



**Friends Of The Beaverkill Community
Summer Meeting
August 18, 2018**

*The Zen Studies Society's mission is to teach the principles of
Rinzai Zen Buddhism and the practice of meditation
as a way of living with insight and compassion.*

What is Zen?

By Shinge Sherry Chayat Roshi, Abbot

What is Zen? It's both something we are—our true nature expressing itself moment by moment—and something we do—a disciplined practice through which we can realize the joy of being. It is not a belief system to which one converts. There is no dogma or doctrine.

Zen is the direct experience of what we might call ultimate reality, or the absolute, yet it is not separate from the ordinary, the relative. This direct experience is our birthright. The practice of zazen—meditation—is a way of realizing the non-dualistic, vibrant, subtle, and interconnected nature of all life.

It was this path toward realization that was shown some 2,500 years ago by the Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be known as Shakyamuni Buddha. "Buddha" simply means "awakened one." His great teaching was that we can all awaken; that fundamentally, we are all buddhas—Jewish buddhas, Christian buddhas, Hindu buddhas, Islamic buddhas, Haudenasaunee buddhas, secular buddhas.

With this flexible and accommodating attitude toward the various cultures and beliefs it encountered, Buddhism was embraced throughout Asia. In China, it merged with Taoism and evolved into Ch'an, the Chinese word for meditation, which became "Zen" in Japan. Over the past few decades, it has become very much a part of Western culture. Indeed, the historian Arnold Toynbee said that one of the most significant events of the twentieth century was the movement of Buddhism from East to West.

Through a dedicated and consistent meditation practice, we can realize that self and other are One, that the conditioned and unconditioned are simultaneous, that absolute and relative are identical. Out of this realization flows a natural compassion and wisdom, a peaceful and intuitively appropriate response toward whatever circumstances may arise. We don't make a big deal about it; we don't even call it religion. When the Dalai Lama was asked about Buddhism, he simply said, "My religion is kindness."

So, again, what is Zen? Stop now. Stop trying to get an intellectual lock on something that is vast and boundless, far more than the rational mind can grasp. Just breathe in with full awareness. Taste the breath. Appreciate it fully. Now breathe out, slowly, with equal appreciation. Give it all away; hold onto nothing. Breathe in with gratitude; breathe out with love. Receiving and offering—this is what we are doing each time we inhale and exhale. To do so with conscious awareness, on a regular basis, is the transformative practice we call Zen.



From "A Preacher's Hermitage," New York Times, October 1887:

"Mr. Beecher came to a spot overlooking a large lake, encircled by high and densely-wooded peaks. Mr. Beecher says that as his eyes fell on the scene that lay before him he felt that all his longings were to be satisfied there. He had wished to stand in a primitive forest and commune with the wild and picturesque scenery of tumbled nature, but never before had he found it in such perfection. He encamped on the shore of the lake, which he at once, believing that he had the right of a discoverer, christened Beecher Lake."

Excerpts from *A History of Beecher Lake*, by Bowman Owen, first caretaker for the Zen Studies Society:

"Our mountain buckboard shot down a sudden pitch in the road and with a bound rested on the bridge at the foot of the miniature lake. It was a bright morning in last July's closing days. We had driven over from Quaker Clearing to

which spot John Burroughs so pleasantly leads the reader through *Locust* and *Wild Honey* to view the Hermit Beecher preacher's paradise. And as Buckley halted the horses, there on the rustic bridge, our eyes rested upon a scene of surpassing loveliness and beauty of Beecher Lake."

"Six years previously (1885), Thomas and James, two of Lyman Beecher's remarkable family of 13 children, including Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward, the third son, were accustomed to wander through these wild backwood regions of Ulster County, comprising the lower Catskill Range. James Beecher erected a crude cottage in place of a tent. His brother Reverend Thomas Beecher came for six or eight weeks every summer.

"They built with pre-cut; there are remnants here up until 1939, and you could see parts of the original buildings, like the old shed."

ZSS Capital Campaign Case Statement

Since its founding in 1956, the Zen Studies Society has played a major role in the development of Zen training in the United States. Its urban temple, New York Zendo Shobo-ji, and its mountain monastery, International Dai Bosatsu Zendo (DBZ), have welcomed spiritual seekers from all over the world to engage in the life-transforming practice of Rinzai Zen Buddhism.

Each year, approximately 1,500 people leave the realm of digital screens and overflowing appointment calendars to travel up an unpaved mountain road deep in the Catskills. They arrive at DBZ to participate in week-long sesshin (intensive Zen retreats) or introductory weekends, or to attend ZSS Open Space programs with guest teachers offering yoga, shiatsu, reiki, environmental awareness, workshops in the Zen arts, 12-Step retreats, and healing and wellness weekends for those living with HIV/AIDS and their caregivers.

The unique setting, the compassionate Open Space offerings, and the rigorous practice offered at DBZ motivate newcomers and seasoned ZSS members alike to return season after season.

Everyone is struck by the beauty of the monastery building's traditional Japanese architecture, and by the rustic Americana of the historic Beecher House (owned in the 1800s by the Beecher family: James, Henry, and Harriet Beecher Stowe), built on the banks of the highest lake in the Catskills amid 1,400 acres of pristine forest.

The Beechers were ardent abolitionists, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's deeply affecting novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was instrumental in ending slavery in the United States. Constructed by James Beecher in 1875, the Beecher House was where Dai Bosatsu Zendo's first resident community lived after ZSS purchased the land in 1971 from the Rutherford family.

As we look to the future, we are undertaking a capital campaign to Save the Beecher House.

Today, the Beecher House building is in dire need of restoration. To preserve its unique legacy, retain its current capacity for 18 guests, and make it available for four-season use, we are announcing a \$1 million campaign to Save the Beecher House. Among other renovations, this will allow us to:

- Build a retaining wall and swale to manage water runoff
- Repair the deterioration of the stone foundation and resolve moisture issues
- Replace the roof and siding
- Upgrade to energy-efficient windows
- Install modern plumbing
- Upgrade the electrical system to code
- Install a new heating system and insulation
- Replace aged kitchen appliances

This campaign has two phases – a two-part expansion that will strengthen the ZSS community and provide for the next generation, creating more capacity for dedicated practice and guest programs.

We envision a new holistic wellness center to complement the current offerings of our Open Space program. This would be the first new construction at DBZ since the monastery was built in 1975, 100 years after James Beecher crafted his country home on Beecher Lake.

The retreat center, an ecologically designed LEED-certified structure with a solar array, will

include a dedicated room for yoga, tai chi, and other types of movement, a conference room for seminars, guest accommodations, a professional kitchen and a full dining room. This will allow us to expand our offerings and be host to groups with kindred missions, thus helping enhance our fiscal sustainability well into the future. The estimated cost of the new construction is \$1.5 million.

In Buddhism, *dana* – generosity – is the first of the Six Perfections. From the beginning, Buddhist temples and centers have relied on donations from members of the Sangha and the wider community in order to offer the Dharma.

We invite you to join our campaign, and participate in the reciprocal relationship of mutual giving and gratitude that has existed since the time of the Buddha.

For more information, please contact Juyo Dennis Giacomo at office@daibosatsu.org or (845) 439-4566.



Holistic Wellness Center