

CAMBRIDGE ZENCENTER

AN AFFILIATE OF THE KWAN UM SCHOOL OF ZEN

# THE EASTERN GATE

MEMBER NEWSLETTER / WINTER 2023

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## SUNFLOWER MIND

by Zen Master Bon Haeng

Years ago the Zen Center had this beautiful white farm house in Allston. I was in my mid-twenties; I thought I knew a lot. As life goes along, you begin to realize that you really know less and less. We planted a big garden. It was the first garden that I'd worked on. We grew some tomatoes, zucchinis and squash. Along the house, someone planted sunflower seeds. As the summer went along, these seeds sprouted and grew. It appeared that they grew an inch or two a day. Some of the stems got as big around as silver dollars. In the fall, large sunflowers appeared. I'd get up every morning and do our morning meditation practice; bowing, sitting, chanting. Then I'd go off to work. As I left the house, I noticed that the sunflowers were facing east. When I came home from work that night, the sunflowers were facing west. I said to myself, "That's not possible. I must be confused. Tomorrow morning, I'll be very careful and make sure my mind and

eyes are clear." The next morning, as I headed off to work, I looked over. Sure enough, the sunflowers had rotated 180 degrees and were facing the east. When I came home that night, again, these big sunflowers were facing west.

Saturday came. I thought, "Something's not right. How can a plant with a big flower completely rotate in just a few hours?" We had a work period, as we do every Saturday at the Zen Center. I worked in the garden all day long, and I kept looking up at the sunflower. Every hour it seemed to move a little bit, but you couldn't be sure. All of a sudden around noon time, it rotated 90 degrees. The whole experience was quite extraordinary. This sunflower didn't think about moving. It didn't have a strategy for facing the sun all day long. It didn't have any idea about how to relate to the world around it. It didn't have any

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photo by Carol Korsak of Colby Farm

## REMEMBRANCES

by Joel Villaseca

One evening after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen center, a student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What is love?” Zen Master Seung Sahn replied, “I ask you, what is love?” The student was silent. Dae Soen Sunim said, “This is love.” The student was still silent. Dae Soen Sunim said, “You ask me. I ask you. ‘This’ is love.”

A very dear friend of mine, who is also a Zen practitioner, just moved to New York a couple of days ago. Today we sat down across from each other and asked, “what would be the guiding principles for our time together?” He suggested that we call our grounding principles, “remembrances”, which I love, and I said, “Yeah, that’s a great title.” It’s not hard to sit across from him and have these heartfelt conversations because I feel a special connection to him. But what about the billions of other beings and other things? What about those people and things with whom or with which we don’t have any special connection? And more so, what about those people and things that we find challenging? Is there a way to see all of them as the beautiful gift that they are? To me, the promise of this practice, our practice, is that there is, in a very deep way, to be that. And what is even more astonishing, we are told, is that it’s nothing special. It’s just right there, right where you are, right where I am now.

Some years ago, I took a class on positive psychology, and one of the concepts that has stuck with me from that class is this: micro moments of love. That every heartfelt interaction that we have, even with a stranger, or maybe even a squirrel, has joy. I spend a lot of time in the park these days. Often enough there would be this squirrel that is always munching, we would have eye contact and a staring contest for a few seconds, and I would feel the joy in it. That right there is a micro moment of love.

“You ask me. I ask you. ‘This’ is love.”

If we are able to be in this space of love, moment by moment, then there is a way for the mind to be expansive, for the mindset to broaden, as opposed to an afflictive emotion, which narrows down our vision. This narrowness makes us fail to see the fullness of life, the ‘you’ more in mind. For me, our practice helps me to be in that space more and more. How does that happen? Don’t know!

Don’t know, right? But here’s a quote that I really love. “Oh nobly born, you who are the sons and daughters of the awakened ones. Remember who you are. Remember your true radiant nature.” Remember your true radiant nature [claps]. Right there. When I sit, I get glimpses of this, however short [claps]. That short.



Retreat January 2023 led by Zen Master Bon Shim

## SANGHADHARMA

I get glimpses of my luminous nature. The more I sit, the more I'm able to access a deep sense of joy. And by joy, I mean not fleeting pleasure or happiness. It is not defined by ease or hardship, laughter or despair, but it includes all of that. There is this realization that it's not about good things happening to me. Instead there arises a recognition that there is good within me – a recognition that I could trust, even in times of uncertainty.

This deep trust in life with all of its 10,000 joys and 10,000 sorrows allows me to move in the world lightly and not to take myself too seriously. And being in this space of joy, engenders in me, an upward spiral: the more I practice, the more I get to know myself, and the more I see my mental patterns, biases and prejudices, and aversions and my cravings. And the more I recognize them; the more skillful I am at responding to them. The more skillful I am at responding to my moment to moment experience, the kinder, the more generous, the more loving I am. And that spiral just goes on and on, upward.

A few years ago, I heard a story in a podcast that stuck with me about a guy named Derek Black. Derek was the son and heir apparent to Stormfront, the founder of perhaps the biggest white nationalist online community. He is also the godson of the former grand duke of the Ku Klux Klan. When he went to college in Florida, he was outed as belonging to this lineage. An Orthodox Jewish person who lived in his same dorm started inviting him to their Friday Shabbat dinners. They invited him under the assumption that he probably didn't know anyone in the group that his ideology despised. Derek came to those dinners. At the dinners they would just talk about non-ideological topics, heart-to-heart talk week in and week out. And he came to change his mind about what he believed in. He turned his back on his inherited white supremacist ideology.

“You ask me. I ask you. ‘This’ is love.”

It is through the slow work of getting to know each other. This slow work of heartfelt conversations—of listening generously to each other—enables us to find ways of living in widening circles. By finding time to sit in front of each other, of having the willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions, and to take in ambiguity, we may keep that “don't know” mind, as Zen Master Seung Sahn never failed to remind his students That is how we are able to see each other. That is how we are able to change each other and see everyone as the beautiful gift that they are.

My day job is as a United Nations attorney, and my first station when I joined the UN was in Jerusalem 15 years ago. An author described Jerusalem as one of those special places where human stories play out very intensely. It's in your face, all the time. And this story of humanity is the story of separation: good versus evil, us versus them. There you can see this wall. If you've been to Israel, Palestine, there's a wall that Israel built ostensibly to protect itself. And then there's a line



that's drawn in Jerusalem, somewhere in the middle of the city and east of that line, the Jewish people don't usually go or live. And west of that line, no Palestinians are allowed to live. You cannot be more literally separated than that. Soon enough, I was caught in that story of separation, and nowhere was it more visceral than when I'm crossing borders and checkpoints.

Whenever I would have to stop at a border crossing, my body would stiffen and I would feel my amygdala sounding the alarm: fight, flight or freeze, right? Don't even think of smiling. And this mental orientation had its consequences. Not a few times I was delayed, not a few times I was detained, not a few times the soldiers insisted on inspecting the vehicle, which was against international law. Around 10 years later, in 2017, I returned to Jerusalem. In many ways, nothing had changed. Jerusalem was still the same Jerusalem, but something had changed. And what had changed was how I experienced the world because I had developed a regular contemplative practice. So in these experiences of crossing borders, as soon as I knew that I was approaching a border, I would start to send metta to the soldiers: “May

## SANGHADHARMA



Zen Master Bon Shim giving a dharma speech

Zen master, Thich Naht Hahn said that what Zen means when it talks about emptiness is that everyone and everything is empty. That everyone and everything is empty of a separate self: that everyone is in everything, “inter-being.” There’s no greater definition for love than that. There’s another Zen teacher who said, when you can appreciate the flavor of emptiness in your tongue, you know, immediately that love is the only thing that exists. Emptiness actually is love. All joys, all living, all dying, all the tragedies of the world, however much they don’t seem to be, are all expressions of this love. This path that we are in, is exactly that, a path with heart, a path of love. And it’s not too shabby a way to live a life.

A student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What is love?” Zen Master Seung Sahn said: “You ask me. I ask you. ‘This’ is love.”

So maybe you’re old friends; I see you all in your little boxes on the screen, and my heart is filled with gratitude. I feel heard, and I feel seen, and I feel your love, and I hope you feel mine too.



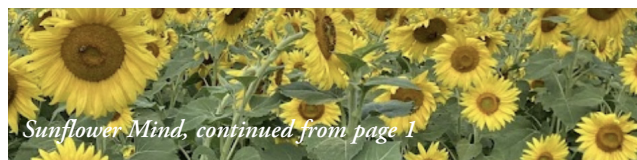
you be well. May you be safe. May you live with ease and joy.”

I would always try to remember the beginner’s mind. I didn’t know, “don’t know” mind yet then, but I believe the concept is the same, this “don’t know” mind. I would remind myself of Shunryu Suzuki’s beautiful quote: “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities; in the expert’s mind there are few.” In that moment, there is that real possibility that this soldier is just like me. There is that real possibility that they have the same hopes and dreams and fears, just like me. There is that real possibility that they have people that they love and people who love them, just like me.

I never forget this: whenever the Dalai Lama meets new people, he sees them as old friends. Right before I cross the border, I would take a few deep breaths, and the interactions change drastically. As I lower down my window, I would be smiling to the soldier. And I would say, “ma kore?” it’s the colloquial Hebrew for “what’s up?” or “how are you?” And almost always, I would elicit a smile. In this way, a connection is made: that micro moment of love is there. I remember one time that the interactions became so good that one of the leaders of the soldiers, as I was waiting for my papers, came up to me with a cup of coffee. He said, “this is brewed from my special machine” and “please have some.” That was unheard of, so it was amazing.

From January, 2020 to May of 2021, I stayed in various Zen centers for all of COVID. One night we just had finished dinner in our favorite Chinese place here in midtown Manhattan. Of course you have your fortune cookie. I wasn’t expecting anything special, a ‘ho hum’ fortune. But when I opened the strip of paper, it said, “pick a path with heart.” Whoa, pick a path with heart!

Emptiness is one of the main teachings of Zen, as we all learn. It doesn’t sound so inspiring at all for a spiritual practice. The late, great



opinion about how to handle things. Somehow, all by itself: east in the morning, west in the evening. It was connected to the sun. Just very slowly, turning, turning, turning.

This was a great shock because I realized we all have that same connection to this universe. We’re not separate. We have all kinds of ideas about our separateness, and opinions about the right way and the wrong way to interact with this universe. We solicit things from this universe that we desire, and we reject other things. Yet somehow, we are the universe and the universe is us. We’re never separate. So how can you push away anything, how can you grasp anything?

Everything is in a constant state of change. So, formal practice means, completely letting it be.

Just like the sunflower; sun is east, face this way, sun setting, face the other way. Chanting time, just chant; bowing time, just bow; sitting time, just sit. Just doing it, trusting it. Each thing is complete.



## CAMBRIDGE ZEN CENTER



### LIVE & PRACTICE AT CZC

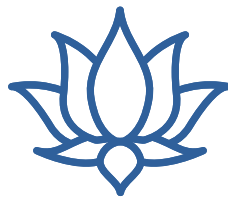
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When you sign up as a member of CZC, you also automatically become a member of the International Kwan Um School of Zen (KUSZ) and join our global sangha. Membership comes with the perks of reduced retreat costs and fees at your local and other Zen centers around the world. You also receive the school's teaching journal, Primary Point.

SIGN UP ONLINE AT:

[Americas.kwanumzen.org/membership](http://Americas.kwanumzen.org/membership)

## SANGHANOTES

Happy New Year!! 2023 has arrived and the holidays are behind us. We are happy to welcome all our members and friends as the Zen Center is now open to the public.

There have been some changes to our current staff, so I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce everyone to our Head Dharma Teacher, John Kolwaite. John lives at the Cambridge Zen Center with his wife and daughter. He is taking over this important position from Jim Kopcienski, our previous Head Dharma Teacher. We thank Jim for all his hard work and wish him good luck in his new home in Cambridge, and we appreciate that he will continue practicing with us as a Senior Dharma Teacher (SDT). Bobby Yribarren is our new Kitchenmaster, taking over from SDT Francisco Irby. We thank you for your dedicated service along with our other staff members, Tim Jones, Housemaster, Robin Hoffman, Director and Barbara Feldman, our Abbot.

2022 was an eventful period. Long-time resident and friend, Tracy Dolge moved out of the Cambridge Zen Center after 30 years of residency, and we continue to visit him at the Cambridge Rehabilitation Center at 8 Dana Street in Cambridge and he sometimes visits us; I know he would love to see his dharma friends. A major project with the Cambridge Historical Commission was completed; this project replaced the deteriorating front entrances with brand new steps, railings and refinished vestibules; new gardens were designed and installed. 204/206 Auburn Street had its roof replaced and the building painted. Now our buildings are matching colors and ready for winter.

A number of residents celebrated the Spring Equinox last year with a Persian themed New Year celebration, Nowruz. This celebration has been acknowledged by the UNESCO List of Intangible Culture Heritage of Humanity and includes lots of food and cooperation to display it on our Haft Seen table adorned with seven objects that begin with "S" in the Farsi language. We are looking forward to the next Equinox this Spring!

Our Co-Guiding teacher, Zen Master Bon Shim, has come to stay with us from early January through March 2023. She will lead our January and March 2023 hybrid retreats in person and teach at the Winter 2023 Kyol Che for a week in February. She has led several Kido sessions this season in response to the war in Ukraine and we continue to chant for our friends and families in Russia, Ukraine and all countries impacted by this terrible situation.

We said farewell to In-Ai Kim, our wonderful kitchen bodhisattva. We thank her for all her beautiful flowers and delicious dumplings and homemade kimchi!



Jim Kopcienski and In-Ai Kim

Our newest resident, Deung Myong Sunim, is a Korean monk who is in the Harvard Divinity program. We have been enjoying his wonderful Korean drumming skills, and we are happy to share his strong practice energy during his residency until he departs in May 2023.

We congratulate all our CZC preceptors who took precepts on Buddha's Enlightenment Day, December 10th at PZC! John Kolwaite and Bobby Abraham took 10 precepts, and taking 5 were Jerome Doherty, Jon Trachtenberg, Bobby Yribarren, Noah Connally and Rayan Fardoun. We were happy to have our largest CZC turnout in a long time to support them.

We would like to thank all of our donors for their support and our residents for all their hard work each day as we have re-opened our doors to the public while maintaining our virtual offerings. We also thank our Guiding teacher, Zen Master Bon Yeon for her tireless work including frequent inspiring talks, the bi-annual College Retreat and interviews. We thank our teacher, Dyan Eagles, JDPSN for her added inspiration at retreats and help with the garden; our Co-Guiding teacher, Zen Master Bon Shim, for returning to live with us this year, raising our practice energy, and our spirits.

Please join us in person as often as you can and on Zoom in this year of the Water Rabbit 2023. We are so happy to be able to practice together again. Our Cambridge Zen Center family wishes you all a peaceful and auspicious new year.



Tracy Dolge with Zen Master Soeng Hyang

# FUNDRAISING LETTER

By Zen Master Bon Yeon

As we approach year-end 2022, we'd like to take a moment to thank you for all your support of the Cambridge Zen Center. Thanks to your generous donations, and a matching grant from the Historical Commission of Cambridge for \$75,000, we have restored all three front entrances, stairways, vestibules, and gardens from 193 to 199 Auburn Street. This was a huge project that involved a lot of work and planning from the team at CZC. We hope you will be tempted to walk through these beautifully restored entryways to practice with us again in person because we are now open to the public!



Completed Front Stairs Restoration Project

Did you know this year marks the 50th anniversary of Zen Master Seung Sahn's coming to the West? For most of those years, the Cambridge Zen Center has opened its doors every morning and evening, free of charge, offering the practices of sitting and walking meditation, bowing, chanting, classes, groups, dharma talks, and retreats. As one of the largest residential zen centers in the country, it's awe-inspiring to think of the tens of thousands of people who have lived and practiced with our community. In addition to the daily programs, we have developed classes for younger students, created a monthly social justice diversity and inclusion program, college zen clubs, and offered an ongoing prison program.

Needless to say, the cost of maintaining the programs and the zen center itself (in addition to our two apartment buildings) is very high. In 2023, we are hoping to make the building more accessible, add to the outdoor lighting, repair the parking lot and the trash enclosure area, replace several more windows, repair the deck, and address some foundation and electrical issues. After three long years of mostly Zoom practice, we will again be inviting teachers from around the world to visit in person to lead retreats and give talks and interviews.

We welcome your continued support, whether that may be joining us for practice and sangha events, volunteering for projects, or any tax-deductible financial contributions you are able to make. Please help CZC continue to offer Zen Master Seung Sahn's teachings for the next fifty years and hopefully beyond!

Yours in the Dharma,  
Zen Master Bon Yeon and the CZC Family



Precepts Ceremony December 2022

DONATE ONLINE AT:

<https://gofundme.com/f/protect-the-jewel-20222023>



**WEEKLYSCHEDULE**

Introduction to Formal Practice      Midday Sitting  
 Thursday Evenings 6:45pm      Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:30–1:00pm

Public Dharma Talk with Q & A  
 Thursday Evenings 7:30–8:30pm

Long Sitting & Kong-an Practice  
 Tuesday Evenings 6:30–9:30pm  
 Sunday Mornings 9:00–11:30am

**DAILYCHEDULE**

Mornings:  
*(Except Tuesdays)*

108 Bows 5:45am  
 Chanting 6:10am  
 Sitting 6:30am

Evenings:  
*(Except Thursdays)*

Special Chanting 6:30pm  
 Chanting 7:00pm  
 Sitting 7:25pm



Drumming by Deung Myong Sunim



College Retreat November 2022