

Kaihan

The Quarterly Newsletter of the North Carolina Zen Center

Spring 2006



The Brooks Branch Zendo is currently operating on the following schedule:

Monday — Friday mornings:

6 AM — 6:40 AM Zazen

Tuesday & Thursday followed by opportunity for interview with Sandy

Tuesday Evening:

7 PM — 8:30 PM Zazen

Thursday Evening:

7 PM — 9 PM Chanting, zazen, interviews and Dharma talk

Sunday Morning

9 AM Work practice

10 AM - Noon Chanting, zazen, interviews and Dharma talk, followed by tea

Sandy regularly attends Tuesday mornings, Thursday mornings and evenings, and Sunday mornings. Also, please note the hour of work practice before the Sunday morning session. Feel free to show up and give a hand in the many small tasks which keep the Center running smoothly.

When the Buddha was 72, his cousin Devadatta suggested that he, the Buddha, retire and make him, Devadatta, his successor. The Buddha replied that he wouldn't even consider making one of his awakened disciples like Mahakashyapa his successor, "much less a gob of spit like you!"

Eight years later when the Buddha was on his death bed between the two sala trees in Kushinara, he reaffirmed his intention not to name a successor. Rather, he said, "Let the dharma be your island." That is, let the teachings be your refuge. In all our ceremonies, we remind ourselves of this when we chant the Three Refuges — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Some months after the Buddha died, his main disciples assembled in a mountain cave near Rajgir in Bihar state for the First Council of the Elders. At that time, Mahakashyapa took the helm and thus began the organization that today is called Buddhism. The Zen schools consider Mahakashyapa to be the Buddha's successor. He is the one who, according to case 6 in the Mumonkan, smiled when all the monks were stunned by the Buddha's lifting a flower. At that time, the Buddha recognized his attainment of the dharma, but didn't say, "You are my successor."

Rinzai, the founder of our school, had numerous awakened followers. On his death bed, he named Sansho as his successor, but Sansho's line died out after a couple of generations. The Rinzai school lineage survived through Rinzai's attendant of many years, Koke, who was not a named successor.

In our particular school of Zen, named Rinzai-ji, founded by my teacher Joshu Roshi and based in Los Angeles, the question of succession is big: the Roshi, as far as I know, has not named a successor. The Roshi, who is now 99 years old, often says to his oshos, "None of you are any good!" Perhaps he will follow the Buddha's example and refrain from naming a successor; perhaps he will name someone whose line continue only a couple of generations.

The point is, each person should practice fully. Don't be lazy and depend on someone else to do it for you. As the Buddha said, "Let the dharma be your island!" And as we chant in our third Great Vow, "We vow to study the countless teachings!"

————— Sandy Gentei Stewart

Upcoming Events

Thursday, May 25 — Sunday, May 29 Flattop Zendo near Charlottesville, Virginia will host its annual spring zazenkaï weekend. Flattop is a small zendo located in a beautiful mountain area and is guided by Bill Stevens, a longtime student of Joshu Roshi. Sandy will be in attendance, so he will not be at Brooks Branch. For more information please contact Bill Stephens at brzen@adelphia.net.

Friday, June 30 — Thursday, July 6 Southern Dharma Retreat Center near Hot Springs, North Carolina will host Sandy's annual summer sesshin. This is a week of formal Zen practice, including sitting, chanting, walking meditation, integrated work periods, and opportunities for interview with Sandy four times a day. Sandy will also be lecturing on a Zen text and taking questions. The retreat is open to beginners and long-time practitioners alike. Part-timers are welcome, although lodging preference will be given to full-timers. For more information please contact Southern Dharma Retreat Center at info@southerndharma.org, (828) 622-7112.

General News

The last few years have seen major changes at the NC Zen Center's Brooks Branch Zendo. Since 1998 four major buildings have been brought to completion, including a zendo, a kitchen building, a shower house and a residence building. For the first time the Center can comfortably host retreats for up to 20 participants, offering comfortable lodging, shower and bathroom facilities, the only amenity lacking being a proper dining hall. We actually have no current construction projects underway, and this respite has suggested to many that we as a community need to take a few moments and think about where we have been, where we are now, and where we are going.

To this end, the Board of Directors got together in early April to address these questions, and in particular to try to refine our sense of what our mission and purpose is. The Board spent a day and a half in retreat discussing these issues, and came out with a one-page document outlining a fourfold mission for the center involving supporting a local practice community with daily practice, intensive practice including hosting retreats, on-site and off-site education. This was then presented to a group of the general membership for lively and informative discussion at the Center on May 7.

The group worked to refine mission and vision statements, and to get and incorporate feedback from the Sangha concerning the future plans for the Center. The Board will press forward in developing a business plan over the summer and fall. As pieces of the plan are formulated the Board will return to the Sangha for input. The process will take several months but the final outcome will be a necessary clarification of how the Center moves forward. Stay tuned...

On Sandy's recent trip to India to visit the Buddhist holy sites he met a young man who needs help paying for his schooling. He sent the following letter to Sandy, which Sandy wishes to make available to the membership, and anyone wishing to help Kapil should contact Sandy:

Hello sir or madam,

I am kapil i live at Bodhgaya, gaya district in Bihar in india. i belong to poor family .i have passed matriculation examination. i want to join in college. i want to be a doctor. Education of medical is very expensive in india. Expense are such as book.college fee, tuation fee, if i will be a doctor then the condition of my family will be better after me generation will get good education, so, i request you to be sponsor for my education.for this kindness work, i will remember you for ever.

*your Truly
kapil kumar,*

Kapil Kumar (mailto:kapil5b@yahoo.com)

The Center has several needs that members might be able to fill.

16" wok

Refrigerator

6 quart pressure cooker

Message/menu board for kitchen

new zafus and zabutons to replace the 30 year old brown and blue ones

Three robe sets (kimono and hakama) to keep at the zendo for anyone's use

If you can contribute, either with these items or with the funds to purchase them, please contact Matt Young at the NC Zen Center.

The Center hosted its Spring Zazenkaï Weekend May 11 — 14. It was attended full-time by B. J. O'Brian, Brad page, Sandy Stewart, Roxanne Henderson, Samana Young, Bill Mayhew, Andy Bell, Casey Miller, Matt Young and Glenn Gilchrist, and Pam Berger and John Iler attended part-time. Weather was perfect, warm days and cool nights, with a bit of rain one night. A lot of small tasks were completed during the work periods, including finishing the pathway lighting from the gate to the zendo, plus general tidying up after winter, window washing, cutting down dead trees for the ice storms several years ago, and more. So we go into summer looking our best!

The Adopt-a Highway program continued with a clean-up of Russell Chapel road on April 30. Participating were Glenn, Casey, Joe Kenlan, Kenny O'Hara, Victor Manos, Lynn Hoffman and Matt Young. In our search for ways to be good community citizens this one has a real benefit to ourselves and our neighbors in helping create and maintain a healthy and pleasant environment, in addition to increasing our visibility in the community. We hope more members will contribute their time as the program continues.

Our teacher Sandy has been appointed by Joshu Roshi and the Board of Rinzaï-Ji to a one-year term as vice-abott. These duties will require Sandy to be away for short periods of time four times during the year. Dates of his absence will be posted to the website Calendar page. Because Sandy is unable to be away for the entire year, the Board has appointed two other oshos to be there in his stead. Besides these two persons, many others have kindly volunteered to help and are doing a fine job. Sandy says, "My deep gratitude goes to all of you."

On Sunday March 25 Casey Miller received the Five Precepts at Brooks Branch. Casey first met Sandy at the summer retreat at Southern Dharma several years ago. Shortly thereafter he moved to the Chapel Hill area and has been a regular at the Center and a welcome happy and peaceful presence. We at the center share his joy in participating in a rite which traces all the way back to the time of the Buddha and reflects one more person's vow to live an awakened life and thereby bring peace into the world.

On Wednesday, May 24 the Center hosted India Night. Folks brought a wonderful diversity of goodies for a pot-luck supper enjoyed by nearly 30 members of the Sangha. Dinner was enjoyed *al fresca* (lack of a dining hall, see above), and was followed by a slideshow presentation of images from the recent trip to the Buddhist holy sites in India by Sandy, Leila Webster and Bill Russo. The photography was stunning, the images haunting and evocative, and Sandy's historical commentary on the Buddha's life and times was very illuminating.

In a final note, Brad Page, a long-term student of Sandy and Joshu Roshi, who has been residing at the Center, suffered a heart attack on May 23. He was able to drive himself to the hospital, where he underwent triple by-pass surgery. He is expected to recover fully and should be returning to his residence at the Center. As we all know, recovery from such things can be a slow process, and Brad will probably need some help from the local community. Information will be provided to the community as it becomes available. Please send your best wishes for his recuperation.

Someone who loved me
gave me the book, and I gave
the book to someone...

My father lay in
his coffin without his shoes
before I knew him

At twilight the snow
yields her soft slow whiteness to
heaven's blue embrace

by Mary Reinhart, age 91, a longtime student of Joshu Roshi

Kaihan

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