

# Kaihan

The Quarterly Newsletter of the North Carolina Zen Center

Winter 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.

## Upcoming Events

Brooks Branch will be hosting its Spring Zazenkai weekend starting with informal dinner at 6 PM on Thursday April 6 through lunch on Sunday, April 9. It will include a ceremony marking the birthday of the Buddha during the 10 AM — noon sit on Sunday. "Zazenkai" literally means "sitting zen gathering." This is an opportunity to experience formal Zen practice for several days, but short of the full seven days of a regular sesshin. Sandy will be in attendance only for interview and Dharma talks. If you wish to attend please contact the Center at least two weeks in advance. The suggested donation for the retreat is \$25/night, and please remember that this donation goes to the Center to cover the cost of meals and lodging, not to Sandy. Additional contribution may be made specifically for Sandy.

Flattop Zendo near Charlottesville, Virginia will host its annual spring Zazenkai weekend on Memorial Day weekend, May 25 — 30. Flattop is a small zendo located in a beautiful mountain area, and is guided by Bill Stevens, a longtime student of Sandy. Space is limited. If you wish to attend, please contact Bill Stevens at [brzen@adelphia.net](mailto:brzen@adelphia.net). Sandy will be in attendance full-time, so he will not be at Brooks Branch on these dates.

## News

One big piece of news is Sandy's trip to India. Guided by well-known Buddhist teacher and scholar Stephen Batchelor, a group of about 20 people from the United States are making a pilgrimage to visit many of the early Buddhist sites in northern India. Sandy was accompanied by one additional member of our local sangha, Leela Webster. The trip lasts several weeks and includes visits to Bhodgaya, where the Buddha was awakened, in addition to his birthplace and other significant places of his life.

It is interesting to note that most of the places Sandy will be visiting were only recognized as Buddhist historical sites in the last 150 years. For more than a thousand years after his death in about 500 BC, while Buddhism flourished in India, the places of the Buddha's life and death were revered and maintained, and received pilgrimages from as far away as China and Korea. But with the decline of Buddhism in India after about 700 AD, coupled with the Muslim invasions of northern India, most of the sites were either destroyed or fell into disrepair and were abandoned. It was only the scholarly explorations of the British in the last part of the nineteenth century which firmly reestablished the location of many of these sites, so long lost, which have now reemerged as major Buddhist pilgrimage destinations.

For more information on the life of the Buddha one could hardly do better than Karen Armstrong's biography, *Buddha*. And for a truly fascinating account of the meeting of East and West, the story of the British scholars in India as they attempted to decipher the "riddle" of Buddhism, look at *The Search for the Buddha* by Charles Allen. Copies of both of these books are in the Center's library, and are also available through booksellers.

## General Notes

It was mentioned in the last Kaihan that that the Center is seeking funding sources for the final phases of the Center's construction, which include a large dormitory/dining hall building. The cost of this building has been estimated at \$300,000. Several members of the local sangha have expressed dismay over this figure, and the board has wished to make clear that the local sangha will not be in any way asked to participate in raising this kind of money. The board is looking for large outside donors such as foundations, and work will not begin until a reliable source of funding is secured.

The Center hosted its third annual Winter Zazenkai, a week-long retreat held every January at Brooks Branch. Both full-time and part-time retreatants participated. Full-timers included Alan Haskins, Brad Paige, Sandy Stewart, Be Gardiner, Anna Madden, Bill Mayhew, Andy Bell, and Casey Miller. Part-timers were Matt Young, Kim Young, Glen Ginchrist, Elizabeth Thornton, Lyn Soeder, and John Iler. According to Matt Young, "A number of people mentioned how nice it was to have hot showers and dorm room accommodations. The weather was inspiring, with warm temperatures, a full moon at night, and several really windy days. Appreciation to all those who came and worked hard inside and outside the zendo. During work practice a number of general maintenance items were addressed throughout the Center. Also we started installing lights along the Kinhin path between the gate and the zendo."

On the last day of the retreat Andy Bell, a longtime student of Sandy, received Tokudo, the Ten Precepts Ceremony, marking his ordination. Congratulations, Andy, from all of the Brooks Branch sangha.

Brad Page, who now lives in the house close by the Center, accompanied Sandy to the Mountain View Correctional Institute in Spruce Pine, North Carolina, to hold three days of Za-zenkai with the Buddhist inmate group which practices there. Sandy has provided his services to the group for several years, and the group has been slowly growing. In a recent letter, one of the inmates, Daniel Pratt, said "Our small group has really grown and gotten real strong. It is amazing watching the changes in attitude over weeks. Guys will come with anger and hatred, but the first thing they notice is the love the group is willing to give them."

Prison outreach from the community can be very helpful to those struggling to start or grow a Buddhist practice behind bars. Sandy recently sent a general email asking that anyone interested in opportunities for prison outreach should contact him. Both the Wake County unit in Raleigh and the Harnett County unit in Lillington have need of volunteers to participate on a monthly basis. Anyone interested should contact Sandy by email at [sandy@nczencenter.org](mailto:sandy@nczencenter.org).

To all who have graciously given their time, money, skills, resources and good wishes to the Center over the last three months, you can see the immediate benefits of your generosity in our place of practice, which is happy and thriving, and is more of a "thank you" than can be offered here.

And finally, Kim Young, the mother of the wonderful little Samana, whose presence graces the Center and whose cries and laughs in the distance have offered us tiny moments for mindfulness while sitting in the zendo, is once again pregnant! Congratulations, Kim and Matt - and Samana!

*In the still night by the vacant window,  
wrapped in monk's robes I sit in meditation,  
navel and nostrils lined up straight,  
ears paired to the slope of the shoulders.  
Window whitens — the moon comes up;  
rain's stopped, but drops go on dripping.  
Wonderful — the mood of this moment —  
distant, vast, known only to me.*

*Ryokan  
Tr. Burton Watson*

*Kaihan*

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