



Newsletter 2021 nr. 2
Zen Heart Sangha Nederland
2 October 2021

On suffering? - Michel Sensei

“The art of life is to stay wide open and be vulnerable, yet at the same time to sit with the mystery and the awe and with the unbearable pain - to just be with it all.”

- Ram Dass -

“The Noble Truth of Suffering is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, being with what is painful is suffering, being without what is joyful is suffering, not receiving what one wants is suffering.”

- Shakyamuni Buddha - (The Sutta that set the Wheel of the Dhamma in motion)

“One who sees suffering, also sees the arising of suffering, the stopping of suffering, and the practice leading to non-suffering. One who sees the arising of suffering, also sees suffering, the stopping of suffering, and the practice leading to non-suffering. One who sees the stopping of suffering, also sees suffering, the arising of suffering and the practice leading to non-suffering. One who sees the practice leading to non-suffering, also sees suffering, the arising of suffering and the stopping of suffering.”

- Shakyamuni Buddha - (The Gavampati Sutta)

Vimalakirti replied: "My sickness comes from ignorance and from the thirst for existence as a separate self, and it will last as long as the sicknesses of all living beings. If all living beings were free from sickness, I too would not be sick. Why? For the bodhisattva, beings live in the world, and sickness is inherent in living in the world. If all living beings were free of sickness, the bodhisattva also would be free of sickness. For example, when the only child of a man and woman is sick, both his parents suffer on account of the sickness of their child. And the parents will suffer as long as that the only child does not recover. And just like that, the bodhisattva loves all living beings as if each were his only child. He suffers when they are sick and is cured when they are cured. You ask me, what causes my sickness; the sicknesses of the bodhisattvas arise from great compassion."

- Vimalakirti - (The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutta)

Suffering and non-suffering don't exist separately. And neither do living beings exist separately. Our minds try to make a separation between suffering and non-suffering because we want to be free from suffering and because we believe that suffering and non-suffering are opposites.

But even if we were to be free from suffering, other beings still suffer and therefore we suffer. This is one of the strong reasons why we want to believe we are separate and independent from other beings, because then we can believe we can be free from being touched by their suffering.

But this striving for independence, which we confuse with freedom, causes a lot of loneliness and a lot of suffering. And because all beings are in fact utterly interdependent, this independence can never actually be achieved. No matter how much we try, we're never free from suffering, as Ram Dass, the Buddha and Vimalakirti make so clear.

When we open ourselves to the universal suffering inherent to life, then the separations inevitably fall away. When we experience the intense pain of all these attempts at living independent separate lives, and have the deep courage, the heart, to be with the pain of all beings, in other words, to do what Ram Dass describes, "*to just be with it all*", then we actually open ourselves to the deeper reality, the selfless, the "me-and-mine-less" reality of life as it is; raw, naked, complete, without beginning or end, without a separation between suffering and non-suffering, knowing nothing and including everything, just so.

True compassion arises naturally in this openness. This embrace of suffering and non-suffering is in fact the truest joy and happiness I know. It is the heart of my practice. And sometimes it hurts like hell.

Dana: The practice of generosity. - Michel sensei

Every sesshin again we get questions about donations and very often the apparently hardest thing about it is not donating but NOT donating. But NOT donating is gift too!

The activities of the Zen Heart Sangha involve incurring expenses and Helen and I too have to pay bills and buy food. So donations are very welcome indeed. And because many participants and sangha members like to have some sort of indication about what to donate, we usually mention a suggested donation when we announce a sesshin or zazenkai. But there is no obligation whatsoever and most of all: it is a gift, a present. If someone wishes to participate but has little or no money, and then manages to overcome the usual embarrassment and participates without giving money but giving his/her participation as a gift, then that may well be a greater gift to the sangha than a gift of money!

If we want to base ourselves in generosity, we can separate participation and paying money. My work and effort as resident teacher and everything we do as sangha, all these are gifts, freely given donations. If no one gives money we would still continue to do what we do. We'll think of something.

What I received from my teacher and all the 81 generations of teachers before her, is so valuable for me, that it is impossible to name a price. And at the same time I basically got it free of charge, so I pass it on in gratitude and joy, particularly also because of course it's not Mine. There is no "owner" of the dharma. The Shakyamuni Buddha® didn't impose a copy right on the content of the Pali Canon®!

We can try to see everything we can manage by way of activities, attention, practice, love, presence, in short our lives, ourselves, as not-Mine and to give it all as a gift, without expecting something in return, not even the gratitude of the receiver(s). It's a practice of selflessly giving yourself and therefor also a practice of trust. And these are just a few of the aspects of the practice of "Dana", of generosity.

Anyway: access to the dharma is free of charge. It is as valuable as the air we breath, or the warmth and light of the sun. It is beyond value, priceless and at the same time without price.

And if you do donate money (thank you so much) then that gift is a donation to the well-being and functioning of the sangha as a whole. And if you do that unconditionally and especially without seeing your donation as donated by You, then you will give yourself a sense of freedom and spaciousness and

trust that surpasses any and all description. And the same is true for non-donating without embarrassment. Thus, living your life becomes unconditional.

Announcements

Sangha Board membership

Legally the Zen Heart Sangha is a so called “religious society” which under Dutch law is a particular type of foundation. The board of the sangha functions as the official governing body and in the day to day practicalities as an advisory board for sensei as well as the sangha. The composition of the board of the Zen Heart Sangha has changed per the first of October of this year. Sjoerd Wiarda has left the board after more than ten years of working in the service of the sangha. The board and sensei are deeply grateful to him for all that he has given to the sangha and for his warm presence, involvement and friendship. Aliesse van Keulen and Marieke Dawson have joined the board as new members.

Members of the board are now:

Job van Dansik (chairperson), Marlies Hogendijk (secretary), Mark Hakstege (treasurer), Jeroen Bosch, Marieke Dawson, Aliesse van Keulen, Marie-Christien Kleintjes, Bart van Lent and Catherine Genno Pagès Roshi.

Looking for a second hand laptop

We’ve decided that online participation in the week programme and retreats will continue to remain possible, so a board commission has started work on improving the technical installation in the zendo. This includes getting a decent webcam, a better microphone and a more recent and especially a less noisy laptop computer. Webcam and microphone are being purchased but perhaps someone in the sangha has an unused, reasonably recent and quiet laptop that might be usefully recycled in the zendo. If that is the case, please contact us through info@zenheart.nl

Jukai in the August sesshin

On the final day of the sesshin in August we performed a jukai ceremony for Aliesse van Keulen and Sjoerd Wiarda. Aliesse received the Dharma-name *Elle qui Entend (She who Hears)*, and Sjoerd *Way of the Heart!*

Agenda

- Thursday 14 - Sunday 17 October: Three day sesshin Den Haag.
- Sunday 31 October: Zazenkai (a one day retreat) in Den Haag.
- Monday 8 November - Sunday 14 November: Week-sesshin in De Dieken in Holten.
- Monday 13 December - Saturday 18 December: Lay-life-sesshin in Den Haag.
- Winter break: 24 December 2021 - 7 January 2022 (Note: The last day of sitting in the year will be Thursday 23 December).

Please note: From Friday April 8th until Friday April 15th 2022, we will be holding a so called Maha Sangha retreat in Frandoux (Belgium). This special retreat will bring together the sanghas of Genno Roshi (Dana Sangha, Paris) and all her successors i.e. Amy Hollowel (France), Frank De Waelle

(Belgium) Corinne Frottier (Germany), João Rodrigues (France), Tania Gent (UK), Scott Williams (UK) en our sangha. It is possible already to register for this very special occasion by sending an email to info@zenheart.nl.

Colophon

This newsletter from the Zen Heart Sangha will be published three to four times a year.

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