

# Open Secret

Zen Open Circle newsletter

No 2 June 2004

## Launch into Zen, Friday 23 July, 6.30pm

*"...The great life is not a mysterious state of mind or an ecstasy belonging to saints, but just the simple, skilful act of returning to what you really are and agreeing with that, taking your heart's bearings from the very middle of the middle of each moment, open to all the offers of your lucky, lucky life. And when the straw sandals wear out, you just walk on."* (from Susan Murphy's Preface to *Upside-Down Zen*)

You are warmly invited to let your steps take you to the Buddhist Library at 6.30pm on Friday July 23 to join Susan Murphy when her new book, *Upside-Down Zen*, published by Lothian Books, will be launched by Rachael Kohn, well-known presenter of *The Spirit of Things* and *The Ark* on Radio National. Come and help celebrate what the publishers are proudly calling 'the new voice in Western Buddhism'.

"This book locates spiritual work where it has always really belonged—bang in the middle of whatever is happening.

"... Susan and her book are terrific guides for the real work of transformation. She is anchored in the old Asian tradition but is helpful if you have the courage to want more than that — a spirituality that is a creative force and useful each moment of your life. She brings her knowledge of myth and cultures to bear. She shows how Zen and the Western, along with also the older, native traditions, illuminate each other. (from *John Tarrant's Introduction*)

### praise for *upside-down Zen*

'This is a wonderful book — offering not a reading of Zen but an experience of it. It's playful, wise, elegant, accessible - and is grounded in marvellous truth.'

(Stephanie Dowrick, author of *Forgiveness and Other Acts of Love*)

## A hand for the Third Buddhist Film Festival

Initial planning for **Reel to Real - the Third Buddhist Film Festival** is complete and willing hands are needed to turn plans to action.

An annual fundraiser, organised jointly by the Buddhist Library and ZOC, and directed by Susan Murphy, the Film Festival relies on volunteers to sell tickets, arrange food, organise seating etc.

If you can offer your time, please ring Maureen Hogan, 9953 2556.

**WHEN:** Friday 30 July to Sunday 2 August

**WHERE:** Buddhist Library, 90 Church St, Camperdown

Where there are humans  
you'll find flies,  
And Buddha.

Issa

## now and Zen

Zen Open Circle sits **every Friday** from 6-8pm at the Buddhist Library, 90 Church Street, Camperdown NSW 2050  
T: 02 9519 6054.

The next **ZOC Council** meeting and AGM will be held on Friday 20 August 2004 at the Buddhist Library. All welcome.

Walk the Songlines of the Way, a **weekend retreat** with Uncle Max Harrison, Susan Murphy and ZOC at Gorricks Run, 13-15 August 2004.

The next **sesshin** will be held 24 September to 1 October 2004 at Gorricks Run.

If you would like to **join our email list**, please email [chris@tmte.com.au](mailto:chris@tmte.com.au) and put ZOC Mailing List in the subject line.



A guardian of Guanyin, Goddess of Compassion, on Putuoshan

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## Putting it into practice

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An increasing number of people are now regularly joining Zen Open Circle at Friday zazen and sesshins.

This happy increase in numbers requires a correspondingly greater emphasis on effective but unobtrusive administration. On Sunday 31 May, the ZOC Council and several other members of ZOC, met at Nicola Moulden's house to think about how day-to-day business can best sit with and support the sangha's practice.

After sitting and kinhin, Susan Murphy introduced the day's discussion by considering the spiritual and worldly balance needed by Zen practitioners. Her talk, reproduced here, introduces and puts into context the summary of the actions agreed to by the Council and other attendees (found after the talk)

### The Morning Star

Shakyamuni Buddha sat alone for seven days and nights under the Bodhi tree, in his utter commitment to see at last into his own self-nature, which is no other than your self-nature and my self-nature. It is shared by everything in the universe. It opened to him when he happened to glance up and see the Morning Star shining low under the tree just before dawn. That was Venus herself, interestingly enough, the planet of love and connection, and that seeing was the dawn of a new and immensely powerful articulation of the great matter that we all take part in, whether we know it or not. But it might just as well have been a twig snapping under the hoof of a grazing cow, or the twitter of a bird, or a glimpse of how the grass bent to the breeze, or the low chuckle of someone passing in the mist.

So we sit alone, all one, to wake up. But we sit together in a Zen group of dedicated people who practice together, sharing a focussed and necessarily intense meditation activity with others we trust. People go through deep changes in each other's company over many years of practice together. Sitting alone together, especially in the experience of sesshin over seven days and nights, binds people in mysterious ways. In the shared silence of sitting together, intuitive closeness grows between us in a way that social contact can know little about. We are

passionately alone, passionately together, in this.

And the Zen path of inquiry is a long one, not a weekend workshop affair. A decade is not a long time in Zen training, and if you pay attention to your life for that length of time, you will have entered a lifelong habit of paying attention.

So the people who walk with us on the path have some of the quality of family - we seem to share our big events with each other, births, deaths and marriages, and much of what happens in between. Zen community is 'there for you' at such important moments of your life. So any form of community shaping and administration we may undertake must be very mindful of this fact, and work to protect, respect and nourish it.

And there are two other equally vital and fundamental, matters to consider. The first is each student's own bodhicitta - that flame of trust and love that burns inside each one of us, that draws us to the path and helps us endure and be in there for the long haul. It is, very simply, the aspiration to see deeply, to wake up in this life to the vastness, the Morning Star, in the 'ordinary'. And the second is each student's individual relationship with the teacher. A sangha is composed in an almost carefully unconscious way of dozens of such relationships, each of them truly known at heart only by the two people concerned. This is the co-creative space of the teaching, the germ of the seed.

Each of these is in fact a relationship, each lines up with one of the Three Treasures of Buddhism - Buddha, Dharma, Sangha - and looking after each one of these is the true business of the 'business' side of things. Bodhicitta is our relationship with our own practice, our own great matter of waking up: this is the treasure of Buddha. The student-teacher relationship is at the core of our initiation into the treasure of Dharma. And the relationship of each of us with the group, the tending of its harmonic power and its widening relationship with the world and with all beings, is the treasure of Sangha.

So our community business is with actualising the three treasures. Really, it's all we're here for. The organisational part of our work together exists only to serve these three: We're here to provide and maintain and tend the place of

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practice, and general group harmony and ease; to provide the best conditions for the flourishing of the bodhicitta of each student; and to provide for and protect the private space and integrity of each student-teacher relationship.

It is also to connect with the wider world in terms of such things as these: To notify our activities to those who may be interested. To provide an encouraging, warm and respectful welcome to new people. To build and maintain a 'critical mass' for our most important practice spheres - regular zazen nights, and regular sesshins. To render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, though Caesar seems to want everything, at times, and so it is a matter of finding appropriate means to limit and balance that side of things. To offer duty of care towards the physical and psychological needs of participants. To take appropriate measures to ensure liability cover, and give due consideration to legal issues.

Worldly and the quasi-legal affairs can seem remote from Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and it is in the areas around money, liability, taxation and governance that problems can arise if we become remote towards the three treasures, or forgetful towards their continuing primacy. When we get caught up in money, responsibility, liability, rules and regulations, things which can generate their own intensity, we can accidentally do harm to the web of relationships that are formed in heartfelt response to the three treasures, and that we are actually here to serve. This can happen easily but be hard to realise or name at the time, apart from a feeling that something feels bad.

And this is so even though Zen attracts - have a look! - some of the most highly intelligent, sensitive and open-hearted people you will meet anywhere. Zen is an experience of opening the self up completely. In that process, you must be prepared to catch sight of yourself at times in magnified ways - the good, the bad, the ugly, *the complete*. We're here to be seized by the whole, but it is surprisingly easy to get caught up in the parts on the way home to wholeness! And so compassionate, humorous enjoyment of self and other - our foibles and miracles mixed together - is called for.



Huangshan (Yellow Mountain) - one of the most sacred of Daoist mountains

For all of these reasons, the administrative needs of the group must be handled with exceptional sensitivity, and humour and lightness - not overblown, not turned into dramas that start feeding on all the intensity that is natural to a practice like ours. We have to ensure that the tail does not wag the dog and sometimes shatter the poor dog to pieces!

This doesn't demand a lot of rule-bound or procedure-bound thinking - just a practice of turning again and again to the question of what do we need to do to provide for the three deepest concerns of our practice and our community? What behaviour suits those needs best?

I think that respect and trust figure high on that list; so does compassionate care with each other, and a preference for lightness and humour over drama; and at all times to look for the creative and life-affirming response to the need to be firm, not the authoritarian one. So it is a matter of asking our selves what creative, flexible solutions arise in each moment of perceived need. Can we find an action, and a degree of formality, proportionate to the actual situation and the actual scale of our activities? Can we let those we entrust be trusted, within a process that has due checks and balances built into it? Can we always come back to the question - is my action, my response, my decision truly mindful of the three treasures? Does it further them, does it hinder them, does it defame them?

Religious business is business unlike any other. It deals with an immensely powerful matter - the intimate relationship between you and your higher self, your God, the ground of your being, your Buddha-nature, or whatever you may wish to call it. These are excellent

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reasons for modesty, care, light-ness of touch, humour, patience and creativity to be the cardinal virtues of the business side of religious business.

So if any of us notice ourselves getting into the grip of an organisational archetype, that is beginning to steal your bodhicitta (a tremendous source of fuel!) and trample unawares on others - *stop!* Nothing is important enough for that. At such a time, do not send any emails. Speak only face to face to the person concerned. Sit more, recover your sense of proportion and humour - and forgive yourself. And then let it go, let it go, let it go. No-one ever died of letting go of a grievance or an obsession, though it is certainly possible to die of never letting it release its grip on us. In letting it go we learn its true nature, we open to insight, we rejoin all beings.

Finally, the truly creative response always arises from the space that is empty of the self. Teaching relies on this fact entirely. And it never fails to provide. It's why our roles are just roles, and not cloaks of personal power. It's why we sit and learn to drop the self, in order to discover the force that created the universe. To see the Morning Star at last, and to recognise it as no other than who we really are.

*The following proposals emerged from intense discussion:*

- There was a proposal to formalise induction and encourage new members by establishing a designated role of 'practice facilitator'. People should let Susan know if they are interested so she can consider applications and develop a training course.
- The Buddhist Library will be establishing a branch in Chatswood and ZOC have been invited to use the facility. Susan proposed that a further two nights of dokusan a month might be possible at the new centre.
- There was a proposal to explore the option of becoming an incorporated organisation. This is in order to limit liability of council members as well as making it easier to obtain public liability insurance.
- There was a proposal to charge a nominal membership fee of 25.00 (to be reviewed) which includes a one off

joining fee for those who wish to participate in Sesshin. The membership fee was proposed to offset the cost of public liability insurance for future events.

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## Easter Sesshin

Easter Sesshin was held for the first time at Kirrikee near Penrose.



Kirrikee– Easter 2004 sesshiners From left (back) Julie, Patrick, David, Nigel, Joyce, Maureen, Nicola, Ricardo, Nell. (front) Jacqui, Deborah, Susan, Nailia, Imelda, Lindy. (There in spirit - Sarah, Timothea, Cecile, Chris, Lesley, Barbara and Michael).

### When practice gets hairy

"I have two alpacas (they're sort of hairy lamas)." (from the homepage of a NSW school boy)

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## It's my Jukai

During Easter Sesshin one of ZOC's senior practitioners, Lindy Lee, took Jukai to celebrate ten years of practice. Patrick Hobbs talked to Lindy about deepening practice.

*Do people have a Jukai when they first take their vows?*

Jukai is a decision that you make... there is a ceremony...to formally take precepts, to formally marry yourself to the way, as if you weren't already married to it any way, and to a specific teacher...so I took Jukai ten and a bit years ago when John Tarrant was the main teacher at Sydney Zen Centre.

*Is it both parties that decide when to take the Jukai ?*

The way it happened to me was quite unusual. Because first of all I hadn't actually done a Sesshin before, though I had a very strong sense of commitment to Zen practice from the moment I stepped into Sydney Zen Centre. The moment I sat on the cushion, it was so familiar to

me it was frightening. I wanted a spiritual path but I hadn't expected this one.



For lots of reasons, I just ended up at Sydney Zen Centre on that particular night and then I realized I'd come home. I am used to being quite driven about things and so I sort of made this deal with myself

that I wouldn't force myself to go and sit but if I found myself there sitting... and somehow strangely I would find myself there at Sydney Zen centre every morning at six o'clock to sit, and you know I had quite strong experiences and after a few months I realized I wanted to take Jukai. So I wrote to John Tarrant, who was living in California, you're supposed to write to your teacher and explain the reasons why you want to do it, and I must have written an okay letter because he said it is fine, 'When I come back to do Easter Sesshin, you can take Jukai'. So I did. I hadn't done a Sesshin up until that point... and when I did go to Sesshin I thought 'Oh No!. I have made a very serious error', because it was very painful and difficult.

*And did you do seven-day retreat?*

Yes, I was used to sitting for a one-hour period but nothing prepares you for seven day Sesshin, like a seven day Sesshin.

"At that first Sesshin, in my heart, I thought it was the right thing to do...until my third day when I thought I have made such a serious error. There's no way I can last till the end of Sesshin. However, things went quite deeply for me and things changed very quickly and on the fifth day I found myself doing Jukai. And the part about Jukai which always gets me, even when its not me who's doing it, is the marriage to the way, its really your commitment to be thoroughly who you are what ever the hell that might be.

*And why did you decide to take Jukai again?*

Its different, ten years have passed. There are sixteen precepts all up, ten grave precepts, three great vows and three something else ...you actually have to write your response to each vow and its not like a commandment where you promise never ever to do xyz . It is more

to do with being human and fallible, you write what you would like to work towards. So between 1994 and now my understanding of the precepts has changed, grown and deepened and its quite interesting to kind of, ten years down the track, renew your vows and see where you are in this process...my vows didn't really change that much but the meanings of things, the profundity of things has shifted.

*And the rocket suit?*

The rocket suit [the rakusa] is what you make for yourself before you take precepts. One side has a grid like a rice paddy and the original pattern of the Buddha's robes.

The other side is a bit like a passport, I've got a couple of stamps, signatures, Susan wrote me a poem and it has your dharma name. When you take Jukai your teacher gives you a dharma name and mine was *Compassionate Wave*. John Tarrant gave me that name. There were three of us who did Jukai and we were

called 'The Wave Family'. Carolyn Joseph, who was Powerful Wave, Rob Myer who was Zen Wave, and I was Compassionate Wave.

The name refers to a quality you have, a quality that's important to you and that you want to learn to embody more deeply. If the house were on fire, it [the rakusa] is one of the things I would take first, apart from the dogs.

*"... nothing prepares you for seven day Sesshin, like a seven day Sesshin"*

### The Bridge

Indignant small birds nag at a languid eagle  
as it drifts far up in the soft blue sky.

The patient river soaks along  
unperturbed through knowing mangroves,  
while the factory gently fumes and reeks.

On the bridge suspended  
I crane my neck and laugh,  
electric with the sudden thrill of it all.

*jac*

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## Which came first?

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While ZOC member, Nell, was preparing for a show Patrick Hobbs braved the menagerie in her studio to find out more.

*The egg is a big symbol for you (literally) at the moment.*

Yes, this is the anchor of the show (the big egg) is my height and it's made of 20,000 upholstery pins. The piece is called *Many Little Decisions*, like the self is made up of these very small gestures and moments, graces, nuances. Should you wear your striped shirt today, and when you stand back each one seems so insignificant.

This is also going to be in the show, it is a severed crocodile tail with a gold drip.



*Is this cast or is this the actual thing?*

Yes, this is the actual crocodiles' tail. Over here we have rubber mice coming into existence. It's going to say my name out of mice. It's called *The One and The Many* and it has an accompanying gravestone over here.

*It's not meant to be a brand?*

No, not so much a brand ...there's a good chance it will be read as a big art signature - well that's actually okay, but then at the same time it is strangely putrid

*Is it fear that drives it? You seem to be setting up situations where normal people are going to have their fears triggered, with big scale objects dripping and oozing into the museum.*

I don't feel like I'm the one oozing into the museum, that's just sometimes what happens in life. Things are meant to be contained in certain ways but it doesn't happen, with people especially.

*Mental states as well?*

Yeah, that's very astute that you picked it up, they are quite menacing but at the same time, a bit funny and a bit 'science fictiony'. But for that first second, I do want it to be like a moment of suspending disbelief, the drip could possibly drop or the mice are really writing Nell.

*The eggs take on a benign presence in these pictures.*

They're lots of snakes and birds, I guess because they come out of eggs. There's also going to be a gold lightning bolt in the show. This piece is going to be in the show, *Sky Burial*, a broken boomerang from about 1900 which has some little birdies painted on it. And I call this my Maitland meets Rome piece, *Who made Who*.

*It's a beautiful gold egg covered in the phrase 'who made who', repeated like a mantra or an affirmation.*

It is exactly like a mantra, but it finally realizes who came first, why the sky is blue and why I was born. This was my Koan for a year and this is like my answer to my Koan.

*Is it nice to have a big fat Koan you can hold on to...as opposed to a mental cloud?*

When I come in to see Susan, I wish I could show her my work. I find it so hard to verbalize these ideas, my way is to present them through objects.

*Why do you have to have the form there? You started off in painting?*

Remember, I was never a painter. I've always been a bit of an anti-painter. I used to make paintings without paint, that was always my mission. Dog biscuits, dishwashing liquid, the cowboys and indians, the jelly on the trolley, the bunny on the hill and the gold bricks. I've always wanted to make sculptures.



*Many Little Decisions*

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*Do you like getting right into the space of the viewer?*

I think its something about being a woman making big work that is imposing in a way that you can't be in your own life, seeing how people relate to this thing you can make, how it relates to their body. I like these things to be almost like religious objects. When you walk into a beautiful church your whole body, your being just changes. I like that kind of moment.

*I'm looking at this card of Lindy Lee. Do you think there is a correspondence between your work and hers?*

Initially I thought we made very different work and the way that it appears we actually still do and even some of the underlying motivations that make the work are again completely different but there is one frequency of our practice so utterly aligned that its uncanny...its so hard to explain ...when I started sitting, I remember I said to her, 'that show you had at the art gallery, that was your *Mu* show wasn't it?' and she just roared with laughter and said yes, that was my *Mu* show...because I know her so well there are things I am able to read in her work and she of me.

*Nell's show opened on 1 July at the Roslyn Oxley Gallery, Paddington.*

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## Teeming silence

(for Timothea)

"...there is a huge amount - a really huge amount - of energy bound up in every material thing.

"You may not feel outstandingly robust, but if you are an average-sized adult you will contain within your modest frame no less that  $7 \times 10^{18}$  joules of potential energy - enough to explode with the force of thirty very large hydrogen bombs, assuming you knew how to liberate it and really wished to make a point. Everything has this kind of energy trapped within it."

*From Bill Bryson, A Short History of Nearly Everything, p161*



Chan temple in Shanghai

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## Instructions from the cook

### Peperonata

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
1 small onion sliced thinly  
2 cloves garlic sliced  
2 red capsicums, de-seeded and sliced  
3 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
black pepper  
2 teaspoons balsamic  
sea salt

Heat half the oil and cook onion until starts to brown. Add garlic and cook a minute longer. Add capsicums, cover and simmer 15 minutes.

Uncover, raise heat and bubble, watching it doesn't stick, until very thick and liquid is gone. Add vinegar and boil a moment longer, season and stir in remaining oil.

*Adapted from Stephanie Alexander by ZOC member Judy Cole.*

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## He does not know the last word

'When you try to do something, you lose it, because you are concentrated on one out of 1000 hands. You lose 999 hands. Before you try, you have it.'

Shunryu Suzuki



A Guanyin temple on Putuoshan



A nun on pilgrimage to Putuoshan - she was from Wutaishan, another sacred Buddhist mountain in Northern China

**Photos** from China on pages 1,3,5,7,8 are courtesy of © Robert Scott-Mitchell 2004. Easter Sesshin group, page 4, was taken by Herb.

Photos on page 6 are by Adrian Cook

*Open Secret* is edited by Patrick Hobbs and Ann Williams with ZOC

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