

Open Secret

Zen Open Circle newsletter

No 7 July 2006

Diamond Sangha Teachers™ Circle Meetings

Zen Open Circle, together with Sydney Zen Centre, hosted the 2006 international Diamond Circle Teachers Circle meetings, with teachers attending from USA, Germany, New Zealand, and many parts of Australia, from 3-8 July.

A welcoming pot-luck dinner on Monday at the home of Brendon and Kerry Stewart was a warm and lively event, with all teachers being issued with an Australiana sample bag including a hand-knitted beanie, courtesy of Chris Cormack, who took the lead role in coordinating the week of events, as well as plugging many gaps and doing much of the heavy lifting. A very deep bow to your effort over the last two months, with all the many other concerns you have had pressing on your mind, Chris!

The panel presentation on Engaged Buddhism on Tuesday night was well attended and raised nearly \$200 for an indigenous education fund.

Friday night saw a packed crowd at Summer Hill Zendo for the dharma enquiry evening, with five visiting teachers offering themselves for question and answer interaction with the steady stream of ZOC students who bravely came forward.

The final event was a picnic at Gorricks Run, with beautiful food, bushwalk and, of course, soccer game. Australia won, this time. Or was it the two circling wedge-tailed eagles who really won the day?

During the days, the 17 participating teachers carried out koan review in the mornings, and discussed issues around teaching practice in the afternoons. Thursday afternoon included a visit to the Zen Mind, Zen Brush exhibition at the AGNSW, and tea ceremony at the gallery.

A deep bow to the many members of ZOC who contributed in so many generous ways, by hosting teachers, offering transport, chopping, cooking, and support for the events including coming forward on Friday night and laying your life on the line! Many visiting teachers commented glowingly on the warmth and spiritedness of our Zen community.

If we have not quiet in our minds, outward comfort will do no more for us than a golden slipper on a gouty foot - *John Bunyan, preacher and author (1628-1688)*

Windy winter rain...
My silly big umbrella
Tries walking backwards

Shisei-Jo

now and Zen

Zen Open Circle sits every Friday from 6.30-8.30pm at the Art of Yoga, 80 Smith Street, Summer Hill
T: 9799 7108

Art of Yoga/ZOC Open House at Art of Yoga, Saturday 5 August. A feast of food and films (programs now available)

Seven day sesshin (retreat) at Gorricks Run, 7-14 October 2006 (registration forms available soon)

Next ZOC council meeting will be held on 24 September. All welcome

Ensos - everywhere



Zen Open Circle is a member of the Buddhist Council of New South Wales Inc.

What would the Buddha Do?

Here's a recent essay from Buddhist scholar and practitioner David Loy, who's on the faculty of Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is a member of BPF's International Advisory Council. During the recent Diamond Sangha teachers' Circle week of meetings, events offered included a public forum on the subject of what is (not) 'engaged Buddhism'.

Maybe every modern generation feels confronted by some crisis that will determine the fate of the future. But unless your head is buried in the sand, or some Buddhist equivalent, it's not possible to be ignorant of the extraordinary planetary crisis that confronts all of us today. Environmental collapse no longer merely threatens: we are well into it and it's already apparent that civilization as we know it is going to be transformed in some very uncomfortable ways by the mutually-reinforcing breakdown of ecological systems, especially global climate change, ozone depletion, rapid disappearance of many species, and various types of pollution including some we don't know about yet.

Although our globalizing economic system is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the biosphere, the CEOs who direct this system (as much as anyone controls it) can't plan much further than the next quarterly report, anymore than politicians can think further than the next election. Overpopulation, pandemics, and the increasing deprivation of basic necessities for vast numbers of people threaten social breakdown, while the media - profit-making enterprises whose primary focus is the bottom-line, rather than discovering and revealing the truth - distract us with infotainment and assurances that the solution is "more of the same": keep the faith, hang in there long enough, and eventually technological development and economic growth, more consumerism and greater GNP, will resolve our problems.

As if that were not enough, our ignorant, corrupt and arrogant leaders, or rather rulers, have shown themselves to be incompetent at everything except lying and gaining power. Now that their deceit and incompetence are coming back to haunt them, their popularity has been

plummeting - but at the same time they have been consolidating their power. The faces will change, while the power structure remains much the same, unless we find ways to do something about it.

One of the most important tools for maintaining their power is fear, which requires replacing the Cold War with a never-ending "war on terror" that means never-ending profits for a military-industrial complex that fattens on war and would collapse without it.

Intentionally or not, the war on terror has been prosecuted in a way guaranteed to produce a dozen more despairing people, who hate the U.S., for every "terrorist" we kill. Our aggressive efforts to suppress terrorism ensure that it will continue. As Peter Ustinov put it, terrorism is the war of the poor; war is the terrorism of the rich. The violence of small terrorist groups such as al Qaeda is, in the final analysis, trivial compared to the "state terrorism" (including sanctioned torture) that we feel justified unleashing on anyone else who scares us or challenges our "national interests."

I do not offer the above reflections as political opinion ("c'mon, we must hear the other side too!") but as fact. It is the critical situation we find ourselves in today, and Buddhists, like everyone else, need to face up to it quickly. To be quite blunt, if you are not at least dimly aware of these urgent problems, then you are living in some very strange bubble devoid of news (perhaps in the late stages of a 20-year retreat in some Himalayan cave?), or there is a deficiency in your spiritual practice. Either you are not paying attention, or something is wrong with your ability to see. There is a special place in hell (the Buddhist hells as well as the Christian one) reserved for those who refuse to give up the self-centered indifference that allows them to rest indefinitely on their cushions while the rest of the world goes to hell. Buddhism encourages mindfulness and awareness, and especially today it's necessary for that awareness to extend beyond our sitting cushions and dharma practice halls, to embrace a broader understanding of what is happening in our world, to our world - which cries out in pain. Like Kwan Yin, we need to be able to hear that pain.

Sometimes we think that meditation practice means "just seeing, just hearing,

just feeling is *good!* -- concepts are *bad!* There are times and places when we need to focus on immediate sensory and mental phenomena, yet such practices are by themselves incomplete, like a Buddhist awakening that liberates us without also motivating us to address the liberation of everyone. Otherwise we may end up like frogs at the bottom of a deep well, oblivious to the wider world that exists outside. If your Buddhist practice makes you allergic to all concepts and abstractions, then you'd better be prepared to visit the South Pole, to experience directly your own ozone-hole sunburn, and the arctic tundra, to wallow personally in the melting permafrost mud, and the slums of Bogota and Rio de Janeiro, to see for yourself how families try to survive there, and Baghdad, to learn for yourself what "bringing democracy to the Middle East" means on the ground and a lot of other places as well.

Those of us who do not have the time, money or energy for all that need to develop wider awareness in other ways, ways which do not rely on junk media or the Bush spin machine, and which therefore must employ our critical faculties to understand the enormous challenges facing the world we live in. *Concepts and generalizations are not bad in themselves.* Rejecting them is like blaming the victim, for the problem is the way we misuse them, the way we get caught up in them. Yes, sometimes it is important to be able to let go of concepts. At other times it is just as important to benefit from how they can inform us. The greater awareness that we all need today cannot function without an appreciation of that distinction.

Believing that "mindfulness means attentiveness only to my immediate surroundings" and placing such limits on one's awareness is really another version of the basic problem, which is our sense of separation from each other and from the world we are "in." *Anatta*-nonself means that it is delusive to distinguish "my own best interests" from what is in the best interest of everyone. The world is not that kind of zero-sum game. That is why karma works the way it does.

There are two other common Buddhist responses to this type of argument, which try to justify focusing solely on one's own practice and enlightenment. "I must tend

to my own liberation before I can be of service to others; and from the highest point of view there are no sentient beings - everything is 'empty' -- so we needn't worry about their fate, or that of the biosphere." Neither of these answers will do, however, because in different ways they are both dualistic half-truths at best.

If focusing solely on my own liberation tends to reinforce the separation between myself and others, a more nondual response is to engage on both levels of practice, collective as well as individual. We can't wait until we have overcome all our own suffering before addressing others' suffering, because the world is speeding up, and events are not going to wait for you and me to attain great enlightenment. Since the degrees of enlightenment are infinite (even the Buddha is only halfway there, according to a Zen saying), we need to contribute whatever we can regardless of where we are in our own personal practice. More precisely, we need to do what we can according to where we are in our practice, in accordance with the ways our practice empowers us right now.

More to the point, however, that objection misunderstands how spiritual practice works. We don't wait until we overcome our self-centeredness before engaging with the world; addressing the suffering of the wider world is how we overcome our self-centeredness. Contrary to a common way of understanding the bodhisattva path, bodhisattvas don't defer their own perfect enlightenment in order to help others; helping others is how they perfect their enlightenment, because they know that their own liberation ultimately cannot be distinguished from others'. We awaken from our own self-suffering to discover ourselves in a world full of suffering. To awaken is to realize that *I am not other than that world.*

But it's all empty, right? Yes and no. To focus solely on the emptiness aspect is to dualize again and misunderstand the essential teaching of Mahayana. Form is emptiness, but emptiness is also form. Phenomena have no essence, yet our formless essential nature assumes one form or another because that is how it manifests; without manifestations it remains nothing, amounts to nothing, has no meaning. Not to cherish the intricate

web of life that the earth has miraculously spun - including us, deluded as we are -- is to denigrate the wondrous activity of the essential nature that we share with all other beings. Enlightenment is not about attaining some higher reality or transcendental dimension, it is about realizing our essential oneness with the world, which is the same as realizing the emptiness of our self-being; and acting accordingly. Without a healthy biosphere, the possible forms available to emptiness are much diminished. Without healthy societies, the possibilities for fulfilling human activity, including following the path to enlightenment, are damaged.

What would the Buddha do?

That's an important question, but not easy to answer. I sometimes wonder what he would think about Buddhism today. The Buddha never taught Buddhism; we can even say that he was not a Buddhist, just as Jesus was never a Christian. Shakyamuni taught "the Dhamma." Buddhism isn't what the Buddha taught, it's what the Buddha began. Buddhism as we know it is how the Dhamma and sangha developed over the centuries, in many different places and cultures. Would he be pleased with what his efforts begat?

His teachings emphasize impermanence and insubstantiality. He wouldn't be surprised by the history of constant change, or by the extraordinary adaptability that Buddhism has demonstrated wherever it has spread. He wouldn't expect us to simply follow and repeat his ways of teaching, nor to cling to the rules that evolved for regulating the sangha in his day. Surely he'd not want us to remain unaware of the challenges that face us collectively, not expect his followers to ignore them? In his time the sangha could largely ignore political struggles and social conflict by retreating back into the forest; today there is nowhere on earth to hide that is not under some threat. The traditional duality between lay and ordained does not apply in this situation. Our fates cannot be distinguished.

What would the Buddha do? Is the answer that we can't know, because he's not here? If the Buddha doesn't live in us and

as us, he is indeed dead. If we are unable to answer that question for ourselves, Buddhism is dead. Or might as well be. The challenge is for you and me to apply the most important Buddhist teachings to our present situation. If those teachings do not work for understanding and addressing the global crises we face today, so much the worse for those teachings; maybe it's time to get rid of them, or at least revise them radically. Remembering the distinction between the Dhamma and Buddhism as it evolved and has been preserved, perhaps then we should "let go" of Buddhism and look for another spiritual practice that better provides what is needed today.

But I do not think that is what is called for. The most distinctive Buddhist teaching is also the one that gives us the most insight into the collective crises confronting us: the relationship between *dukkha* and *anatta*, between suffering (in the broadest sense) and the delusive sense of self. A sense of self is inevitably uncomfortable since, being a psychological construct, it is groundless, and the usual ways it tries to ground itself to feel more "real" just make things worse. This essential truth is just as revealing about "collective selves" that vainly try to secure themselves by promoting their own group self-interest at the price of those outside. This gets at the heart of why sexism, racism, nationalism, militarism and species-ism (the alienation between human beings and the rest of the biosphere) are self-defeating: if sense of separation is the problem, embracing our interdependence must be at the heart of any solution. Our rulers are failing so miserably because their policies embody and reinforce the delusion of separation, which is why they keep aggravating the world's *dukkha* rather than alleviating it.

Such interdependence is not merely a realization to be cultivated on our cushions. A suffering world calls upon us to realize interdependence - to make it real -- in the ways we actually live. This includes challenging the powers-that-be and their culture of greed, ill will and delusion. If we Buddhists do not want to do this or cannot find ways to do this, however, then Buddhism is not the spiritual path that the world needs today.

Walking the Larapinta trail

A pilgrimage

Connection with an old old land

Connection with Mt Sonder - Woman

Connection with the full moon

Connection with my centre

Connection with my fellow pilgrims.

Is the single stem of narcissus,
picked in sweet surprise from the ragged
winter garden,
diminished by buckets of bunches in the
mega mall?

Can tattered mint and tomato, shared
with the caterpillar,
taste sweeter for their flaw?

The Centre

So harsh

So soft

Cecile Barral

Before the bloom of abundance and
perfect form,
the shabby softly shrinks in shame and
shy self-loathing.

Meanwhile those tough beauties, the
haphazard miracles,
dodge and cheat at covert law,
smiling to befuddle the complete
and by their sharp teasing lessen the
more.

Judy Cole

April sesshin



Front row: Michael, Nicola, Jacqui, Susan, Lindy, Deborah

Middle row (kneeling): Margie, Merran, Lesley, Patrick

Back row: Maureen, Chris, Julie, Naomi, Gus, Barbara (& Felix) Michael, Herb



Birth of Felix Rainer Ozols

On the rainy evening of 2 June, while everyone was sitting, Barbara Ozols-Wulff gave birth to a bonny boy. Susan was her birth attendant and Naomi was there in support of the birth too, offering acupuncture.

Welcome to the world, little Felix, and congratulations to Barbara, Eddie and Oscar for their new family member.



Cat Scan



A fragment from *Jubilate Agno*, written by Christopher Smart between 1759 and 1763 when he had been confined in Potter's madhouse in Bethnal Green. The main symptom of his disorder was a manic compulsion to pray in public, anytime, anyplace. "For I blessed God in St James's Park till I routed all the company". (Cited in Edward Hirsch *How to Read a Poem and fall in love with poetry*.)

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffrey.
For he is the servant of the Living God
duly and daily serving him.
For at the first glance of the glory of God
in the East he worships in his way.
For is this done by wreathing his body
seven times round with elegant
quickness.
For then he leaps up to catch the musk,
which is the blessing of God upon his
prayer.
For he rolls upon his flank to work it in.
For having done duty and received
blessing he begins to consider himself.
For this he performs in ten degrees.
For first he looks upon his fore-paws to
see if they are clean.
For secondly he kicks up behind to clear
away there.
For thirdly he works it upon stretch with
the fore-paws extended.
For fourthly he sharpens his paws by
wood.
For fifthly he washes himself.
For sixthly he rolls upon wash.

For seventhly he fleas himself, that he
may not be interrupted upon the beat.
For eighthly he rubs himself against a
post.
For ninthly he looks up for his
instructions.
For tenthly he goes in quest of food.
For having considered God and himself he
will consider his neighbour.
For if he meets another cat he will kiss
her in kindness.
For when he takes his prey he plays with
it to give it a chance.
For one mouse in seven escapes by his
dallying.
For when his day's work is done his
business more properly begins.
For he keeps the Lord's watch in the
night against the adversary.
For he counteracts the powers of
darkness by his electrical skin and glaring
eyes.
For he counteracts the Devil, who is
death, by brisking about life.
For in his morning orisons he loves the
sun and the sun loves him.
For he is of the tribe of Tiger.
For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel
Tiger.
For he has the subtlety and hissing of a
serpent, which in goodness he suppresses.
For he will not do destruction, if he is
well-fed, neither will he spit without
provocation.
For he purrs in thankfulness, when God
tell him he's a good Cat.
For he is the instrument for the children
to learn benevolence upon.
For every house is incomplete without
him and a blessing is lacking in the spirit...
For he is tenacious of his point.
For he is a mixture of gravity and
waggery.
For God has blessed him in the variety of
his movements.
For, tho' he cannot fly, he is an excellent
clamberer.
...
For he can tread to all the measures upon
the music.
For he can swim for life.
For he can creep

Instructions from the cook

Creamy mushroom and green bean sauce

Serves four people

1 cup (100g) pine nuts
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large onions (finely chopped)
2 cloves garlic (chopped finely)
250g mushrooms (thinly sliced)
½ cup white wine or grape juice
300ml cream
½ cup vegetable stock
250g green beans (topped and tailed, and cut into long thin strips)
3 tablespoons fresh basil (chopped)
¼ cup (40g) sun-dried tomatoes (cut into thin strips)
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
50g Parmesan cheese (shaved)

- Place pine nuts in a small pan, stir over medium heat until golden. Set aside.
- Heat olive oil in a large heavy-based pan, add the onions and garlic and cook over medium heat for 5 minutes or until softened.
- Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, for 1 minute.
- Add the wine or grape juice, cream and stock. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes.
- Add the beans, basil, pine nuts and tomatoes and stir until heated through.
- Thicken with cornflour or potato flour if needed, season to taste with salt and pepper.

This recipe was adapted from *The Essential Vegetarian Cookbook*, Sydney: Murdoch Books, 1996.

Open Secret is edited by Ann Williams with ZOC

Please send your words, random thoughts, stories of the way, jokes, puns, suggestions and pictures to: Ann Williams
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If would like to be on our email list, please send an email to
jacquelinegodwin@pacific.com.au and put ZOC Mailing List in the subject line.

He does not know the last word

What is a saint? A saint is someone who has achieved a remote human possibility. It is impossible to say what that possibility is. I think it has something to do with the energy of love. Contact with this energy results in the exercise of a kind of balance in the chaos of existence. A saint does not dissolve the chaos; if he did the world would have changed long ago. I do not think that a saint dissolves the chaos even for himself, for there is something arrogant and warlike in the notion of a man setting the universe in order. It is a kind of balance that is his glory. He rides the drifts like an escaped ski. His course is the caress of the hill. His track is a drawing of the snow in a moment of its particular arrangement with wind and rock. Something in him so loves the world that he gives himself to the laws of gravity and chance. Far from flying with the angels, he traces with the fidelity of a seismograph needle the state of the solid bloody landscape. His house is dangerous and finite, but he is at home in the world. He can love the shape of human beings, the fine and twisted shapes of the heart. It is good to have among us such men, such balancing monsters of love.

Leonard Cohen, Beautiful Losers (1966)

Taking to the cushion...



Daphne, who sits with Deborah and Herb

Membership of ZOC is open to everyone for an annual fee of \$50. Membership forms are available from our secretary, Jacqui Godwin.

ZOC website: www.zenopencircle.org.au

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