

Zen Center

O F S A N D I E G O

ZCSD Newsletter

March-April 2026



Hatching Our Life Through Zazen

In the Pali canon, there is a passage that is attributed to the Buddha where he says, and I'm paraphrasing a bit, *Suppose a hen has eight, ten, or twelve eggs: If she doesn't cover them properly, warm them properly, or incubate them properly, then however much she might wish her chicks to hatch safely and be healthy, it's not going to happen.* It's not going to happen because she didn't cover the eggs, she didn't warm them, she didn't incubate them, and without that, there could be no chicks.

Then the Buddha compares the nesting process to zazen. And addressing the assembly, he reminds his students to practice diligently, because wishing for awakening isn't enough.

2026 Sesshin Dates

June 4–7, 2026

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

Please note the new dates for this sesshin.

Wednesday Programming

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

The Sexual Misconduct
Complaint Procedure and

Why is this a good metaphor for us? It's a worthwhile question. But first, what prompted me to reflect on this was the actual hummingbird's nest I was watching from our kitchen window. I'd noticed it, perched—too visibly, I felt—on a peripheral stem of a schefflera tree growing near the house. The nest belonged to an Allen's hummingbird, the green and rusty-orange one that happens to be my favorite.

The next day, we had long hours of rain, and a little after dark, for about 15 minutes, it seemed that the heavens decided, "Okay, just dump it all!" The water came down with such force, such intensity, that I had to wonder whether the nest could survive. I reminded myself that hummingbirds do nest in the tropics, but there was nothing I could do but light a candle and wish the bird well through the cold, wet night.

In the morning, I looked right away...and the nest was still there. The bird was soon hunkered down, back from foraging for food, and before long, it was clear there were chicks, hungry to be fed. For three more days, the rain kept coming in waves, sometimes light, sometimes heavy, and through it all the parent bird remained steady.

The male hummingbird doesn't stay with the female after mating, so it falls to her to do everything—she must build the nest, incubate the eggs, feed and protect the chicks, and feed herself.

She sits with unconditional patience, driven and sustained—of course—by instinct, but nonetheless, for us, an inspiring and humbling example of endurance and selflessness and courage through adversity.

She sits to incubate eggs and nurture her young. We sit to incubate and nurture, too, but what are we incubating? What do we nurture? In meditation, we nurture awareness, stillness, attention, and what is incubating is our True Nature, which we already are—it's always there—but really living it takes practice; it needs a little help to emerge. As Bodhisattva's Vow reminds us,

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<http://www.zcentersandiego.org/Policies/>

"Our thinking mind may be restless, but our commitment is to be here."

we sit to attain maturity in the wisdom of the Awakened Life. That's *our* life—the Awakened Life is always shared, always a life in relationship. And selflessness is key to its unfolding.

To attain maturity in the wisdom of the Awakened Life... At times, like the hummingbird, we sit through difficult circumstances, through physical distress and uncertainty. Our thinking mind may be restless, but our commitment is to be here. So, we sit, noticing when worry arises or aggravation shows up, when attachment to outcome arises or we push, impatiently, toward a goal. Incubation takes time. If expectation or ambition becomes a distraction, we notice and again wake up to whatever is arising here and now in our field of awareness. As I watched the nest in the downpour, I saw my attachment to a happy outcome—noticed it and didn't cling.

Through dark and cold, wind and rain, and on into sunshine, a tiny bird maintains her dedication to a clutch of eggs, her warmth and presence serving as a catalyst for an internal transformation that allows for the awakening of new life. In zazen, too, an internal transformation takes place, there is an intimacy that allows the Awakened Life to ripen into being, and, as in the nesting process, there is trust in sitting.

Earlier this year, another arena gave us abundant examples of courage and perseverance. During the Winter Olympics, I enjoyed watching some amazing athletes. We know they'd spent thousands of hours practicing their skills, falling again and again and getting back up, persevering through injuries and defeats, and facing anxiety, disappointment, heartache, expectation, anger, perfectionism, shame, self-doubt—the same uncomfortable emotion-thoughts that show up in our own lives, both on and off the cushion.

I'll mention a couple of things that stood out for me in interviews and are relevant here to our practice.

When Mikaela Shiffrin won her first Olympic gold medal in 8 years, she said, "The biggest task today was to simplify and focus on the skiing."

She said it again in slightly different words: "In the end, today, [the task] was to take away the noise and be simple with it."

That's what we discover in practice: When we learn to be simple, we can show up for our life. We can savor and appreciate the moment and respond skillfully.

When Mike Tirico suggested that Shiffrin's gold-medal win was finally an answer to the long drought in her sporting career, she said, "Yes, it is an answer—but it's only an answer for today."

Later, in an interview, she reflected, "Skiing has been such a gift in my life. I don't know what I would do without it. It's been a reason for growth and a motivator for change. It's been a gift of celebration and a reason for hardship." She was grateful for the hardship just as she was for the celebration—in part because it had schooled her for the hardships she encountered in life beyond the sport. Likewise, in practice, we come to see our difficulties as opportunities to wake up and to grow.

At these games, snowboarder Shaun White was a spectator, but he was asked how he would prepare on occasions when a medal hung in the balance. His response? He did everything he could to let the day be as ordinary as possible—so, he'd eat his usual snack at the usual time, listen to his usual music, do the things he would typically do. In other words, he did what he could to keep things simple.

Being simple doesn't mean we can't have fun; it doesn't mean we don't take risks and have adventures. We just learn to let go of the noise.

—*Myoku*

When we sit through the boredom, the pain, or whatever comes up, something happens. It's not that we cease to see things the same way but it's as though there's now a space around it that doesn't push at us quite as hard.

—*Joko Beck*