

Zen Center OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

August 2017

Blind Spots, Clues, and the Present Moment

We hear that blind spots are blind by definition, but the work of practice is to challenge that. Yes, there are those deep-space black holes—aspects of our nature that may remain hidden to us for years and that we sometimes need help to see—but there are also the momentary blind spots caused by patterns that still run, though we know them quite well. As our practice matures, it is more and more our task to pick up the countless signals that alert us to those patterns and can function as wake-up calls throughout the day.

After practicing for a good many years, it would be difficult to drive 15 miles on the freeway and reach our exit having had no awareness of our surroundings on the way, but can't we all remember doing that at some point? Happily, with practice, our antennae do get sharper. And while we all operate unconsciously more often than we'd care to admit, we recognize that our job is to detect the clues that tell us when our attention is divided.

Why? Because when we are present and engaged, we live more genuinely, which benefits not only ourselves but others. And when we are distracted and allowing energy to be siphoned into self-centered thinking, we are at least partially blinded to reality.

We want to wake up to our blind spots, not only to learn what they are and how to see through them, but also—more crucially—to wake up to what they are masking. And it's not just blind spots we want to notice; we have deaf spots, too ("I didn't hear



August Sesshin

Applications are still being accepted for the five-day August Sesshin (8/8–8/13). If you can't attend all five days you can apply for the first or last three days.

Practice Period

Practice Period in 2017 will be from September 16 through October 14. The Practice Period Forms will be included in the September Newsletter.

October Sesshin

The three-day October Practice Period Sesshin starts on Friday evening, October 6 and ends on Monday, October 9. Applications will be accepted starting August 7.

Announcements

Sesshin Application

Click [here](#) to see this newsletter online.

a word he said—I was thinking about dinner!”), and numb spots; and no-taste spots—who hasn’t inhaled food while lost in some other task?

The great thing is that when we hit resistance or drift into “me stuff,” signals go up. This is good news as long as we notice the signals and return to reality. It’s when we miss the flares that trouble starts. It’s a false yarn that a frog will eventually allow itself to be cooked if you place it in cold water and then warm the water gradually, but if it were true, it would make a useful metaphor in this case. If we repeatedly miss or willfully ignore the clues to our blind spots, we eventually allow ourselves to be thoroughly blinded. Our perspective shrinks, and our capacity to connect with and experience life as it is—dynamic, flowing, interrelated—is sorely diminished.

So how do we blind ourselves? I know how I do it—with judgments and grumbings; with fearful spells; with flashes of anger or indignation; or simply with wandering thoughts. I may be reading a manuscript at work, but part of my brain is generating a shopping list or replaying a conversation. As an editor, I need to know when that’s happening because that’s when I could read right through an error. The stakes are higher in other fields. We like to feel confident in those who wield instruments near our bodies. Once at a dental teaching hospital I had my lip drilled open—and it wasn’t by a student; it was by the supervising dentist, who was blinded by a moment of sharp annoyance at the young woman he was training.

In such a flash of anger, will we act rashly and cause someone harm? As we congratulate ourselves for putting right something important, will we overlook something even more vital? As we glare at the slow driver we’re passing on the freeway, will we miss the car on the other side that has swerved in too close? Maybe, or maybe not if we’re quick enough detecting the clues.

We want to wake up to our blind spots, not only to learn what they are and how to see through them, but also—more crucially—to wakeup to what they are masking.

These are momentary blind spots. And whether they are truly blind or lit by the light of awareness depends on practice. We can't eradicate them—being human—but we can learn to recognize when our mind and our body are saying that they're there. We can see through them by knowing what our thoughts are doing, by knowing what our belly and our throat and our shoulders are doing—by waking up to all of that and opening beyond that into the fullness of the moment.

Daily sitting is our great ally. Without it we may get farther and farther out of range of our true self. And that is a loss to the world, because how we live our life does matter.

I want to tell you about our mail carriers. The mail slot in our house dates back to the 1940s. Just 7.5 inches wide, it was built for small envelopes. In the past three years we've had five or six mail carriers, and until recently they all shared the same approach when delivering our mail—they scrunched up whatever wouldn't fit in the slot easily and crammed it in there by force. Nothing was safe, the process was noisy, and the carriers made hard work of it.

Last fall, our mail carrier changed again, and the young man who now has the route—his name is Cody—takes a different approach. He slips the small items quietly through the mail slot. Larger items he places flat, to the left of the door. On days when a pair of shoes is sitting outside, he places the heels on the flat items, overlapping just an inch or two, to provide an anchor. The shoes are not disturbed. There is no noise. Our mail reaches us in one piece. And Cody seems contented in his work.

The first time I stepped outside and saw those items placed there with care, it was a gift—it lit up my day! It was also a lesson. Here was my teacher, showing me: How we do things matters. In a recent sesshin, we practiced paying careful

attention to forms—placing our shoes, bowing in the zendo, and so on—because it helps us wake up. It counters the sway of blinding sleep and helps us be present. It also benefits others.

So as you go about your day, what are the signals that tell you you're falling asleep? What helps you notice them? How do you practice then, when you notice them? And are there particular practices that help you be more awake more often throughout your day?

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