

Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 24

Winter 2014 Newsletter

Special Upcoming Events

2015 Meditation Schedule

- Jan. 19: ZHS Sangha Meeting
- Jan. 23: Precepts and sewing class (note: 4th Saturday)
- Jan. 26: Monday evening resumes
- Feb. 7: Regular 1st and 3rd Saturdays resume
- Feb. 14: Dharma school

2015 Sangha Meetings

- Jan. 19: ZHS Sangha Meeting
- Mar. 9: ZHS Annual Meeting

Vajrapani Retreats

- Apr. 10–12: Buddha's Birthday
- Sep. 25–27: Fall Retreat
- Apr. 15–17, 2015: Buddha's Birthday

Dharma School Dates

- February 14
- March 14
- April 4
- May 9
- June 13
- July 11
- August 8
- September 26
- October 10
- November 4

The Practice of Dana

Before giving, the mind of the giver is happy. While giving, the mind of the giver is made peaceful. After having given, the mind of the giver is uplifted. –The Buddha

Amid the holiday decorations, feasts, and the search for that 'perfect gift', let us recall the essence of the season: generosity and giving. *Dana* (giving in Pali) is the fundamental entry point for Buddhist practice, the first step in the Buddha's system of gradual training. Through the practice of generosity, we begin the long process of weakening our habitual clinging to views, sensual pleasures, and unskillful modes of thought and behavior, allowing our minds to open to the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path

The Buddhist tradition of *dana* begins with the understanding that the teachings are given freely because they are priceless. A specific precept warns against 'hoarding the teachings'. At the same time, teachers and sanghas rely on monetary support to offer these teachings. These offerings are not 'payment for goods or services rendered', but given from our hearts as an expression of gratitude. Thus generosity includes the giving of teachings without reservation, receiving the teachings whole-heartedly, and supporting those who share the teachings with us without expectation of return. Dogen writes in "The Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance": "...*Buddha said, 'When a person... practices giving... people take notice... the mind of such a person communicates subtly with others.'*"

Generosity is not made of flamboyant or obvious gestures; it is subtle and constant. A person who practices generosity is giving all the time in every gesture and word; we notice such people becoming less self-concerned and more focused on the well-being of others. Dogen also says, "Give your valuables, even a penny or a blade of grass... the truth can turn into valuables; valuables can turn into truth. This is because the giver is willing." The smallest thing can be a gift of great value, a gift of truth, and can surpass a larger gift from someone else all because 'the giver is willing'. This willingness to give freely—without holding anything back or expecting anyone to notice—is done primarily because it gratifies our hearts, and only secondarily for its benefit to others.

Finally, Dogen writes that both mind and "things given are beyond measure... mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms mind..." *Dana*—giving—is beyond our comprehension and transforms our mind in ways that we cannot foresee. At this time of year, we ask everyone to make a generous gift to the sangha and our teachers for the purpose of continuing to offer the Buddha's teachings for everyone. Give your heart away completely and transform your mind! *Deep bows, Misha*

Zen Heart Sangha 2015-16

Head Teacher

Misha Shungen Merrill

Practice Leaders

Tanto (Assistant Teacher):

Jill Kakushin Kaplan

Ino: Diane Comey

Work Leader: Chris Wesselman

Assistant Work Leader:

Hiromi Kurahashi

Sewing Teacher: Jill Kaplan

Board Officers

President: Camille Spar

Treasurer: Wing Ng

Secretary: Marya Shahinian

Board Members

G. J. Scove

Lauralyn Curry-Leech

Gulia Bekker

Hau Thi Long

Stewards

Outreach: Bill Clopton

Dharma School: Stephanie Zeller

Newsletter: Anna Doherty

Setup: Gulia Bekker-Dulmage

Website: Chris Doherty

Audio Recording (temporary): Jill

Kaplan & Chris Wesselman

Committees

Membership:

Misha Merrill, Lauralyn Curry-Leech, Kelly Perri

Council of Harmony:

Nancy Leech, Kate Haimson, Chris Doherty

Gassho

Gassho is the Zen way of saying 'thank you' by putting our hands together and bowing. We honor our out-going officers and stewards: Camille Spar for her unstinting effort as president for the past three years; Lidia Luna for her care and concern as treasurer for the last two years; our tanto, Jill, for her continuous dedicated support of sangha and sewing practice; our work leader, Chris Wesselman, for bringing new meaning to work practice; our board members, G.J. Scove and Lauralyn Curry-Leech, for their insight and wisdom over the last two years; Nancy for her leadership on the Council of Harmony; and Lauralyn and Kelly Perri for their service on the the Membership Committee.



No Giver, No Receiver

I remember my mother always cooking and giving of her time. This was mostly directed to our immediate family and neighbors. She often helped take care of the neighborhood kids when their moms were working and the kids were sick.

She modeled for me the spirit of giving of herself—a model that has permeated my life. I see dana as personal giving, whether it is giving food, care, time to an organization, or just listening to someone who needs to be heard. At this point in my life, giving has opened up to include a monetary component. There have been times in my life when I needed help but could not ask. Friends came forward to give of themselves and I had to receive....a circle of giving and receiving. I discovered that ultimately there is no giver or receiver, just a flow. Dana works both ways. Our organization cannot exist with the flow of teachings and energy only going one way. That is why I think 100% participation in a group is important. It is a recognition of the givers and a showing of appreciation. It helps us to maintain a balance in our lives and hearts and is a practice in gratitude.

by Camille

Monthly Schedule

Monday evenings*

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Service	7:40
Lecture*	7:50
Final Bows	8:45
End Evening	9:00

* except 1st Mondays

1st Monday retreat

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Kinhin	7:40
Zazen	8:00
Three Bows	8:40
End Evening	8:45

1st & 3rd Saturdays

Zazen	5:50 am
Kinhin	6:20
Zazen	6:30
Service	7:00
Community breakfast	7:20
Soji (Cleanup)	8:00
Zazen	8:40
Study/Tea	9:15
End program	10:15

Zazen – sitting meditation

Kinhin – walking meditation

The Thanksgiving season is a wonderful time for reflection. As I take time to reflect on my blessings, the teachers and members of Zen Heart Sangha immediately come to mind. I am deeply grateful to have found this compassionate and committed community, and participating in dana is one way I can express my gratitude. I believe that giving and receiving are two parts of one act. The gifts I receive from our sangha are many and touch my life everyday. Participating in dana with an open heart is a way in which I am happy to give back.

by Linda M.



For me, the belief that I am connected to all beings and reliant on their well-being for my well-being is the foundation of giving. This belief motivates me to invest talent and money in organizations attempting to increase the health and resilience of the community and the environment, locally and globally. I find that it's a joy and a privilege to support the work of extraordinary people like Misha who devote themselves to making a difference in the world.

by Debra

2014 Dharma School Report

by Stephanie (Dharma School Steward)

We have just concluded a wonderful year of Dharma School.

- On February 8, the Dharma Kids performed a tea ceremony with Misha.
- On March 8, they baked doughnuts with Hiromi.
- On May 10, they practiced qi gong with Wing and Diane.
- On June 14, they were introduced to bodywork by Hau.
- On July 12, they rolled sushi with Izumi.
- On August 9, they made mandalas with Jill.
- On September 13, they sewed with Sue.
- On Oct. 11, they went to Gulia's for a cooking lesson.
- On Nov, 8, they became photographers with Chris W.
- And, on December 4, Lidia hosted a Rohatsu hour for the Dharma Kids.

Dharma School is only possible because of the generosity of ZHS teachers and members who give their time, talents, and enthusiasm to the Dharma Kids. I would like to take this opportunity to say, Thank you! Thank you!, for making Dharma School happen so beautifully. Thank you to the Dharma School teachers – Misha and Jill, the activity leaders, and the Dharma School hosts – Misha, Dharma Parents, other ZHS members (sometimes Dharma School is held at the home zendo, sometimes at a member's home). It takes a village...

I am happy to report that Dharma School has grown. We have 16 Dharma Kids now with between 4-10 attending each time. I am also happy to report we have already filled our 2015 schedule (see page 1, left).

Many thanks to next year's volunteers...It's going to be a great year!



I was five years old and I watching my mother, Lora, packing a bag. She put a container of homemade soup in the bag. Next she pulled out a box with my favorite store-bought cake. The cake was layer upon layer of delicious white sponge, cream, and crushed almonds. As I write those words, I can taste the delicate cream on my tongue.

At five, I could not really comprehend why my beloved mother was taking something this delicious away from us. In an upset voice, I asked her why the cake was not staying at home. My mother answered, “It is not staying home because all is good at home but our friend Galia lost her cat.” Galia rescued that cat and took care of him as if he were a child; she had no family and very few friends. I was only five, so I still felt a bit sad about the cake—but not as sad as I felt about Galia.

Over the years, I observed my mom cooking food she brought to many people for many reasons. She visited sick friends to keep them company. Friends would come to eat with us, and they did not need to call ahead. Lora often visited people in political jails and people in psych hospitals, and she knitted socks for anyone who asked. Gradually I started helping her, and then I started doing it on my own.

To me, that evening in the kitchen with mother was a first lesson in dana. It was not an easy lesson. I really wanted that cake.

I do not think giving is instinctually effortless, and I think it take practice. Sometimes the difficulty lies in the limited time; sometimes it is not easy to part with money. In my own life, I find that the gift of service is easier for me than a gift of money. I think it is probably so because I grew up with plenty of time but limited monetary resources. I feel lucky that now my circumstances are such that I can practice a variety of dana. *by Gulia*



Wing and I just recently talked about our usual end-of-year donation to ZHS. It really wasn't a sit down conversation about what we could afford and how much we saved this year—it was about what would make our contribution give our Sangha a proper financial support.

Like a tire that needs a certain amount of air, sometimes it just needs a boost. But as we add on the mileage, it is more obvious that it may need a lot. I think our tire is showing some wear and is beginning to need more than just air.

We might even have a nail or two in it.

The warning has been sounded. Let's not be careless. *by Diane and Wing*

The word *dana* is associated with true generosity, that can only arise of its own accord. That spirit of generosity is palpable in a truly generous act. The kind of generosity that can be encouraged is the kind associated with values. As we all know, in life one can be encouraged or discouraged to have certain values and act accordingly. Values encourage us to act in ways that strengthen, and while these acts may be acts of generosity they are not quite *dana* in my mind. As Bodhidharma famously said to the emperor Wu, "There is no merit in building temples and giving financial support to monastic communities."

by Trupti

Dana Is a Good Teacher

Dana is not something that I learned from my mother. As a child, if I didn't take care of it myself, there wasn't anyone else who would. Asking for help was not an option.

My grandmother, on the other hand—much more than her formal volunteering roles, I noticed her generosity in small things, small moments. She could make friends in the most unlikely places, with absolutely anyone in any part of the world.

My brothers and I were kind by nature. We shoveled snow for older neighbors without needing them to know it was us. One kid captured a bunch of frogs and was tormenting them; we snuck in, cleaned out his terrarium, and returned the frogs to the pond. We moved caterpillars across the road and worms out of puddles. For me, giving is easy.

This year has offered me difficult lessons on receiving generosity. Incapacitated by the loss of my grandmother last Fall, I forced myself to ask for help. Sangha members cooked much delicious food for me to reheat and feed my boys and myself. I could taste their love, time, and attention—it was so sweet, and so hard for me to be needing help.

A few years ago a dear friend was dying of cancer, and Chris and I were among the handful of people who were really there for him and his wife. In my heart-mind, when the chips are down and someone needs help, you just show up. When a friend loses a beloved cat, or someone is experiencing domestic violence, or a child needs extra support—you just show up. Zen practice is so helpful in setting aside whatever else may be going on, to focus on the need at hand.

Being the one who needs help is so much harder for me. By breathing, and sitting, and loving reminders, I was able to see how my need created an opportunity for people I care about to have the good feeling of helping me. Such a hard lesson.

In my life I rarely manage formal, scheduled donations of volunteer time. For me, *dana* is about giving my attention in the moment, even though there are other things I "should" be paying attention to. *Dana* is also about donating money. I enjoy the feeling of connection to organizations whose work I respect, and the feeling of being a donor for many years in a row. Donating money to the sangha feels especially good, because the beauty of what we are together is so, so bright.

by Anna