

## Wild Country A-Town Sangha & Jikoji Zen Center

### An Invitation to Explore (v.4)

Join us for a 7-week intensive practice period, an exploration, offered in virtual collaboration (on Zoom) by the Wild Country A-Town Sangha and Jikoji Zen Center, and open to all practitioners and those interested in learning more about Zen.

Our topic will explore the fundamental and mysterious core concept of Zen Buddhism called (in Sanskrit) "**shunyata**," but often translated to English as "**emptiness**," and summed up famously in the Heart Sutra as,

**"...Form is emptiness, emptiness is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness."**

**Presenters and Moderators:** Taizan Gendo, Gerow Reece, Kishor Forson, Eli Cohen, Chobun Nenzen, and Cliff Isberg will be presenting on Tuesday nights; Taizan Gendo will be moderating a special book reading group on Thursdays. Estimate about 10 hours per week for this opportunity to go deep for 7 weeks with commitment to wholehearted practice—or for however much time you can devote. You are welcome always!

**On Tuesday evenings...** Together, with each of us contributing, we will explore Buddhism's "flow in history," seeing and feeling our way into penetrating shunyata with a different **lens** week—story, art, nature, reason, relationship, language, science, and ritual. We will be emphasizing feeling, not just words and texts. We'll see how our historical lineage of Siddhartha, Nagarjuna, Bodhidharma, and Dogen expressed shunyata, as well as more recent prophets, perhaps Alan Watts, Dali Lama, Thich Nhat Hahn, Ken Wilber—and your favorite contributors?). We will explore this mystery from these myriad lenses hoping to gain a glimpse, a taste, a feel of shunyata. And then sit with it in our heart and mind.

**On Thursdays evenings...** We will read and discuss "*A Light in the Mind*" by Eiko Joshin (Carolyn Atkinson), a Dharma heir of Kobun Chino Otagawa Roshi. The subtitle of this remarkably clear treaty is "*Living Your Life Exactly As It Is.*" Writing from a Vipassana and Zen perspective, she encourages us to cultivate both mindfulness and stillness, to discover, as Kobun called it, "a light in the mind." This is a steadying read for troubling times, a healing read, and a wonderful accompaniment to our exploration of shunyata. You may order the book "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson on Amazon.

**Both Tuesday and Thursday meetings will start at 6:30pm (Pacific) on Zoom. We begin on Tuesday, Oct. 6th and end on Tuesday, Nov. 24th.**

Our practice period is bookended by the **Denko-e sesshin** which started Monday, Sept. 28, and the **Rohatsu sesshin** starting Nov. 30th. These are rare opportunities for concentrated practice before and after our exploration of shunyata—please join!

**The link to join our Autumn practice period zoom is:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9494877033>

**Meeting ID: 949 487 7033      Mobile # 669.900.6833**

More info on our Wild Country Zen website pages “Practice Period Info Page” & “Lens of Shunyata” on <https://wildcountryzen.com> ; files with additional resources from presenters will be posted there as well. Check back periodically for new materials or changes.

**Dates and topics on our journey:**

**Tuesday, October 6**

**The Lens of Story.** Laying the foundation and context of this central doctrine of Buddhism with stories and alternate versions/visions of what IS shunyata, told by central figures of our practice.

Presenter: *Taizan Gendo*

**Thursday October 8**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Introduction: A Basic Perspective, Chp. 1 The Winds of Impermanence, Chp. 2 Inhabiting Our Lives.

pps. 1-19.

**Tuesday, October 13**

**The Lens of Art.** Where could Shunyata be "functioning" in Western art, in East Asian art? Can we peer through the lens in both directions--from art and from Shunyata?

Presenter: *Gerow Reece*

**Thursday, October 15**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Chp. 3 Are We Safe Yet, Chp. 4 Whose Cookies Are These?

pps. 23-35.

## **Tuesday, October 20**

**The Lens of Reason.** Our Zen practice incorporates Nagarjuna's reasoning on ultimate emptiness of **everything**, the "Middle Way" and absolute and relative truths; Vasubandhu's Yogacarin (Mind Only) reasoning; and of course the pesky Tathagata-garba's proposition of a "really existing" Buddha-nature" in the midst of shunyata...

Presenter: *Kishor Forson and Taizan Gendo*

## **Thursday, October 22**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Chp. 5 Life Isn't Personal, Chp. 6 Creating the Self.

pps. 39-56.

## **Tuesday, October 27**

**The Lens of Language.** "Inter-faith dialogue" attempts to reconcile some pretty significant differences--starting with the belief in God, an eternal soul, or words like "the One," words not used in Buddhism. Rabbi Eli will help explore the problems with language, from a Jewish faith perspective.

Presenter: Rabbi Eli Cohen, Chadeish Yameinu

## **Thursday, October 29**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Chp. 7 The Water of Our Lives, Chp. 8 With Our Thoughts We Make the World.

pps. 59-73

## **Tuesday, November 3**

**The Lens of Relationship.** What does "relationship" mean in Zen Buddhism? How can we love what is empty of self and has no "inherent existence?" And what does it mean to follow a Bodhisattva path in an ultimately non-existent world?"

Presenter: Nenzen Pamela Brown

## **Thursday, November 5**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Chp. 9 Open to the Outcome, Chp. 10 When the Heart Closes Down

pps. 77-90

## **Tuesday, November 10**

**The Lens of Nature.** Investigating emptiness through nature is a well travelled path we will explore, with short readings of Kobun, Gary Snyder, Henry David Thoreau, Alan Watts, Timothy Leary, and others.

Presenter: *Taizan Gendo*

**Thursday, November 12**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Chp. 11 Have I Done Enough?, Chp. 12 A Light in the Mind  
pps. 93-99

**Tuesday, November 17**

**The Lens of Science.** Science and Buddhism: both are dedicated to the pursuit of truth; both face paradoxes, incompleteness, inconsistencies, and the unknowable. Emptiness (Shunyata) provides the background of potential.

Presenter: *Cliff Isberg*

**Thursday, November 19**

**READ: "A Light in the Mind" by Carolyn Atkinson**

Concluding Teaching from Kobun Chino Otagawa Roshi  
p. 113

**Tuesday, November 24**

**The Lens of Ritual.** Ritual and ceremony help us connect to things words alone cannot express. On our last evening of the practice period, all participants are invited to contribute to a "Shunyata Show and Tell," a minute of two of sharing something, a ritual, a poem, an image, a song--whatever you feel from sharing the lens of our explorations .Presenters: *Taizan Gendo, Gerow Reece, Kishor Forson, Eli Cohen, Nenzen Pamela Brown, Cliff Isberg*

**COST:** By donation; all dana (for teaching) proceeds should go directly to Jikoji Zen Center, to support our jewel in these challenging times. On every page of the Jikoji Zen Center website are "Donate" buttons; please indicate in the note you are signing up for **Autumn 2020 Wild Country A-Town /Jikoji Practice Period on Zoom.**

Limited to 50 participants, with lottery for possible late openings.

Please contact Taizan Gendo at [TaizanGendo@gmail.com](mailto:TaizanGendo@gmail.com) for further questions about the practice period content.