

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

January-February 2024



Support, Joy, and Gratitude

I'd like us to consider our support. Gratitude comes along with that. Opening to that which supports us, we feel gratitude. I feel this is an important topic because, so often, we seem to think and feel we are not supported—and this affects our whole life.

Few of us probably get through childhood not having support issues. This may have something to do with why the core belief of unworthiness is so prevalent. Thinking we are unsupported can tend to turn into a reality, but there's the potential to change the mind and change life. There can be real power in our negative beliefs, but there is real power in seeing a believed thought as simply a believed thought, thus loosening its grip on us.

Even in this instant, we are supported by this universe, by All-That-is. Consider how our body, with its innumerable functionings, supports our life. And are we not equally supported as we are born and as we die? Did you have to think to "do" anything to be born?

2024 Sesshin Dates

March 1-4
June 5-9
September 13-16
December 27-31

March Sesshin enrollment opened February 1.
<https://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."

Perhaps one of the most important things offered by spiritual practice is to allow the fact of this support to come forward into our life. Allowing the progression of its experience and expression might be a lifelong aspiration. As we go, some faith and trust can partner with our experience.

And joy is with us. We might talk about joy a little bit. I lean away from the word *happiness* because it can have a connotation of “getting what I want makes me happy.” Joy is closer to “happy for no reason.” Or maybe, “happy from a deeper place.” Happiness is pleasurable feelings that come with objects or a situation. We can find joy even in times of grief or uncertainty.

The founder of our Center, Joko Beck, used to say, “Joy is what’s happening minus our opinions about it.” And there are the words of Jesus, “The kingdom of heaven is within.” Rather than being about the desires of life, these words point to the underlying spirit of life, which I’ll call joy.

Joko’s phrase offers us a challenge. How, for instance, might the death of someone close to us be joyful? Is it because this experience can open us to our inherent joy and considerably lighten our pain? Being fully present in this moment, might we experience joyful pain or joyful sorrow? This might happen as we can increase the space around pain or sorrow, view it from a new, larger perspective.

Is this the natural joy of Being, independent of self-centered likes and dislikes? Let’s explore some possibilities:

We open to this joy as we get out of the way of the flow of life, as we stop believing in our self-centered dream. This is opening to what-is.

Joy is this surrender to what-is, with no separation. The practice is largely applying awareness to our self-centered thoughts, to better see and experience the difference between being in the way of what is within us and getting out of the way.

As we can do this, we can become our own support, our own heart, and can better support others. We get so we understand, feel, and act according to the line in our “Kindness” recitation by Naomi Shihab Nye: kindness is the only thing that makes sense anymore.

The joy Joko speaks of may be the coming forward of our inherent support, the unity, the deep connections, the intimacy of those, the still spaciousness that invites them in.

No doubt about it, life offers regular challenges. There are times when openness, support, faith/trust, and some courage are required. Courage here can be defined as

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the ability to do something that frightens us, strength in the face of pain or grief. It's my experience that practice helps to develop all of these capacities. And if we are to keep evolving, we keep benefiting from them. Thus, the advisability of our persistence.

Years ago I read this, from Thomas Merton: "Prayer and love are learned in the hour when prayer becomes impossible and the heart has turned to stone."

My interpretation: The essence of prayer and love are revealed when all notions of prayer and love have vanished. And helpful, if not necessary, are openness, stillness, attention, being wide awake in and staying with what-is—which may be acute feelings of sorrow, or abandonment, or desperation.

I am more grateful, now, for those times when the heart feels distanced and I might just open to the depths of that feeling. I can't say I want to go there, but there's some willingness. And something else can happen as I stay with it.

Perhaps inevitably, in our practice and life, there are times when we'll get down to the nitty-gritty of doubt and confusion. We might feel like we don't have a clue. This is not bad news—it is good news. This is when we might most effectively employ our support, go to our roots, let something come to us. Again, the key is the allowing, the openness and awareness. When we can truly let go of our thoughts about things, we can fall into our inherent wisdom and compassion.

Just as we sometimes consider what we are grateful for, we might consider how we are supported. There are many things that support us, physically and otherwise. Reflecting on these can be a valuable exercise that I leave to you.

I went through most of the readings we recite during service, looking for words that speak of this support.

From *Bodhisattva's Vow*:

The realization [of the mysterious truth of the awakened life] teaches us
That our daily food, drink, clothes,
And protections of life
Are the warm flesh and blood,
The merciful incarnation of the Awakened Life ...
Which uses devices to emancipate us from blind tendencies.

Stephen Levine from *Exploring Grief*:

Opening the heart to the mind's pain, we find space to explore mercifully. ... We enter the eyes of discovery [and] discover the unexplored territory between the heart and mind. ... [We examine] *what* we feel, not analyzing why. ... And the darkness of a

thousand moments of helplessness and hopelessness is illuminated in a clear and merciful awareness.

Naomi Shihab Nye from *Kindness*:

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere,
like a shadow or a friend.

Rumi from *This Being Human Is a Guest House*:

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond [within].

Really, all of our readings point toward the support that we have. We all have the capacity to enter into practice and discover the truth of these teachings, live the teachings, and lessen suffering for ourselves and the people we interact with, ultimately with all Being.

—Chuck Sweet

"You are not your thoughts or emotions; you are the awareness behind them." —Joko Beck