

Zen Center

OF SAN DIEGO

ZCSD Newsletter

July-August 2025



Giving Up Our Suffering

As we read or listen to words, can we stay mindful of our breathing, of our environment? Can we do this with a minimum of thinking, simply being attentive to this moment, letting the words touch something deeper than thought? In that attentive stillness, we might encounter the *wonder* of life, discover something of value that is not blocked by the busy mind. Words can be a catalyst for understanding at a level deeper than conceptual thought.

Those newer to practice might find it helpful to

2025 Sesshin Dates

September 18–21, 2025

December 27–31, 2025

<https://www.zencentersandiego.org/schedule/sesshin.php>

Wednesday

hear a bit more about seeing or learning in the absence of thinking. It's not so hard really, but it does take some practice in watching how we're distracted by thoughts and then returning our awareness to the physical experience of the body, to this present moment: breathing, sensations, sights, sounds, feelings, emotions. We notice that we're spinning in our drama, our judgments, our beliefs and fears, and we've lost touch with the moment. We notice and return, without self-judgment, over and over as attention wanders. With each repeat of this cycle, we open to experiencing life more directly, which is not a matter of thought.

This is building awareness, and it makes a difference. It's getting a wider perspective on what we're up to—noticing ourselves going from being present to being caught in the self-centered mind. And seeing how this caughtness causes suffering, we can begin to suffer less.

This is not to devalue our ability to think, to problem-solve, to create, but rather to apply this powerful tool in a way that enhances life, that helps ourselves and others. Practice allows us to use the mind in a more heartfelt, intelligent way. It can be largely about getting out of the way of our Being, our larger nature, and just letting that work in our life.

I read this quote many years ago, and it stayed with me (though I no longer know the author): "I see that I am clinging to my darkness like a baby to a security blanket, and that I am in fear of the bright, open path that leads away from it."

We might see part of ourselves in this. There are internal conflicts and struggles with certain

Programming for August

<https://www.zencentersandiego.org/>

The Sexual Misconduct Complaint Procedure and Code of Ethical Conduct for Teachers/Practice Leaders can be found on the ZCSD website under "Policies."
<http://www.zencentersandiego.org/Policies/>

"We notice and return, without self-judgment, over and over as our attention wanders."

impulses, certain aspects of our human nature. We have awareness of brighter possibilities, and yet we cling to this "dark side" out of fear and a sense of familiarity, like a baby clutching a security blanket. This clinging hurts us, and probably others, even while it provides a sense of safety or comfort in the known. So, we tend to stay with the familiar gloom instead of facing the unknown and potentially disconcerting path toward the light.

Many of us seem to carry the burden of a less-than-happy sense of self. Might it be because we're inclined to hold onto, maybe obsess about, those things we think justify it, since they keep us in the familiar? Maybe most of us have had really difficult things happen in our lives. Did we derive a sense of self from those experiences, making ourselves a victim of this, that, or the other occurrence? Did we develop the "flavor" of our life accordingly? *This is "my" flavor. It may be painful, but it's my flavor.* Maybe we are still reluctant to move out of our "comfort zone," afraid to question that habitual sense of self, that identity that we've built up.

Painful occurrences do, indeed, happen, but I suggest that as long as we're living in an unconscious, self-centered way, we will suffer. So how can we proceed from the point of an event that upset us? How do we go from there, with our life? Can we derive our sense of self, our aliveness, from a deeper place?

Enter our practice. Our challenge is to differentiate between our external reality, what's happening, and what we're doing with it, how we're negotiating that reality. Awareness is key. Yes, we remember the tough things, we might still feel the pain, but we develop space

around them, a larger field of awareness. This way, there is freedom from continually carrying the burden; you might say this liberates us from the past. Again, we haven't forgotten, we still feel—and might have related thoughts—but there's space there. We don't have to obsess. We better see how we suffer and why. The possibility of giving up our suffering begins to take shape. This is the practice. Going from unawareness to awareness here can be like going from dark to light.

My siblings and I had our challenges growing up in a house and environment short on love and understanding. My world came to be seen that way, short on love and understanding, and those events are still with me to some extent, but they don't rule as much. I can see around them better, having a wider perspective.

I can even be grateful for the difficulties, as they've provided fuel for finding a way to lessen suffering—namely, this practice that we do, the increased awareness that goes with a friendlier world. This brighter perspective offers the full spectrum of life, and *identification* with those painful things is largely decreased. It's almost as if they happened to someone else, which in a way they did.

The sense of self is freer to come from the deeper "I" of Being.

So, as we sit here, can we sense the deeper "I," that which is fundamental to who and what we really are? This is nothing to think about; it's experiential—it is that which is intimate with us, always present. As self-centered thoughts quiet, which they tend to do as we sit zazen, it's possible to better sense this. It can come with an

almost audible, energetic silence, and we feel that energy, its vitality, its benevolence, even. Turning attention to the body, we might feel it in the heart space or the solar plexus; it inhabits the entire body. I've heard it called the animating presence, the inner body. This is tuning us into something that is vast compared with the ego's efforts to keep us lost in self-centeredness.

We have an opportunity to wake up to this vastness, let it flow as our life. As we take up the opportunity, we let ourselves live with more connection, appreciating the natural wonder of it all, and of each other.

—*Chuck Sweet*

Awareness is our true self; it's what we are.

—*Joko Beck*