

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

July-August 2026



Relieved From Self-Clinging

"As we open our eating bowls, may we and all existence be relieved from self-clinging."

This is a wonderful verse, open-hearted and generous, and it speaks to the very heart of this practice.

For those who may not know, it's the first line of a set of verses that we say at the beginning of each formal meal in our retreats, or sesshin. In our current circumstances, the bowls are not wrapped at the start of meals, but in full oryoki,

A New Home:

ZCSD Has Relocated

Our new address is:

4761 Cass St.,
San Diego, CA 92109

You will find the zendo in the Wright Chapel on the corner of Cass St. and Missouri.

2026 Sesshin Dates

To be announced

the first step is to unwrap our bowls from the cloth they are wrapped in and prepare our place setting. And as everyone does that, together we create one big table, spread across the room.

In looking at this line, I'm going to begin, not at the beginning, but at the end, with the notion of self-clinging. This is something we talk about one way or another all the time. But what is self-clinging, why would it bring solace or ease if we were relieved of it, and why would we wish this for all existence?

When we begin a sitting practice, we quickly discover that we are continually striving to hold onto, or satisfy, or reinforce, or justify, or apologize for, or protect, or defend a constructed self that we take ourselves to be. A self held together by opinions and identities, by aversions and vanities, and by beliefs that may be hidden even to ourselves. No matter how much events and people and circumstances show us the everchanging nature of life, we push and scrape to carve out and maintain a fixed sense of self that we can call "I." And when there is no awareness of this, no spaciousness within which to see it, the risk is that opinion and belief come to be seen as life itself, which invariably gives rise to division and hostility.

As we hold to fixed ideas of self, despite evidence to the contrary, and as those ideas generate the illusion of separation, there is suffering. Suffering for self, and suffering for others.

To let go of clinging doesn't mean we turn into doormats or don't respond when response is needed. On the contrary, to let go of clinging allows our response to be clear-eyed; it frees energy from entanglement, making it available

<https://www.zencentersandiego.org/schedule/sesshin.php>

Wednesday

Programming

<https://www.zencentersandiego.org/>

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/>

"As we hold to fixed ideas of self, despite evidence to the contrary, and as those ideas generate the illusion of separation, there is suffering."

for wise, compassionate action. And yes, we get entangled; yes, we suffer—we make choices in confusion, take action under pressure, and feel regret. But we go on. We do our best. We keep practicing and learn a little more.

Our verse—"May we and all existence be relieved from self-clinging"—is beautiful. At the heart of practice is a generosity toward all beings, a genuine wish for universal well-being. The line reminds us that the Bodhisattva takes no hostages and that as we make our way in practice, often stumbling, often challenged, if we can learn to work with grievances, to let go of clinging and cravings, the freedom that comes isn't narrow or restricted, it's not selective—how could it be? As the Third Ancestor puts it, "The whole world opens up." So, in this way, we practice for the benefit of all beings. "It's a nice way to live," Joko would say, encouraging us.

A nice way to live—and yet there is self-clinging, the craving of the conditioned self to feel a certain way: complete, safe, satisfied, comfortable. And, of course, we need the basics of life: breath, water, food, clothing, shelter.. and beyond those, companionship in some form, connection. What we can't have, however much we crave it, is a Goldilocks life in which every moment is just right—just right, that is, for the little self that's entitled and indignant, that's better than or less than or no good or needing to be perfect. The little self that longs for ease while clinging to opinion and judgment. The little self that never wants to feel lonely or off-balance or angry or sick—and yet feels each of these states, regardless, at one time or another.

The Goldilocks "just-so" life *is* there, but it's there on life's terms. It's there arising in each moment,

just as it is. And if we're blindly insisting on some other agenda, we miss it.

Very often, it seems, our little self operates like this: "When I don't feel satisfied, I try to get what I want by getting." *What* we get, or try to get, varies: it might be things, approval, reassurance, information, safety, status, our way, the upper hand in an argument, money, a relationship, power, or control. You can probably think of others. *Practice* asks us to notice the wanting, to notice the not-feeling-satisfied, to notice any thoughts that are fueling that feeling, and to stop for a moment and be present to the experience of wanting. To *be* the experience of wanting, within spacious awareness.

When we do that, it turns out that the energy of wanting is one thread in an intimate, interwoven landscape that includes the air on our skin and the sound of traffic and a thought arising and passing. And the moment is perfectly complete just as it is. And even now, the need to satisfy that craving self is easing a little and there is more space for appreciation.

"As we open our eating bowls, may we and all existence be relieved from self-clinging." We began at the end, then we moved to the middle, and now we're back to the start: "As we open our eating bowls, ..."

This is an invitation to be present right here in the activity we are attending to, right now in the actions of unwrapping and folding, lifting and placing; it's a reminder that in the midst of this experience is our opportunity to be fully alive, receptive and responsive within the mystery and wonder of our shared life.

Beyond meal practice, let's recognize that this is true whatever we are doing, whether we are sitting in meditation, attending to household chores, making a presentation or doing something else:

As we open our mouths to speak, ...

As we browse online or read the news, ...

As we lie in bed and sleep doesn't come, ...

As fear arises, ...

As someone criticizes us or disagrees with our point of view, ...

As we look at the face of our child, ...

As we greet our neighbor or friend, ...

As a coworker receives the promotion we wanted for ourselves, ...

As we gather to sit in a new setting, ...

Our opportunity to notice self-clinging and wake up to our life, our opportunity to experience and clarify, to see and respond, to enjoy and appreciate—our opportunity to love—is always here, in this very moment, exactly as it is.

—*Myoku*

"Surrendering to what is allows us to find peace and liberation."

—*Joko Beck*