

Winter 2003

Zen Group News

Newsletter of the Bellingham Zen Practice Group

Guiding Teacher: Zoketsu Norman Fisher

Resident Priest: Nomon Tim Burnett



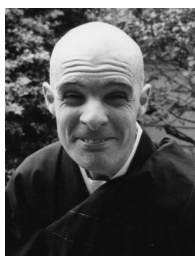
You are all perfect the way you are, and I think you could use a little improvement.

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi

Winter 2004 Practice Period

January 22 – March 7, 2004

The idea of practice period, (*ango*, in Japanese) comes from the “rains retreats” of the original Zen Buddhist monks and nuns. During the rainy season, they could not travel, and they settled down for more intensive practice. Practice period is a time in which a group of people try to practice more intensively together. In monasteries, there is usually a more intense schedule of zazen, silent work, and study; and practitioners are expected to attend absolutely all events, and even not to leave the monastery in order to intensify their practice. Our practice period is adapted to our lives as lay people in the West—we don’t live in monasteries. But each winter, we try, in the same spirit of those first practitioners and in the same spirit of the monastery, to settle our busy lives and intensify our practice.



Everyone is invited to join us for any practice period event.

Shuso – And a More Intensive Practice Period

This year, our guiding teacher, Zoketsu Norman Fischer, has invited Nomon Tim Burnett to be *shuso* (head student) for the practice period. We will intensify our practice period to build a strong field of practice to support our first access to this tradition. For Zen priests in our lineage, completing the *shuso* period serves as a next step of ordination and empowerment. The *shuso* is asked to set the tone and provide an example of clear and committed practice in the context of a community of practitioners. In the coming years, Zoketsu may ask other Pacific Northwest priests and also senior lay students to serve as *shuso*.

The *shuso* training, and the practice period, works best when there is a strong feeling of the community practicing together and being in frequent contact with each other. Tim’s focus is on sangha: sangha coming together frequently to sit zazen and do service together. The *shuso* also supports the practice period through teaching—giving a class and several dharma talks—and by meeting individually with all students who have made a commitment to the practice period.

To support the *shuso*’s training and deepen our practice, the sangha will hold more practice-oriented events this year than in the past. Practice-period events will include three retreats, the class given by the *shuso*, additional zazen, a practice-period sharing meeting, and tea with the *shuso*.

The *shuso* is also at the center of two important ceremonies: a Shuso Entering Ceremony at the beginning of the practice period and a Shuso Question and Answer Ceremony (*hosenshiki*) at the end of the practice period.

Upcoming Events

January 2004	Winter Practice Period January 22—March 7, 2004
1/22	Shuso Entering Ceremony —7:00 pm. Opening of practice period. Zoketsu Norman Fischer and Shuso Tim Burnett. Bellingham Dharma Hall.
1/24—1/25	Practice Period Opening Retreat, Vancouver, BC Zoketsu Norman Fischer will lead this weekend retreat. A formal dharma talk will be given by the <i>shuso</i> , Nomon Tim Burnett. To register, email MountainRainZen@Yahoo.ca, or contact Michele Long at 604-253-4984 after January 2.
1/21—1/30	Extra Periods of Zazen - Dharma Hall (30 minute zazen plus short service) Mondays, 7:30 am—8:15 pm Wednesdays, 6:30 am—7:15 am Fridays, 12:15 pm—1:00 pm
February	Winter Practice Period Continues
2/4, 2/11, 2/18, 2/25	Heart Sutra Class with Nomon Tim Burnett Wednesdays, 7:30-9:00 pm . Bellingham (location to be announced).
2/17	Practice Period Tea / Sharing Meeting For practice period students only.
2/21	Unfolding the Heart of Practice: A Zen Retreat on the Heart Sutra Shuso Nomon Tim Burnett. Saturday, February 21, 8 am – 4pm. Bellingham Dharma Hall.
2/2—2/27	Extra Periods of Zazen (30 minute zazen plus short service) Mondays, 7:30 am—8:15 am Wednesdays, 6:30 am—7:15 am Fridays, 12:15 pm—1:00 pm
March	Winter Practice Period Concludes
3/1 and 3/3	Extra Periods of Zazen—Dharma Hall (30 minute zazen plus short service) Monday, 7:30 am—8:15 pm Wednesday, 6:30 am—7:15 am
3/4—3/7	Final Sesshin of Winter Practice Period Zoketsu Norman Fischer. Bellingham Dharma Hall. Retreat begins at 7:00 pm on Thursday and ends at 5:00 pm on Sunday.
3/7	Shuso Question and Answer Ceremony (hosenshiki) begins at 3:00.
3/5	Public Talk Zoketsu Norman Fischer will give a public talk on Friday evening at 7:00 pm.
3/15	Deadline for submissions for April newsletter.

April	
4/10	Sangha Retreat Saturday, 9:00 am—3:00 pm. Potluck lunch. Bellingham Dharma Hall.
4/19—4/24	Spring Retreat at Mar de Jade, Chacala, Mexico Zoketsu Norman Fischer. Five-day retreat in a tropical setting.
4/30	Spring Week-end Retreat In Vancouver, B.C. Zoketsu Norman Fischer. Details to come.
May	
5/1-5/2	Spring Week-end Retreat In Vancouver, B.C. continues.
June	
6/6-6/12	Samish Island Sesshin Our annual week-long summer retreat with Zoketsu Norman Fischer. Sunday, June 6 (afternoon) to Saturday, June 12 (noon). Details to come.

Thursday Practice during Practice Period



During the Winter Practice Period, the regular Thursday evening schedule will be changed: tea and discussion will be replaced by a third period of zazen.

Practice Period Thursdays

7:00 pm zazen / 7:30 pm kinhin / 7:40 pm zazen / 8:10 kinhin / 8:20 zazen / 9:10 service

Full Moon Ceremony / Bodhisattva Precepts Ceremony

(Futatsu) The Thursday night closest to the full moon will follow the regular schedule.

7:00 pm zazen / 7:30 pm kinhin / 7:40 pm zazen / 8:10 Full Moon Ceremony

Mountain Rain Fundraiser

Mountain Rain Zen Community is holding a fundraising activity in support of Ryuzen Robby Pellet. Robby recently underwent surgery for a kidney transplant, and is unable to work regularly as he recovers. To help him through a financially challenging time, Mountain Rain is “recycling” Robby’s calendar artwork. Individual pages of the beautiful calligraphy are being framed and offered for sale. All proceeds, minus the cost of supplies, will be given to Robby. If you can help by donating calendar pages, or if you are interested in buying one of the framed prints, contact Susan Elbe at 604-988-6642.

Dear Friends,

Our practice is in many ways so simple. So basic. Just paying attention. Practicing with the breath. Sitting and studying this funny mixed up being we call the self. Nothing to it in a way! And yet, as you know, it's hard to keep it up. It's hard to stay present in this life. Hard to remain available to the great possibility of each moment—to open to the wonder of being alive. It's so easy to veer off, to muddle through, to sink into our shell and hole up with a good book waiting for the world to just go away.

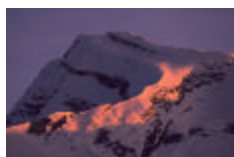
What has kept my practice alive over the years is sangha—having people to practice with, people to share the joys and frustrations of this deep Zen way of living and understanding. You'll read in this newsletter about our Winter Practice Period, and I am writing to invite you make full access of sangha to re-emphasize formal practice in your life this Winter.

If you live in the Bellingham area, I hope you will consider attending the events of our Winter Practice Period, but regardless of where you live, please think about putting your attention more firmly on your aspiration to practice the Buddha way during the six weeks from January 22nd through March 7th. Practice Periods are powerful because of sangha—practicing together with others, or even just knowing that there are others like us doing their best to practice, is a huge support.

You might consider making a commitment to sit every day, perhaps with a friend. You might consider doing a little more study or coming to one or more of the retreats we are offering, or going to a retreat at another center. Regardless of what you choose to do, I hope you will hold the practice and our shared intention to live with some peace and grace in your heart during this time.

Sincerely yours,

Nomon Tim Burnett
Resident Priest



Taking Refuge – Zoketsu Norman Fischer

Seven from Rohatsu—Green Gulch Farm Rohatsu Sesshin, 1996

Taking refuge in Buddha means returning over and over again to the truth we really know in our hearts that our real nature, just like a wave, is that we belong to everything. We belong to everything and we are embraced by everything. And that's taking refuge in Buddha. And taking refuge in Dharma means that we know that there's a way to live and practice that will enable us actively to feel this belonging and embracing in our lives. And to take refuge in Sangha means that we know we are supported in this effort. We're supported by our friends and teachers, by each and every person in the sesshin, by the ancient tradition of practice in which we can have confidence. This is the way that people for generations and generations have found a sense of belonging and embracing. And we are supported even by the clouds and the earth and the plants and animals. In his darkest hour, when he was really scared and was beset by all kinds of demons and difficulties, the Buddha just reached out his hand and touched the earth and said, "This is my support."

Mission / Values / Organization / Membership

Mission

The Bellingham Zen Practice Group follows the Soto Zen style of Shunryu Suzuki.

We support practice with a spirit of cooperation, extending the essence of Buddha's teachings into everyday life.

For the last year our group has been involved in a re-visioning process. What began as an examination of problems in decision-making has resulted in a revamping of our governing structure and the creation of a new membership system. Previous articles in this newsletter have kept everyone updated on the progress of the Process Committee meetings. Now, with some fanfare, we are pleased to announce the details of what we have come up with.

The Process Committee arranged for its last meeting to be with our guiding teacher, Norman Fischer, during our October study retreat, to finalize and tune up our work. Our efforts to date were laid on the table, and with only a few details to iron out, everything was approved with enthusiasm. Final versions were produced for a first ever All Sangha Retreat to present the material to the larger group.

Our Sangha Retreat, organized and facilitated by resident priest Tim Burnett, was held from nine to three on a Saturday and combined sitting meditation, walking meditation, a potluck meal, small group discussions, and business sections. It was gratifying and exciting to see our work finally laid out in a clear and presentable fashion. We hope that it will be helpful in giving people coming to our group an understanding of who we are and how to be involved.

The results of this year-long revitalization are a mission statement, an inspiring statement of core values structured around the traditional four Bodhisattva vows, and a new Leadership Council and membership structure. Nothing approaching any of these elements has ever existed for our group before. It is our hope that by achieving this level of transparent clarity about how we do business, more people will find our group approachable and helpful.

The cornerstones of our changes revolve around the Leadership Council and membership structures. Anyone now has the option to become a member or friend of the Bellingham Zen Practice Group—the distinction between the two being a simple personal evaluation of your level of involvement. Participation in all of our regular activities is, of course, open to anyone, whether they choose to become members or not. Out of the regular membership is chosen a rotating Leadership Council, consisting at this point basically of people who have stepped up to volunteer their energy and work. The council members are each responsible to oversee an area of concern—outreach, retreats, finances, etc.—by enlisting other volunteers to help with component tasks to keep the group moving along. The council holds regular meetings, open to members, where topics are approached in a consensus process, with the council members being empowered to make final decisions. This will help with one of the primary stumbling blocks our group has encountered over the years: that tasks are not carried through because responsibilities have not been clearly defined.

A key to the new system is the creation of the new quarterly Sangha Retreats. Open to the whole sangha, these short day retreats (lasting from approximately 9 am to 3 pm) will provide a convivial forum where our practice and vision can come together. Gathering input and advice from the larger group, the Leadership Council will be able to stay in touch with, and ultimately be responsible to, the entire sangha. Designed to be accessible to anyone involved with the group, these retreats have the potential and flexibility to be arranged seasonally or thematically to allow for such things as discussion of special topics, forms training, seasonal rituals, and other elements to give the Sangha a new touchstone for building community.

To become a member or friend, fill out the enclosed form and return it to us. Or, if you'd prefer simply to remain on our mailing list, let us know. The present Leadership Council is listed in the *Sangha Currents* section of this newsletter, and questions related directly to each area of concern can be addressed to the appropriate person. You can check out the material describing in detail our inner workings on-line at www.bellinghamzen.org or request a copy by mail, by contacting John Wiley (360-671-6064—or by email at info@bellinghamzen.org).

—Bob Penny

Bellingham Zen Practice Group – Core Values – The Bodhisattva Vows



We take refuge in Buddha. We see the Buddha nature of all beings.

Our sangha's inspiration is the bodhisattva path, and we are committed to being guided by the bodhisattva precepts, to living by vow and precept. Our core values support us in this practice.

1 Beings are numberless, I vow to save them.

Service We practice Zen as a way of serving the world. We practice so that others may practice. We practice for the benefit of all beings, and for the natural world upon which all life depends.

Generosity We value generosity, considering others before ourselves. In making sangha decisions and life decisions, we consider what works best over what we personally desire.

Practical, daily practice We are committed to putting the precepts into daily action.

2 Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.

Humility We practice humility, realizing that our understanding of the dharma will never be complete.

Experience We honor experience in life and practice. We honor the teachings, the teacher, and the student.

Diversity We value diversity. Thus we honor each person's spiritual practice, and we respect each other's understanding.

3 Dharma gates are boundless, I vow to enter them.

Openness Everything is a dharma gate.

Support We work with our resistance to practice in its many forms, seeking to deepen our understanding, supporting each other through this practice.

Humor Above all, maintain a sense of humor. That might be the one thing that will get us, and all beings, through to that other shore!

4 Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

Awakening We value the awakening process and recognize that every moment can be a deep awakening.

Patience Inspired by our ancestors in the dharma, we value patience, continuing the practice steadily, realizing that Zen is a life-long activity.

Sangha Currents

Ordinations

Sandy Taylor

On Monday, September 22, 2003, Sandy Taylor was ordained as a Zen Priest, along with another long-time practitioner, Mark Lesser, by her teacher Zoketsu Norman Fischer in a ceremony held in the Buddha Hall at San Francisco Zen Center City Center. The ceremony was held at 7:30 in the evening—a glorious day, evening, and ceremony!

Sandy's daughter Andrea and her husband Stuart attended with their two children, as did Sandy's daughter Stephanie. About 150 people—family, friends, and sangha members—attended a reception at the Zen Center Conference Center.

Sandy's new Buddha name is **Kyo An Jo Shu**, which means "Dwelling in Peace, Continuous Practice." Sandy says, "All in all, the ordination was one of the happiest events of my life. It was a profound and very deep re-taking of the vows."

Congratulations, Sandy!

Leadership Council

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Dharma Hall Representative
Bob Penny (see above)

Ex-officio Council Members

Resident Priest Tim Burnett—tim@bellinghamzen.org
360-647-2363

Guiding Teacher Zoketsu Norman Fischer

Michael Newton Kate McCandless



In a beautiful ceremony held on November 23, 2003 in Vancouver, B.C., long-time Zen students and Mountain Rain Zen Community founding members Kate McCandless and Michael Newton were ordained as Zen Priests by their teacher Zoketsu Norman Fischer.

Kate and Michael started practicing Zen in Japan in the 1980s and have been studying with Norman for more than a decade. They also practice regularly with Chozen Bays roshi of the Zen Community of Oregon. During the ceremony, Norman commented on the meaning of becoming a priest as "leaving home." Kate and Michael, who are married, have a special connection in that they "leave home" together.

Kate and Michael's warm presence and deep dedication to practice have inspired and supported sanghas in both Bellingham and Vancouver. We congratulate and welcome them into our Pacific Northwest practice community as Zen priests.

Congratulations Michael and Kate!

Committee Volunteers

Registrar	Chris Burkhart
Chiden	Marilyn Kratt / John Keith
Bookkeeper	Les Ishimoto
Tenzo	Stuart Travis
Ceremonies Assistant	Connie Martin
Newsletter Editor	Connie Martin

Contributions to Sangha Currents

If you know of some special event that is happening (for yourself or some other sangha member), we'd love to hear about it. Please send announcements to

Outreach Coordinator / Newsletter
cssmartin@bellinghamzen.org.



*Newsletter of the
Bellingham Zen
Practice Group*

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WWW.BELLINGHAMZEN.ORG



Winter 2004 Practice Period

How, after all, will you finally find peace?

*Just wait for the snow to melt and naturally
spring will arrive.*

Hongzhi – 12th century Chinese Zen master