

Monterey Bay Zen Center News

Autumn 2015

SEGIKI

Sometimes it happens this way: You feel a gradual welling up. Your esophagus opens, diaphragm expands. The heart rate increases slightly. You feel poised on the brink of something, but cannot exactly say what it is. A subtle itch. A vague hunger. You can no more contain it than your arms can hold a river. It feels as though a kettle is hissing somewhere in the background of your life. It is present in the gambler, the Internet addict, the shopper and the alcoholic-- a kind of default setting from the minute you wake up until the time you are asleep. You are in the realm of the Hungry Ghosts.

Segiki is the ancient and evocative ritual of "feeding the hungry ghosts." Segiki is a ceremony for remembering the dead and resolving our own karmic connections with those who have died. It is also a time for undertaking our own karmic challenges and releasing hindrances which we may maintain and embrace. Segiki means "food offering." The "Se" is an offering or charitable deed, and the "giki" is food. Segiki is also a ceremony that addresses attachment at the deepest layers of mind.

The word "ceremony" (Latin: caerimonia) is related to "cura," or "cure," -- the act of healing or being healed -- to make healthy, sound or whole. By enacting a ceremony, there is the suggestion that something is becoming healed or corrected. Saint Benedict established "The Rule," which has its roots in the term trellis, or an outer frame-work which promotes inner growth. In the same way as the trellis promotes a structured growth to wisteria, forms and ceremonies establish a framework on which we can grow. Otherwise, we can evolve in ways akin to self-will run riot. The Sanskrit root of the word "Dharma" means "to support."

Ceremonies such as Segiki, Jukai and Ryaku Fusatsu (Full Moon Ceremony) are ways the Soto lineage converses with us. Rituals communicate and form how we perceive ourselves and the world—their function is to shape a kind of perception through patterns impressed by specific action. This modeling is sometimes referred to as the "performative" approach. Similarly, ceremonies have a transformative function that operates below the level of belief or interpretation. Soto Zen is a profoundly physical, embodied practice. Much of the instruction emphasizes posture, movement and comportment. The forms and rituals encourage the body to move and sense and feel in specific Zen ways.

The Segiki ceremony is said to have begun with Moggallana, a disciple of the Buddha, who was plagued by dreams of his recently

departed mother suffering in a world in which she could neither eat nor drink. Food would turn to fire and water would turn to blood or pus whenever it touched her mouth. Moggallana went to the Buddha and told him of his dreams, which tormented him nightly. The Buddha explained that Moggallana was seeing the suffering of his mother in the world of the gakis (pretas in Sanskrit, "departed ones"), or hungry ghosts.

Buddha explained that Moggallana's nightmares were due to his deep and tangled relationship with his mother and encouraged him to make a gift to her of whatever food she could most effortlessly receive and digest. The offering was accomplished in a ritual, dedicated in her name, at the time when monks led regular Full Moon ceremonies to acknowledge their own ethical lapses. Moggallana's story reveals the connection between making offerings to the dead and the purging of karma--both personal and connected to those who have died. Linking the offering for the deceased mother to the declaration of transgressions, the Buddha constructed a path for Moggallana to the heart and mind of remorse and compassion, allowing him let go of his own entanglements. In contemporary terms, we can understand that Moggallana and his mother were entwined in their mutual attachments. An offering, then, at the time of ceremonial confession, could provide a potent unraveling.

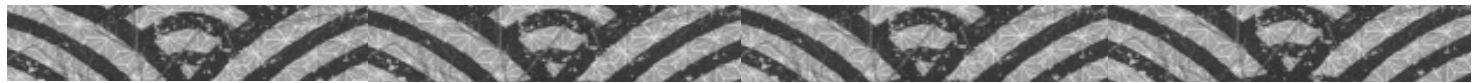
Moggallana, accomplished in paranormal arts, voyaged to hell in an attempt to release his mother. In breaking the lock to hell, he inadvertently released all the hungry ghosts who became free to stroll about in the human world. The ceremony was then performed to pacify the ghosts and persuade them to return. Some of the gakis, however, were purged of their craving and gained freedom. Others, through the process of realizing something they needed to understand, remained in hell until they found rebirth.

The residents of the hungry ghost realm are depicted as creatures with scrawny necks, small mouths, emaciated limbs and bloated bellies associated with severe malnutrition. The cormorant from Kaneko Tôhta's haiku are large, long-necked seabirds with a distensible pouch under their bills for holding fish and synonymous for having a voracious appetite. In the west, the word is sometimes used to describe a greedy person. In Japan, cormorants have long been used by fishermen, who place a ring around their necks to keep them from swallowing the fish they caught. Numerous celebrated haiku have been written about this practice.

The territory of the "gakis" is the domain of thirst, where occupants are constantly seeking outside themselves to curtail a voracious long-

*In the blue sea
where cormorants
and hungry ghosts
have already swum*

--Kaneko Tôhta



(continued from page one)

ing for relief or fulfillment. The imagery suggests a spiritual state which can be seen in everyday life--right in the midst of unremarkable affairs. To one degree or another, craving is a condition which everyone suffers from at some point in their lives.

On the extreme end of the hungry ghost realm are transparent examples of craving such as severe substance dependencies, or addictions to food, technology, shopping and sex. These are often recognizable and gripping examples of yearning--where our suffering is most apparent, but sometimes necessary to recognize the first Noble Truth. Because of their evident and clear manifestation, such addictions might also be where clear recognition of suffering begins.

On the everyday level, this condition is more subtle: the elusive dis-ease of someone who has anxious needs--the phantom itch that cannot be relieved. Imagine, for example, arriving at an unspoiled beach, and, after a time, noticing the wish for the water to be a little bit bluer, or having a few more palm trees or for the sky a little less cloudy. I had a friend who moved from Eugene, Oregon to Palo Alto. While living in Eugene he owned a modest, functional car and thought little of how the car compared to other cars. However, after about six months in Palo Alto and Silicon Valley, he noticed the subtle yearning for a newer, slightly more exotic car. And, when the wish for a newer car was not fulfilled, he noticed a certain understated suffering. These are garden-variety examples of hungry ghosts. In instances such as these, the problem lies in trying to satisfy an inner need for wisdom, equanimity, or peace of mind through grasping after external things, instead of cultivating empty-handed acceptance, which is the real solution. How often our attempts to obtain the things we want are like this.

On the highest spiritual level, the state of being in the hungry ghost realm is the state of someone who desperately wants to know the Truth, but who cannot accept the teaching. She knows she is suffering and that religious practice can be of help, but she just cannot stop resisting and holding on to her personal opinions. Wanting the Dharma, she goes to drink, but her throat will not open to accept it. Each time she tastes the teaching it turns to fire in her mouth.

In each frame of the 12-fold chain of dependent origination there is the image of Buddha, who is offering what is needed specific to the territory. In the Hungry Ghost Realm, he is offering the heavenly food of self-acceptance. To engage in this realm is to take-on the activity of self-acceptance, to acknowledge our own ravenous spirits and to live in a sea where cormorants and hungry ghosts have already swum.

--Robert Reese

OFFERING TO HUNGRY GHOSTS CEREMONY

On Tuesday, October 27, MBZC will conduct the segiki (a.k.a. segaki) ceremony from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm. In this ceremony, we will call forth the restless, unsatisfied yearnings of our own life, inviting them to be known, cared for and released. We will raise the intention to nourish all hungry spirits in the world, and remembering departed ancestors and friends. Offerings of food will be made and we will chant together, make noise to bring forth the hungry ghosts and departed spirits. Participants can bring masks and noisemakers for the ceremony. For more information, contact Susan MacDonald at (831) 601-7590.

THE DHARMA OF MONEY

On October 31, Maia Duerr of Upaya Zen Center, will offer a workshop entitled The Dharma of Money -- Dana Paramita as a Path to Liberation. The workshop takes place from 10:30 am to 4:00 pm at Outcalt Chapel, Community Church of the Monterey Peninsula, 4590 Carmel Valley Road, Carmel. Maia looks at practicing with thorny issues like money and giving, helping others skillfully, and continuing our practice in places where mindfulness and compassion are not priorities. Directions: One mile east of Hwy. 1 on Carmel Valley Road on the south side, just past Carmel Middle School and right next to Rancho Cañada Country Club. Suggested donation is \$35. Scholarships are available.

For more information, contact Matt Hammond at (650) 787-9241, or mhammond@compuserve.com.

NOVEMBER HALF-DAY SITTING AT SAINT JAMES CHURCH

A half-day sitting (zazen) will be held Saturday, November 14th at St. James Church. Zazen, uniting for meditation, provides the opportunity for intensifying and deepening one's practice through the experience of experience of a one half day devoted to meditation. The day will include Zazen, lecture, kinhin (walking meditation) and dokusan (practice discussion). Robert Reese, a Soto zen priest, will lead the sitting. Suggested donation: \$10. 8:30 am to 12 noon, St. James Church, Franklin and High streets, Monterey.

INTRODUCTION TO ZEN PRACTICE

Jana Clark will explore Zen teachings and practices with a special emphasis on meditation. Students will learn the postures for meditation and their connection with Buddhist teachings. Questions and discussions are encouraged. This class is appropriate for new and experienced people interested in meditation. Saturday, November 14, 10:30 am to 12:00 noon. For more information, contact Susan MacDonald at (831) 601-7590 or email soozmacdonald@gmail.com.

YEAR ENDING CEREMONY

This ceremony will be to remember those who have died in the past year and to affirm our practice intentions for the coming year. Incense offerings, a fire, meditation and chanting all play a role in the ceremony. We will have snacks after the end of the ceremony. Tuesday, December 29, 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm, Carl Cherry Center.

FEARLESS FATHERS SUPPORT GROUP

Shōgen Danielson is organizing a study group for fathers. The group will meet Saturdays from 10:30 to noon at the Carl Cherry Center beginning November 14th. According to Shogen, "We may not always feel so fearless, but this group for fathers will provide a safe and supportive environment to reflect on what it means to be fathers and to develop self-awareness, mindfulness and intention in our fathering." Each meeting will have silent time, time to check in and share what's coming up for us as fathers and readings and discussions from the book 'Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves,'

by Naomi Aldort. Individual meetings with Shōgen may also be arranged.

Shōgen Danielson first realized he was Buddhist the summer of '96 after travelling in India and Nepal. After sitting alone for five years, he began practicing at San Francisco Zen Center in 2001. He was ordained as a priest in 2008 by Teah Strozer and was Head Monk at Tassajara in 2013 with Kiku Christina Lehnerr. He worked with the United States Peace Corps in Africa for 4.5 years during two stints as a volunteer teaching Physical Science, Math, and Life Skills. His formal educational training includes a B.S. in Engineering Physics with a minor in Astronomy and a M.S. in Physics & Astronomy. Shogen loves music and spending time in nature: walking, hiking, backpacking and camping. And mostly he loves sharing all of this with his 8 year old son and 3 year old daughter.



ZEN IN MOTION: RUNNING TASSAJARA ROAD

What is Zen? Zen has a different meaning for everyone. To me when I hear the word Zen, a few words come to mind: tranquility, simplicity, balance, awareness and meditation. When I mention meditation, people instantly think of sitting crossed-legged, chanting "ohm." Besides sitting and being still, another form of meditation for me is running.... meditation in motion. This summer I had many opportunities to practice by running up the 14 mile dirt road up to Tassajara.

In 2005, I first discovered Tassajara Zen Center, not for the meditation but for the hot springs and the food. As I began sitting in 2008, my life transformed, I began visiting more for my Zen practice. The road is long, bumpy, and sometimes I got car sick. So one day I asked a few friends to run up the road; they were crazy enough to say "YES." Ever since then, it has been my tradition to start my meditation retreat running from Jamesburg.



When I'm running, especially on this road, I'm super aware of my surroundings and pay attention to every step. I take care to not injure myself. In over three hours of running, a lot can happen. I focus on my breath and my form and staying in the moment, no matter if I'm going up a steep hill or coming down or it's 110 degrees and all I can think about is a cold iced tea. Because it's a challenging road, it's rare to run into someone. I'm usually lucky enough to have a car follow me, my Sherpa. The difficulty and the beauty of this road is what attracts me season after season. Just like sitting, the experience is different every time. I just go back to take care of what is in front of me, focusing on my form, breath and nature all around me. In this moment, nothing else matters.

--Ingrid Aquino

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

After many years of publishing Sangha newsletter jointly, Monterey Bay Zen Center and Santa Cruz Zen Center have decided to produce individual newsletters for their communities. The board of directors of Monterey Bay Zen Center thanks Santa Cruz Zen Center for the years of cooperation. MBZC and SCZC will continue to exchange newsletters and help to publicize each other's activities.

You will notice that our newsletter has a new title. This title is provisional. We are excited about the opportunity to make changes in our format and content. Our masthead will be the priority. I am requesting that members submit suggestions for a new name for the newsletter as well as artwork to go on the masthead. Please submit to mbzc.pres@prodigy.net.

MBZC Teaching council members will provide dharma essays for each issue. We want to encourage submissions of all types to the newsletter - artwork, poetry, articles. Greater participation will be essential for our newsletter's success.

Our newsletter connects our community from those who sit on Tuesday night at the Cherry Center, Brown Bay Zen on Friday, Ordinary Recovery on Saturday mornings, and the myriad other activities our center is responsible for. May the flowers of the dharma bloom!

Gassho

--Mark Orrisch, Editor

WASHING THE RICE

Washing the rice,
writing a poem,
loving another—
do not lose
even one grain of sand,
even one word,
even one moment.
Sand,
the intellect,
the self—
remove them.

Examine all carefully.

The meal, the poem, the love—
each will contain
the bitter, the sweet,
the sour, the salty,
the mild, the hot.
Walk lightly.
Free yourself from confusion.
Live fully.
Start by washing the rice.

--Elliot Ruchowitz-Roberts



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Facebook pages for current
information on what’s happening
there, photos of events, and more.

MONTEREY BAY ZEN CENTER

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

We meet Tuesday evenings, Monday and
Thursday mornings at the Cherry Cen-
ter, 4th and Guadalupe in Carmel.

Tuesday evening schedule:	Segiki Ceremony	Tues. Oct. 27	6:30- 8:30 pm, Cherry Ctr
Zazen 6:30	The Dharma of Money	Sat. Oct. 31	10:30am-4 pm, Community Church
Kinhin (walking) 7:10	Intro to Zen Practice	Sat. Nov. 14	10:30am-12pm, Cherry Ctr
Service 7:20	Half Day Sitting	Sat. Nov. 14	8:30am-12 noon, St. James Church
Lecture/discussion 7:30-8:30			
Monday, Thursday mornings:	Fearless Fathers	Sat. Nov. 21,	10:30am-12pm, Cherry Ctr
Zazen 7am		Dec. 5, and Dec. 19	
(followed by service and soji)	New Year’s Ceremony	Tues. Dec. 29	6:30pm-8:30pm, Cherry Ctr

Zazen instruction first Tuesday of each month at 5:30pm.

Ordinary Recovery Saturdays 9-10am

Brown Bag Zen Fridays 12:15-1:15 St. James Church, High and Hellam Sts, Monterey

Mountains and Rivers Meditation, second and fourth Wednesdays 7-8:30pm - Patricia 659-3042

Information: (831) 375-7826 www.montereybayzencenter.org

Front Page Illustration by Jan Wurm