

Happy New Year!



Seisen with Bernie Glassman during his visit August 21, 2006.



Seisen at Ryan Ando Lennon's graduation, June 2006. (He graduated Summa Cum Laude!)

A Message From Our Abbot

Goal-less Goals

Sentient beings are numberless I vow to save them
Desires are inexhaustible I vow to put an end to them
The dharmas are boundless I vow to master them
The enlightened way is unsurpassable I vow to attain it

Bodhisattva Vows

The New Year is always a good time to review what we have accomplished and refine our goals for the coming year. Most people agree that setting goals is something that helps create health and happiness in our lives. However, Zen is often characterized as a practice without goals. When we do zazen we let go of thinking of the past and worrying about the future and appreciate the perfection of this moment. Certainly, profound spiritual experience is just that. This moment as it is, is perfect and complete. My suffering arises out of regrets about the past and fears about the future.

And yet, as Zen practitioners we also recite the bodhisattva vows at least once every day. This is the Zen riddle. My life as it is, is perfect and at the same time I vow to make my life perfect. How can that be? Our challenge is to hold this mystery and walk with both sides. Because life is perfect, I vow to manifest that perfection in everything I do.

I found an article on the internet that had guidelines for making goals: <http://www.mindtools.com/page6.html>. They suggest using the mnemonic SMART. Our goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. The bodhisattva vows seem to break almost all of those guidelines. They are impossible, never ending, and subject to many different interpretations. The only criterion they fit is that they are the most relevant goals for our lives.

It seems to me that this goal conundrum can be represented as a mandala. The center is the innate perfection of everything, nothing to add or take away. Out of that perfection comes the bodhisattva vows, which encompass the biggest vision of what our life could be. In that vision, all beings realize the oneness of all things.

Everyone has everything they need. The truth is obvious and apparent to us all and we all act with loving kindness toward each other and ourselves. The next circles of the mandala may be the eight-

(Continued on Page 2)

Poetry Corner

Aretha

I am listening to Aretha.
My head is bald.
Chemicals are wielding their way,
Throughout my body,
To my left breast,
My remaining lymph nodes.

I can forget for a while about,
The strangers who handled me,
The radioactive dye that slithered
Through my veins,
The narrow cylinder that
surrounded me
With the directive to be utterly still
For an hour at a time.

I don't think about,
The green bile circling the toilet,
My thick dark hair falling out in
clumps,
Or my nails turning black and
withering.

How could one woman fill the
universe,
With a voice so proud, long-
suffering and strong.
She reminds me that we are souls.
Sheathed in bodies,
That dry up, deteriorate, and die.

Once again our spirits are released
Un-tethered, soaring,
Like the notes of a song
Sung by Aretha Franklin.

Rosaleen Etsudo McCormack



(Continued from Page 1)

fold path and the precepts, which are further instruction on how to accomplish the four bodhisattva vows. These circles are more visionary than concrete.

The last circle is the mundane ordinary goals that we set every year and renew every day. I will sit 20 minutes a day for 6 days out of every week. I will call my parents every Sunday. I will walk in nature 3 times a week. I will finish that project that I put in the garage. I will throw out that project since I'm not going to finish it. I will volunteer in the community 4 hours a month. I will spend 2 hours every week reading about something I am interested in. I will give away the TV. I will apply for that position that I would like to have at work.

We can look at the mandala from both views. From the outside, I need to set my baby step goals in order to realize the awakened way. These steps need to be practical and measurable so that I can see them working. From the inside, because life is perfect, I need the biggest most glorious vision of all. Because life as it is, is perfect, there is no reason why my baby steps won't manifest as the very best life in the very best world.

*Happy New Year!
Seisen*



A Note From the Editor:

In this edition my thanks especially goes out to those members who share their personal experiences here in print as well as in the zendo during council. To me, they are the Sangha in action, working toward the awakened way, and certainly inspiring me.

Hope you all like this New Year's newsletter. I think the submissions this month show that SWZC is a very rich and creative community. Keep those articles coming!

*Enju
bzzaragoza@yahoo.com*

The Sangha In Action

From Tina Gauthier:

Working as a Chaplain at a hospital gives me the opportunity to practice the art of listening and being present to many people who are directly facing their mortality and, for some, their death. It has been suggested that I share one of these stories with all of you.

The first thing I learned about Chaplaincy was: “The doorway into a patient’s room is like crossing a threshold into another world.” There is something very sacred and very intimidating about this to me. So I like to think of it more as a game that I play with myself. The game being: I believe that all I need to learn about my world will be spoken through the mouths of the people around me, so let me see what they have to say, let me see what I will find out.

One particular morning I began my game. I walked down the hallway of my unit and through one of the open patient doorways. For what reason I picked this doorway, I do not know. A man lay there alone in this two person hospital room. His roommate was gone or had not yet arrived. He was a rather tall man with thin, pale white wrinkly skin and big bones. He looked old and dry. His lips were chapped. There was a big plastic brace around his neck. It was the crystal blue clarity in his eyes that drew me in. I walked over to his bedside and leaned in toward him.

“You look like you’ve been through something,” I said. “Oh I have,” he answered as his eyes began to well up with tears. “And you’re here all alone?” I asked, glancing at the empty bed next to him, “Are you married?” “My wife died twenty years ago,” he began to sob. I could feel his grief, sharp and precise, a knife that cut through me to my own place of grief, emptiness, longing, and hunger. I felt my eyes fill with water and said, “You miss her.” Nodding, he began to cry and cry.

The moment was long. For me the cry was so silent. The image of his face, with his open mouth and clear blue eyes, implanted itself in my mind like a mirror. I slowly lowered my head toward his and pressed my lips to his forehead, kissing all that was tender. The moment became even longer. Through his tears he began to smile and told me, “I am ninety-four years old. I thank God for every day that I am alive and every day I pray that He will take me. I am ready to die. In January I will be 95. I hope to see that day.”

And it was here in this very spot where I had no words, no sounds, no feelings, and no images. Is this emptiness?

From Aaron Contorer:

This year I’ve been working hard to promote philanthropy. Since I started practicing Zen at age 19, I have felt that accumulating the maximum of possessions is not on the road to happiness, but that connecting with other people is. For me, this means philanthropy: the desire to share what I have and to teach others how to do likewise.

Last year I joined a group called San Diego Social Venture Partners (www.sdsvp.org), which works to develop new philanthropists for San Diego. We are about 130 partners who have fun pooling our time, abilities, and money to help local non-profits become more effective and sustainable. We identify groups with the potential to help lots of people and support them. And we identify like-minded people who might want to be philanthropists and encourage them to join us.

My latest project with Social Venture Partners is to help organize a \$1 million fund for local environmental groups and a set of volunteers to go with it. I am learning a lot and getting advice from as many helpful people as I can. It’s sometimes intimidating work, but I think we are going to succeed.

People ask me why I donate time and money. I tell them it’s because I feel we are all connected and helping others is the same as helping myself. I hope that in addition to doing some good directly, I am serving as a good example for someone else.

Special Thanks!

This year many people donated their time and money to grow the Sweetwater Zen Center: Thanks go to Herb Deer, Ando Lennon, Gacho Spencer and Seisen Saunders for serving on the Guardian Council, which supports the residents program. In 2006 we restructured the residential program so that everyone at the Zen Center is practicing the awakened way. Everyone is paying fees, helping with the work, and joining the practice program as much as possible.

Special thanks go to Mukan and Larry Drown who give generously to support the training program and make it affordable.

We revised the Zen Center and are moving into 2007 with a solid vision for the future. Thanks to Michael Carey and Carole Spencer for facilitating the process.

We have an active, involved Board. Everyone on the Board is supporting the Zen Center with treasure and sweat. Thanks to Seisen, Gacho, Ando, Herb, Michael, Glenn Friedman, Enju Zaragoza, and Mukan Drown.

We started a successful fundraising campaign for creating a yurt for more program space. We have raised enough to buy the yurt while still needing about \$7000 for the floor, heat, and porch. Thanks to the Development Committee of Glenn, Gacho, Michael, and Robert Wishner. And thanks to all the donors who are listed on the website.

We started a regular newsletter thanks to Enju. We created free wifi on the property thanks to Rick Wilson. We started posting dharma talks thanks to Seisen. And in 2006 we built another bathroom and community kitchen thanks to German Cobain.

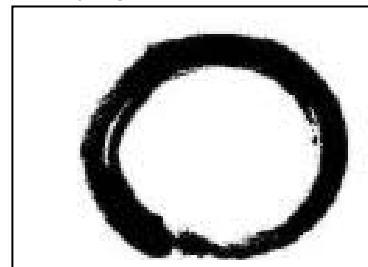
Our new programming has included an expanded summer program. Kokyo Wildi was a great support for the summer training program. Laura Gonzalez and Enju created a three-day Zen camp for children. Special thanks to Roshi Bernie for visiting and to Kanshin Kuriga for providing support for that program. Thanks to Luis Morones for creating wonderful programs for peace and to Alan Mobley for helping with the prison project. We also had a wonderful mandala for New Year's thanks to Tina Gauthier.

More thanks go to photos by Saranam (including in this newsletter!), gardening by Mary Fowlkes and Jamaal, recycling by Carol Jahnkow, cleaning by Brenda Hahn, Andrea Carter and Nancy Yamagata, signs by Aaron Contorer, office help by Caite Mathis and Jolene Beiser, cooking by Michele Houston, maintenance by Glenn, remodeling by Ando and Kanshin, bookkeeping by Gacho, and poetry by Rosaleen McCormick.

And a deep thanks to all those who give silently and may have been forgotten in this report.

And P.S. –

Caite Mathis before going off to Guatemala writes:
I have been staying in the "Garden Apartment" at SWZC for the past three weeks. I love it here and am so happy to have found this community and wonderful place to practice. I will return late February for an indefinite stay as resident. See you then!



SWZC Mission Statement:

Our purpose is to end suffering.

Our practice is to study the self, maintain the precepts and serve others.

Our mission is to provide the teaching, training and transmission of Zen Buddhism; to be engaged with our community and with interfaith activities.