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AN AFFILIATE OF THE KWAN UM SCHOOL OF ZEN

THE EASTERN GATE

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2018

DHARMA TALK

by Zen Master Bon Shim on January 12, 2018

Question: I often get the feeling that people practice because they want some sort of change to occur, and there's a part of me that understands why people want to be different and change. But there's another part of me that appreciates accepting what is and what's just happening. So I'm wondering if you have thoughts on people's relationships to change and practice, and how practice can help you change or not change, or with what's going on. What is this?

ZM Bon Shim: Just sitting here. (Laughs.) You ask me a question and then I answer you. Just an exchange. With practice we become aware of that. We don't have to do anything special. We don't have to try so hard. We don't have to try to impress somebody or come up with some great idea or think interesting thoughts, or whatever. Just to share whatever you're feeling this very moment. That's basically what we observe—that we don't really need to do anything special. Just be as you are. Just care for other people. Just make sure that somebody's feeling good and comfortable. Children are great companions. They don't expect anything and don't project anything.



January 2018 YMJJ with Zen Master Bon Shim.

Whatever they're doing they just do their thing, and if you can plug into that, into their space without trying to improve the situation or take the situation on to another level or anything like that, then it'd be great! And not only children—with adults it's the same way. If you are authentic and you're really for this person, then you're not thinking about what other people would think about me, how do I look, am I doing well or not doing well . . . not checking yourself but instead being present and seeing what's in front of you. That's actually all we can do and all we should do. Just respond. Just to be like a clear mirror. Living in a Zen center is great. It's great

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Dharma Talk

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training and a great opportunity. We meet each other in any kind of moment. Maybe you don't feel so good. Maybe you don't really want to see anybody (laughs) but you just go downstairs and you go to the kitchen and there's always



Theo, Tracy and Jennie cooking for Community Cooks.

somebody in the kitchen so there is always some interaction, which is really great training. I really feel the great benefits from being here and interacting with other people—seeing the mirrors in front of me at any moment. Whether you feel good, or whether you don't feel good, you still try to do your best. It's wonderful and kind of rare in this world: we all live here and share the same direction, practicing kindness, generosity and patience. We support each other to do that and that's something really wonderful. I really feel that. There's not so much checking—you know everyone understands we cannot always feel great, we cannot always show our best face, our best smile or our clarity or great wisdom. (Laughs.) So we all understand that by living together and training our minds moment to moment we are much better able to go outside and interact with people in our daily life. You are just more honest. You allow yourself to be more

honest because everyday practice supports you and helps you cultivate this kind of honesty.

Question: There's a quote by Zen Master Seung Sahn that says humans are the number one bad animal on the planet, but it seems like recently it's more clear that it's really the men that are the number one bad animal. In order not to become a "#MeToo," what would your advice be to men so that they won't take advantage of women or even other young men in situations of power when they have these instinctual drives or these sexual desires that drive them to manipulate other people? What kind of advice would you give to us men?

ZMBS: The same advice as to any person: if your direction is clear, if you have this mind that is "not for me" then there's no way you can be mean and hurt somebody. Maybe you can say something [hurtful] because you are frustrated or are not able to control your temper, but that's all you do if you



Green Zen circle in the CZC garden.

have a very clear direction and if you practice every day. You say the four great vows every morning. You repeat this over and over and over and it goes into your subconscious. Our consciousness is like a field with all kinds of seeds, right? Seeds of anger, seeds of desire and seeds of love, as well as seeds of

What Is Most Important for All of You? The International Initiative

by Kathy Park JDPSN

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I'd like to quote one thing from our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. During a dharma talk he gave in Poland many years ago, when the Polish sangha was forming, he said, "Practicing by myself is no problem, but organization is very important. If we have strong organization, then our own center also becomes strong for each of us. Then helping each other and saving all beings is very easy."



Kathy Park at PZC in October 2017.

a teachers' compact that is signed by anyone who becomes a Ji Do Poep Sa, which also includes anyone who becomes a Zen master in our school. This is how we keep our teaching all together. The third is that we're unified in our teaching forms. Our school exists in many countries, but the bone of the teaching is unified, shared and constantly revised. Those are our principles, and with that, we have our added treasure, which is a wide, global network of Zen centers and sanghas all over the world.

You've seen or heard from many people these few days from the European sangha, the Asian sangha, and the sangha of the Americas—not only the United States but also Canada, South America and Central America. Our school is growing and reaching out, and that global network is rich with diversity, equality and mutual respect. Our global relationships are rooted in love, compassion and understanding, which come from our deep practice of don't know—the foundation that keeps us together. Like it or not we're a family. In the last few days that I've been here, returning to

Providence Zen Center and being at this conference, I feel a lot of love. I feel like I'm back with my family, and that's a wonderful feeling. I believe everybody feels that way. I was talking with Zen Master Soeng Hyang about how things feel smooth here at this conference and there's so much generosity, support and faith, as well as a lot of together action, which is at the heart of our teaching and a true treasure.

The International Initiative was founded about eighteen months ago, and there are a few things to clarify. Our school transformed over the years after Zen Master Seung Sahn passed away. Everybody knows he was a charismatic and strong leader, so we had this hierarchy that all of us followed, and it was wonderful. After he passed away, things transitioned and we had to grow up or grow out. Our sangha restructured loosely into three separate regions: Europe, Asia and North America, the latter of which is now the Americas. The three regions are governed by the respective regional teachers' groups. Overseeing them is the

A Story of Nothing by Ben Shragge

This isn't really a story, because nothing happens, but then that's kind of the point. I went on a Zen Buddhist retreat for the first time. It consisted of silently sitting, then walking, then sitting, then walking, then sitting, then walking, then sitting, then walking. Then lunch: salad and lentils. Followed by . . . let's just say more sitting and walking.

Describing it like this makes it seem like I did nothing. Sure, I didn't just sit; I sat in the lotus posture with my hands folded together. I didn't just walk; I walked with "my feet kissing the ground," as some Zen master of embellishment said. But yes, I basically paid for the privilege of doing nothing.

I have enough half-conscious stories—with unhappy endings—going on in my mind already. I wanted a story where nothing happens. With meditation, you learn to detach from the stories your mind creates about yourself and the world, which stop you from really being yourself and experiencing the world. At least that's the idea,

though idea is probably a most un-Zen way to put it. For a few months, I'd been trying to meditate ten minutes each day, feeling like a failure but inspired by what some fellow failure once told me: sitting and trying to meditate counts as meditation. You sat, you were still, and you survived your worry-flinging, distraction-slinging monkey mind. You might even have had a flash of insight or two. I read an article by a meditator who



April YMJJ with Carlos Montero JDPSN.

concluded that years of practice had made him slightly less irritable. Achieving nirvana, feeling infinite compassion for all beings, awakening to non-duality—these are worthy goals, but being slightly less irritable? That seemed within my reach.

I'd never meditated for longer than twenty-five minutes, and was a little put off by the religious aspects of the retreat, so of course I felt a sense of impending doom when I signed up—which I did, very un-Zen-like, at the last possible minute. I arrived for the early morning orientation with my dread in tow. I was comforted by the fact that, up until then at least, I'd survived everything I'd ever

done in life. So I'd probably survive this too.

At orientation, we were advised to observe our thoughts with compassionate curiosity. I liked that; much better than my usual morbid fascination. We were also shown—twice—how to prostrate ourselves before our interview with the Zen master. This I promptly forgot, and worrying about it would distract me for a good half the day. We put on robes, which felt a little silly—but only a little—and then we were off . . . to do nothing.

This lack of action took place in a hall with an altar to the Buddha at one end, a waiting area with a bell at the other, and cushioned mats lined up against the walls. We sat, with people gradually taking their turn, following the bell, to move to the waiting area, before proceeding to the Zen master's interview room.

There's a scene at the end of Terminator 2 when T-1000, the evil shape-shifting robot, keeps transforming in rapid succession before disintegrating in a vat of molten steel. The mind is like that when it has no outside stimulation. It demands attention, and will keep taking on new shapes to get it. I thought of a

SANGHANOTES

AS SUMMER HAS ARRIVED our sangha is ever vibrant and alive! After a long winter and an elusive spring filled with much coming and going, including some momentous changes in CZC's staff and leadership, we have a full house of fresh faces and exciting projects and programs looming on the horizon.

Last November, at our annual Thanksgiving potluck, we bid farewell to Tom Johnson and Barry Briggs. Tom valiantly served as our abbot for more than seven years. During those years he enriched us with his unique sense of humor and innumerable capital improvements on the physical structures that comprise CZC. Our co-guiding teacher for two years, Barry Briggs JDPSN has left us with the legacy of the new altar and lovely Kwan Yin statue as well as a deeper appreciation for the practice forms of the Kwan Um School. Before Barry left for the wisely chosen warmer climes of the great Southwest, his newly adopted canine charge, Ollie, charmed anybody in possession of a heart with his puppy powers. Our heartfelt wishes to Tom and Barry (and Ollie) as they embark on the new chapters of their lives!

In December 2017, Barbara Feldman took the helm as abbot after having served as director of CZC for more than ten years. Andrew "Woody" Wood became do-gam (vice abbot), and Bo-Mi Choi joined the team in the role as director. Jim Kopcienski took over as head dharma teacher from Mark Uehling, whose hard work and dedication to keep things running



A warm farewell to Tom & Barry (center).



CZC's new staff. From left: Ian, Kyungha, Bo-Mi, Woody, Barbara and Jim.

smoothly in the dharma hall have been much appreciated. Paul Laurey passed on the baton of housemaster to Ian Maher. We are grateful for Paul's untiring service as housemaster for the past three years! We are greatly relieved to report that Kyungha Strange-Lee did not resign but continues her effective rule over the domain of our kitchen.

With great love and sorrow we said our final good-byes to our friend and dharma sister Janice Stenger (1950–2017), who passed away in October of last year after courageously battling breast cancer. Janice's unfailing kindness, cheerfulness and positivity until the very end was a gift to the sangha. In her illness, she managed to bring us together in community as residents took turns to take care of her. In particular Mark Uehling, Austin Ritter and Susie Yeo went beyond their calls of duty to make Janice's last weeks at CZC comfortable. We celebrated her indefatigable spirit on December 9, 2017, which marked the 49th day after her passing.

Fortune smiled on us, as we had not only one but two long-term visitors from Poland with us: Zen Master Bon Shim (Aleksandra Porter) graced us with her powerful presence and helped us with her even more powerful teaching in the fall and again for a couple months this past winter. We can't wait to have her back this coming fall! Marta Magnuszeswka spent the first part of her gap year between high school and university with us and proved to be a living and rare exemplar of those on whom youth is not wasted! Her lovely presence is missed in the house.

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Godspeed to former residents Neil O'Connor, Austin Ritter and Sam Judelson, as well as Paul Brymer and his son Josh! We also said good-bye to Eric Hertz and his partner Maggie Medlin, Shea Riester, and David Peck. We are blessed to welcome new house residents



From left: Susie, Ian and Kyungha.

Ian Maher, Susie Yeo, Jordan Colman, Christal Whelan, Kimberly Bress, Patrick Horgan and Virginia O'Toole. The new faces and the hands-on energy of these most recent recruits to CZC confirm the old adage that change is not only good, it's great!

Changes and new initiatives have also been afoot in other areas: in the kitchen, our kitchen master and Inae Lee, our own bosalnim, helmed the Kimchi-Making Workshop to much acclaim. The subsequent Dumpling Fest in honor of the new Lunar Year proved equally tasty

and successful, and helped inaugurate our spanking new industrial stove. Meanwhile, Mark



Inae Lee (left) teaching the art of dumplings.

Uehling, our Dungeon Master, went on a rampage in the various basements of the CZC compound, as a result of which we are able to breathe freely again. Woody Wood oversaw a lightning fast renovation of the apartment at 203C to get it ready for new residents Lily Smith and



Woody in the newly renovated apartment at 203C Auburn Street..

Anthony Moffa. Thanks to Woody and his helpers, the apartment received a palpable upgrade and looks amazing. Since the weather has become warmer our garden has been receiving much tender loving care from the hands of a coterie of

passionate gardeners led by our house master, Ian Maher. Raised beds in the backyard and planters on the front steps have tangibly increased the verdant energy in the air around 199 Auburn!

In an extra effort to draw in younger practitioners to our Zen tradition, the Millennial Zen Group was launched last fall and



Millennial Zen Group participants.

has enjoyed, since its inception, an impressive number of regular participants. The lively Sunday meetings are facilitated by Tyler Morrill, a former resident and current board member; Billy Bialecki, a former resident and CZC teacher-on-call; and residents Peter Thornton and Woody Wood.

On the teaching front, Zen Master Bon Yeon has been collaborating with Tricycle Foundation in the creation of an online course on kong-ans. The filming of her talks was recently completed. Stay tuned for when the course goes live! In April, an online course on Korean temple food, also produced

SANGHANOTES

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by Tricycle, featured four talks by Bo-Mi Choi based on the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn on food and eating. We are also delighted to report that CZC now has a resident monastic: Mu Sang Sunim, long-time personal secretary of Dae Sang Sunim, moved in late last winter and has been teaching us seon-yu, a series of mind-body exercises that were devised by Zen Master Seung Sahn himself. We were very excited and grateful to have Kwan Haeng Sunim come up from Providence

Zen Center to give a dharma talk on equality and inclusion this spring. He was accompanied by PZC resident



From left: Theran, ZM Bon Yeon and Kwan Haeng Sunim

Theran VanOstrand. Their talks marked the beginning of what we hope will become a new initiative in making our practice more inclusive and creating a spiritual environment where everybody feels truly welcome.

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS for your generous and continuous support of CZC. A special thanks from the bottom of our hearts to

Sheila Bayne
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Mark and Nancy O'Leary
Michel Selva
William Stallman

Your financial contributions in 2017 have made it possible for this most precious of jewels to keep running - and shining!



Above:: Spring 2018 College Retreat with ZM Bon Yeon. Below: Jolly times at this year's Memorial Day BBQ.

Dharma Talk

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enlightenment. We don't take refuge in the political machinery or the situation we are living in. Now, things are currently coming up about the abuse of women. There's now more light on this kind of abuse, and it seems like this is something new but it's not. We practice because we all have this tendency. We don't always have pleasant thoughts, nice thoughts. With practice you can control your mind by becoming aware of your anger or desire. The first step is to become aware of your anger and desire and then you allow your mind to navigate to a more wholesome state of mind, a more wholesome way of thinking.

Everything comes from our mind. So, we practice to become aware of what is happening in our mind. What are our thoughts? If you become aware, your mind opens up and you can train this mind. So, instead of feeding the anger and desire you feed love, generosity, kindness, compassion and care—without care we cannot become aware of what we are doing. You can observe yourself. I'm sure everyone can observe what is happening in their mind and then do something about that. Doing this practice in a more intense way is very important. When you sit a long retreat, you observe the coming and going of our mind, your thoughts

and feelings and emotions as they come and go. If you don't try to reject them and don't try to grab them or hold on to them then that's the essential aspect of our practice. Not rejecting, not holding. Then you practice opening the mind. It's a bodhisattva aspect of our practice, which is warm, open and accepting of what is. It's all about how to apply this meditation and how to apply this teaching. But first you have to become aware of what's in your own mind.

Nothing comes out when it's not already inside so if somebody's abusive or aggressive it means these urges or feelings are already inside them. They are usually suppressed, and that's karma: condition and situation. Then karma appears and you react. We do something and usually we are surprised, "What am I doing? Why did I do this?" We don't plan to act in a bad way. It just happens out of conditioning and because we have no center. We cannot control ourselves, so this practice is very important to really understand what we are doing in our lives moment to moment. How are we reacting? What are our relationships? And you have to see it in your mind, see what's going on because if you don't see it and if you don't allow the thoughts and feelings and emotions to come out to the

surface then you have no recourse of how to deal with them. So, the point is that we all have aspects of life we want to deny. Practice helps us to become aware of that and work on whatever it is. Otherwise it comes up and you cannot control it when you have a bad moment, or when something unexpected happens. I remember some video of an inmate with a life sentence for murder and they interviewed him. It was interesting because he said, "I don't know why I did this. I don't know how it happened." He wasn't planning to murder somebody. It just happened. "I don't know what happened. It's horrible. I really couldn't control myself. It just happened." So really get to know yourself and know your mind! Know what you are denying, what you are trying to hide. We're denying something because we are afraid of some aspects we don't want to see, but that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't help our life. There are no inherently bad or good people. (Laughs.) There are only people who cannot control themselves and have not enough awareness of what is happening in their mind.

The International Initiative

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International Council, comprising the head Zen masters of the three regions and the school Zen master. The International Initiative came along in 2016, initiated by the head Zen master of our school, Zen Master Soeng Hyang, who envisioned a more visible global outreach of our practice and teaching. I thought Bo Haeng Sunim’s sharing earlier was really interesting. [See the article “Don’t-Know Army” in this issue.—Ed.] He said that when he returned to Lithuania as a young monk, he was an outsider in a Catholic country and was not easily accepted. He had to work step by step for some time to gain trust. I realized that for all

of us regardless of our situation, condition or any practicing situation, following the path of truth is difficult. But difficulties are also our teachers. So how can we help each other?

The International Initiative functions along a guideline of decentralized, mutually beneficial collaboration and cooperation. Our working structure and communication is parallel among the regions by listening, sharing and coming to consensus together as much as possible. That’s not always easy. Our main focus has been on outreach, not only to help spread the dharma, but also to find more resources, whatever they may be, and use them to support our growing practicing communities.

I think our centers are already doing this to some extent wherever they are. What the International Initiative focuses on specifically is developing more ways to use media. The Kwan Um Online Sangha program is now running, and people from countries such as Denmark, the Philippines and Australia are signing up for membership and participating in regular online practice. This program specifically reaches people who are in difficult circumstances or are in remote areas too far from any local Kwan Um center. The brand new international KUSZ website was just launched. In addition, many of us use various social media apps to stay connected. And the

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Sign up online at americas.kwanumzen.org/membership, or take a membership form from the CZC reception room and mail it to KUSZ Americas at Providence Zen Center.

SANGHADHARMA

The International Initiative

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International Initiative continues to develop new ways to communicate and work together better, making room for creative growth to connect more with each other and the world. This conference is an example of how that is already being manifested.

We need your support! To become part of the International Initiative, provide professional skills, volunteer your time or share ideas and feedback, please contact global@kwanumzen.org. Or, visit the KUSZ international website at kwanumzen.org.

A Story of Nothing

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friend from school for the first time in years. I thought of my ex-girlfriend, not for the first time in years. I thought of sex. I thought of the people going for their interview and how I didn't remember the protocol. I thought of undone

chores. I thought and thought.

At about the third hour, I felt some tranquility, as if my T-1000 mind had finally stopped thrashing around and melted into a vat of molten stillness. It returned to keep thrashing, of course, but maybe those little moments are enough. The bell eventually tolled for me and I had my interview with the Zen master. My hours of worrying about how to prostrate correctly paid off in my not prostrating correctly. Not that I'm so comfortable prostrating in the first place, but if I'm going to demean myself, I don't want to demean myself more by doing a poor job at it. The interview is an opportunity to ask an official wise person some questions. I asked if years of meditation had changed his thinking. He responded with a pizza metaphor, which, his being a

Zen master, automatically trumps my T-1000 metaphor. If you work at a pizza shop, you'll smell and see the same pizza as someone hungry coming in off the street. But, being around pizza all day, you'll be less likely to want a slice. So, by meditating, you'll still have the same kind of thoughts everyone else has; but you'll be desensitized to them, and so less likely to nom-nom-nom, overthink-think-think, at the expense of outer health and inner peace.

The day ended with chanting, which felt a little silly, but only a little. I then left in a daze, having accomplished nothing and hungry for pizza.



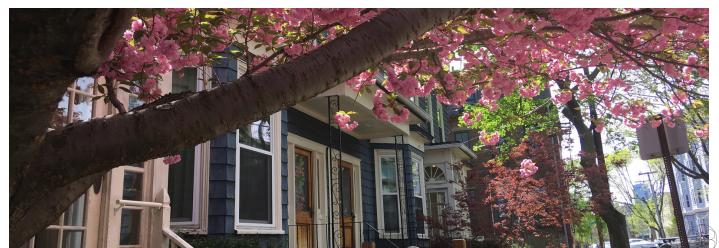
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Above: 199 Auburn snowed in. Below: 199 Auburn in full bloom.

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