



Great Plains Zen Center



Sangha Newsletter

November 2010 through January 2011

Zazenkai – November 19-21

[The originally published dates for the November Zazenkai were 11/12-14. Please note the change of dates.]

Our November retreat begins on Friday evening, November 19, and runs through Sunday morning, November 21, and is held at *Myoshinji*.

During *zazenkai* and *sesshin*, we all live together at Myoshinji and follow the same schedule with multiple periods of *zazen* interspersed with walking meditation, as well as services, formal meals, and work period throughout the day. Silence throughout weekend allows us to focus on our practice intensely, without the usual distractions.

Bodhi Day Zazenkai – December 3-5

Our annual observance of Bodhi Day, the day commemorating the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, will take place during the December Zazenkai. There will be a special service on Saturday, December 4, at 10:15 AM, following two periods of *zazen*.

In the traditional Mahayana Buddhist calendar, Bodhi Day is December 8th, called Rohatsu in Japanese (literally, the 8th day of the 12th month). Bodhi Day is known as Shaka-Jodo-e (釈迦成道会) in the Japanese Tendai sect. Mahayana Buddhists also recognize April 8 as the anniversary of Buddha's birth (Hanamatsuri) and February 8th or 15th as Nirvana Day, commemorating the passing of the Buddha from this sphere of teaching. Theravada Buddhists of southeast Asia commemorate the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing into Nirvana at death on the same day, called Vesak Puja, which is usually in May. Tibetan Buddhists also observe these three events in the life of the Buddha at the same time, during Saga Dawa Duchen, which usually is in June.

In the Zen tradition, Bodhi Day is often preceded by a rigorous seven-day *sesshin* (December 1-8), also referred to as Rohatsu. Participants come to this *sesshin* with a strong resolve to experience enlightenment first hand. They are even encouraged to sit all night (*yaza*) the last night.

In the *Denko Roku*, "Transmission of the Lamp," Keizan Zenji gives the following description of Buddha's enlightenment:

"Shakyamuni Buddha was of the Sun Race in India.

At the age of nineteen he leaped over the palace walls in the dead of night, and at Mount Dantaloka, he cut off his hair. Subsequently, he practiced austerities for six years. Later, he sat on the Adamantine Seat, where spiders spun webs in his eyebrows and magpies built a nest on top of his head. Reeds grew up between his legs as he sat tranquilly and erect without movement for six years.

At the age of thirty, on the eighth day of the twelfth month, as the morning star appeared, he was suddenly enlightened. These words – "I and the great earth and beings simultaneously achieve the Way" – were his very first lion's roar."

Keizan Zenji goes on to explain that from that day on, Shakyamuni Buddha "did not spend a day alone but preached the Dharma for the assembly constantly. He was never without a robe and begging bowl."

Shakyamuni Buddha's complete and thorough-going investigation into the Great Matter is not something separate from our own resolve. We should encourage ourselves to plunge into practice with this intensity and determination at all times, but especially at this time of observance.

I would encourage everyone to participate in this important weekend, Bodhi Day Zazenkai, December 3-5. Only through our sincere practice can we truly express appreciation to those who came before and realize our vows to practice endlessly for the sake of all beings. Please join us for this important event.

–Roshi

Three-Day Sesshin – January 14-17

Our January retreat, held at *Myoshiji* will begin on Friday evening (1/14) and run through Monday Morning (1/17 – Martin Luther King Day). Please refer to registration instructions below for this and all retreats.

Registration for GPZC Events

Recent retreats have been near-or at-capacity, so we recommend signing up as early as possible. Please register for any *sesshin*, *zazenkai*, or workshop *at least one week prior* to the start. This allows us to assign positions and arrange other logistics for the event. If you are unable to meet this deadline, please contact us to make arrangements and check on availability of space. Late cancellations are subject to a \$35 non-refundable fee.

The cost for each *zazenkai* is \$75. The cost for each 3-day *sesshin* is \$150 for current Practicing Members; \$180 for others. Students may attend any *sesshin* on a part-time basis (\$50 per day for current Practicing Members; \$60 per day for others). To register, please *register/pay online at www.greatplainszen.org*



Welcome, New Members

We are happy to welcome two new members to the Great Plains Sangha. **Nataly Kercher** is a software engineer from Northbrook, and she and her husband have three young children as well as two dogs. Nataly writes, *I was introduced to zazen about two and a half years ago at Integral Bodywork training, for which I will always be grateful to Everett Ogawa and Ximena Pridencio. I have been practicing at home ever since as well as reading numerous Dharma books. I am hoping to deepen and stabilize my practice by joining the Great Plains Zen Center sangha and studying with Myoyu Roshi.*

Bill Bomberry is recently retired from Software development, and is taking the opportunity to spend more time with family, and get involved in volunteer activities and dog agility training. Bill notes, *What led me to Zen Buddhism was soul searching after I retired. Prior to retirement I was a "recovering" Catholic who dabbled in forms of Buddhism. Zen Buddhism feels like home to me, in no small part due to the assistance of Myoyu Roshi, Zuiko Redding and the Great Plains and Cedar Rapids Zen Centers.*

Beginner's Mind Sesshin - Reflections

Our very first Beginner's Mind Sesshin was held in September and offered an experience tailored to those new to retreat practice. The retreat introduced students to the formal practices that are integral to sesshin, including: sitting and walking meditation; liturgy; taking meals in the traditional, formal *oryoki* style; and work practice. Experienced members joined six newer members in this weekend of practice.

One of the new members, **Jorge Ortiz**, had this to say about his experience: *I started attending Great Plains Zen Center a few months ago and attended my first sesshin in September. It was a challenging experience that has taken me out of my comfort zone; to be silent and not express my opinions has not been easy. I have been forced to see how much I judge everything and how those judgments create emotions and how those emotions come and go. To experience that with people of the same mindset was very comforting. I look forward to attending the next one.*

New member **Bill Bomberry** wrote this note: *Prior to attending the Beginner's Mind Sesshin, I had not sat with a group and had a very sporadic and limited at home practice. I truly did enter the sesshin with a beginner's mind. It was a challenge but also confirmation at a deep level that Zen Buddhism is the path for me and that Myoyu Roshi and Great Plains Zen Center are an integral part of that path. Myoyu Roshi's guidance and faith in me has turned out to be a turning point in my life.*

Greg Dziedzic has been sitting with the sangha in Palatine for a few months and offered these reflections: *Beginner's Mind Sesshin was the first retreat I have ever participated in. Truly great experience! Mentally difficult, my ego wanted to go home, have a sushi dinner, and watch SNL.*

Physically challenging at moments, but really rewarding, especially at the end. We did it—the satisfaction one experiences after climbing a mountain.

I felt I was in the right place at the right time those days and I am happy I could be a part of Sesshin. I found out that silence, no social greetings and following the tight schedule is the way to inner peace. After all day of zazen, service and work I was tired, my knees and hips were in pain. I crawled into my sleeping bag and I experienced a feeling that was new to me. The chaos in my head was gone. All my thoughts were in order, waiting for their moment, one by one, not all at once. I felt comfortable as myself. I will always remember this moment, because in a way it changed my perspective, encouraged me to focus on my practice and to live my life more fully.

I encourage everybody to experience a sesshin, this very special event where and when I could be with myself, respect others and have a piece of apple for the best dessert ever.

Sangha Members Wed

On August 30, David *Kaiun* Beighley and MaryBeth *Jushin* Van Till were married aboard their racing sailboat, *ChoZen*, in Grand Haven, Michigan. Both are members of the White Sands Zen Center in Spring Lake, Michigan, and part of the Myoshinji sangha. Our sangha wishes health and happiness to our newly wedded friends Kaiun & Jushin.

Establishing a Home Practice

While sitting once or twice a week with the Sangha (a group of practitioners) is a very important part of Zen practice, our spiritual work really requires a *daily* effort. It is better to sit every day, even if you can only devote ten minutes to that effort, than to sit for longer periods only occasionally. People often ask whether it is better to sit in the morning or in the evening. It depends on your schedule. Ideally, you should pick a time that you can sit consistently each day. Many people prefer to sit in the morning because they find that it becomes harder and harder to set aside time as the day goes on. Others find that between getting children ready for school and themselves for work, morning is just too busy a time and evening works better. What is important is to make sitting a part of your daily routine, just like brushing your teeth. Don't let your mood or state of mind determine whether you sit or not. When it is time, just sit.

At home it is good to designate a room or at least a corner of a room as a sitting space. This can help you establish a regular habit of practice. Purchasing your own zabuton and zafu can be very helpful, as it is difficult to find pillows or cushions in your home which are firm enough for sitting. There are many on-line vendors that you can find if you type "zafu" or "zabuton" into a search engine.

(continued...)

(Home Practice, continued...)



A small altar can encourage and help focus your practice. Any small table will serve for your altar. An altar could also be made on a small shelf mounted on the wall. If you wish, you can place an altar cloth on the shelf. On it, you should place a candle, a small vase of fresh flowers, a water cup, and an incense bowl with the sand, rice, or ash in which to burn sticks of incense. Most altars also have a Buddha image, but if you wish, you may substitute a beautiful rock or other item that is suggestive of your spiritual practice. Each of these things helps us connect to our practice tradition and to our own deeper sense of gratitude, reverence, generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom.

The Buddha image reminds us of the awakening of wisdom. The candle, which is placed on the right, represents the light of wisdom. The fresh flowers, which go on the left the same distance from the Buddha image as the candle, remind us of impermanence. The incense that is burned represents purity. As shown in the picture, place the incense burner to the front of the altar. Finally, the water cup (shasuiki), which should be kept about half to two thirds full of water, is an offering to all who are thirsty, and in particular, who thirst for the Dharma. The cup is raised and placed before the Buddha image. Keeping your sitting room or area clean, orderly, and uncluttered will help support consistent and orderly practice.

Also remember to put your practice into action not just while sitting, but throughout the day. While you are working, cleaning, driving – whatever you are doing—just do it with your whole body and mind. And finally, after you are able to sit one or two periods fairly comfortably at home, consider signing up for a retreat (sesshin). A few times per year, we have a special Beginner's Mind retreat, which has a lighter schedule and more instruction geared toward newer practitioners.

Weekly Schedule in Palatine at CCUU

Zazen (Zen meditation) is held every Sunday at 7:00 p.m. at Countryside Church - Unitarian Universalist, 1025 N. Smith Road, in Palatine, Illinois. We welcome new friends to join us any Sunday. A standard schedule includes a 30-minute period of *zazen*; 10 minutes of *kinhin* (walking meditation) and a second 30-minute period of *zazen*.

Each month, the Zen Center holds *Fusatsu*, the *Renewal of the Vows* ceremony (in place of the second *zazen* period). Everyone is welcome whether they have formally taken the Buddhist Vows or not. Upcoming *Fusatsu* dates are November 14 and January 23 (no *Fusatsu* at CCUU in December).

One Sunday sitting each month will feature *teisho* (a formal dharma talk) by our teacher, Susan *Myoyu* Andersen, Roshi, followed by group discussion. Upcoming *teisho* are scheduled for November 7, December 19, and January 9.

Also, once a month, members and friends are invited to gather for informal **Talk & Tea** at 6:15. (11/14; 1/9- none in December.)

Introduction to Zen Practice Workshops

Great Plains Zen Center will continue to hold monthly Introductory Workshops at Countryside Unitarian Church, 1025 N. Smith Rd, Palatine, Illinois, and at Myoshinji in Monroe, Wisconsin. Each workshop provides basic, practical information including how to do *zazen* (Zen meditation), how to practice at home and throughout the day, the aims of practice, and what opportunities for additional or more advanced practice are offered at GPZC. Attendance at an introductory workshop is required of anyone who would like to become a member of the Great Plains Zen Center.

Workshops in **Palatine** (Illinois) will be held Saturdays, November 6, December 11, and January 8, and run from 8:30-11:30 AM, followed by an informal lunch.

Workshops at **Myoshinji** (Wisconsin) will be held Saturdays, November 6, December 11, and January 22. Workshops run from 8:30-11:30 AM.

The cost for each workshop is \$25 per person (\$15 for students and seniors; free for repeating participants).

Visit greatplainszen.org/workshops to register, or call us at 847-274-4793. Please be sure to note the *location* (Illinois or Wisconsin) of the various workshop dates!

Weekly Schedule at Myoshinji Updated

Myoshinji's weekly schedule now includes these opportunities: Morning *zazen*, 5:30–6:00 AM every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday; evening *zazen* each Tuesday and Wednesday at 7:00 PM (followed by discussion and ending about 8:30 PM on Tuesdays); Saturday morning *zazen* continues to be offered at 9:00 AM, followed by *teisho*, zendo position instruction or discussion, ending about 11:00 AM.

***Please note that Myoshinji will be closed Dec. 25 - Jan 1.**

Membership in the Great Plains Zen Center

There are four levels of membership in the Sangha of the Great Plains Zen Center: **Practicing Membership** (\$50 per month) is for anyone who will be practicing zazen with the sangha on a regular, weekly basis. Practicing Members receive a discounted rate for *sesshin* (retreats). **Affiliate Membership** (\$30 per month) is for sangha members who live at a greater distance from the regular sittings, and who are not able to attend on a regular basis. **Friend of GPZC** (any amount per year) is for anyone who wishes to support the Zen Center and be included in all special communications. **Sustaining Member**, is for anyone committing to any amount, \$75 and above per month.

Any of these levels of dues can be submitted at our website at: <http://greatplainszen.org/membership/dues>

Membership helps deepen one's commitment to practice, helps support the center and helps make the practice available to more people now and in the future. Please join us.

Contact Us

By phone: (847) 274-4793

By e-mail: gpzc@greatplainszen.org

Myoshinji (Monroe, WI): 608-325-6248

Visit Our Web Site

Find out more about the Great Plains Zen Center on the web at: greatplainszen.org

Other Services Offered by Great Plains Zen Center

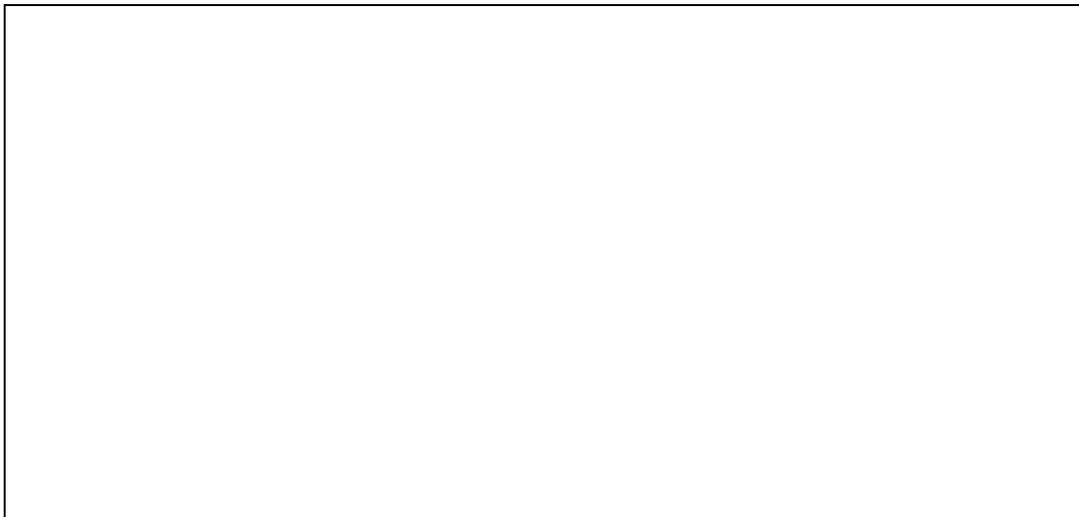
Myoyu Roshi is an ordained Buddhist priest and can perform weddings, baby blessings, memorials and funerals, and home visits for those members who are seriously ill. She is also a Reiki practitioner. For further information about these services, please contact myoyu.roshi@greatplainszen.org

Upcoming Dates

The following are planned dates for future retreats. Please visit the web site, greatplainszen.org to confirm these as the dates approach. Circumstances sometimes lead to changes in selected dates.

- Feb. 18-20 Zazenkai
- Mar. 31- April 3 3-Day Sesshin
- May 13-15 Beginner's Mind Sesshin

**GPZC
P.O. Box 3362
Barrington, IL 60011**



Great Plains Zen Center – Myoshinji (Subtle Mind Temple) – Monroe, Wisconsin

608-325-6248

November, 2010

	1	2 5:30 am Zazen BTC Class 6:30p	3 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	4 5:30 am Zazen	5	6 8:30 am Intro Workshop
7	8	9 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	10 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	11 Veterans Day 5:30 am Zazen	12	13 9am Zazen
14	15	16 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	17 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	18 5:30 am Zazen	19 Zazenkai	20 Zazenkai 9am Zazen
21 Zazenkai	22	23 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	24 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	25 Thanksgiving	26	27 9am Zazen
28	29	30 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion		5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion		

December, 2010

			1 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	2 5:30 am Zazen	3 Zazenkai	4 Zazenkai 9am Zazen
5 Zazenkai	6	7 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	8 Bodhi Day 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	9 5:30 am Zazen	10	11 8:30 am Intro Workshop
12	13	14 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	15 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	16 5:30 am Zazen	17	18 9am Zazen
19	20	21 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	22 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	23 5:30 am Zazen	24	25 Christmas (no sitting)
26	27	28 (no sitting)	29 (no sitting)	30 (no sitting)	31	1 New Year's Day (no sitting)

January, 2011

2	3	4 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	5 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	6 5:30 am Zazen	7	8 9am Zazen
9	10	11 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	12 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	13 5:30 am Zazen	14 Sesshin	15 Sesshin 9am Zazen
16 Sesshin	17 Sesshin (MLK Day)	18 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	19 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	20 5:30 am Zazen	21	22 8:30 am Intro Workshop
23	24	25 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen & Discussion	26 5:30 am Zazen 7:00p Zazen	27 5:30 am Zazen	28	29 9am Zazen
30	31					

Great Plains Zen Center – Countryside Unitarian Church – Palatine, Illinois

847-274-4793

November, 2010

	1	2	3	4	5	6 <i>8:30 am Intro Workshop</i>
7 <i>7 pm Zazen & Teisho</i>	8	9	10	11 <i>Veterans Day</i>	12	13
14 <i>6:15 Tea 7 pm Zazen & Fusatsu</i>	15	16	17	18	19 <i>Zazenkai</i>	20 <i>Zazenkai</i>
21 <i>Zazenkai 7 pm Zazen</i>	22	23	24	25 <i>Thanksgiving</i>	26	27 <i>9am Zazen</i>
28 <i>7 pm Zazen</i>	29	30				

December, 2010

			1	2	3 <i>Zazenkai</i>	4 <i>Zazenkai</i>
5 <i>Zazenkai 7 pm Zazen</i>	6	7	8 <i>Bodhi Day</i>	9	10	11 <i>8:30 am Intro Workshop</i>
12 <i>7 pm Zazen</i>	13	14	15	16	17	18
19 <i>7 pm Zazen & Teisho</i>	20	21	22	23	24	25 <i>Christmas</i>
26 <i>(no sitting)</i>	27	28	29	30	31	1 (Jan) <i>New Year's Day</i>

January, 2011

2 <i>7 pm Zazen</i>	3	4	5	6	7	8 <i>8:30 am Intro Workshop</i>
9 <i>6:15 Tea 7 pm Zazen & Teisho</i>	10	11	12	13	14 <i>Sesshin</i>	15 <i>Sesshin</i>
16 <i>Sesshin 7 pm Zazen</i>	17 (MLK Day) <i>Sesshin</i>	18	19	20	21	22
23 <i>7 pm Zazen & Fusatsu</i>	24	25	26	27	28	29
30 <i>7 pm Zazen</i>	31					