

Branching Streams Newsletter, April 2, 2020

Dear distantly intimate friends (a phrase borrowed from Kevin Heffernan of Richmond, Virginia Zen Center),

I returned from visiting San Antonio, Austin, and Houston Zen Centers on March 17th, as leaders at all three centers were planning how best to respond to the Covid-19 virus. At Houston Zen Center, Abbot Gaelyn Godwin livestreamed my dharma talk through her computer, the first livestreamed talk HZC had offered. Here's a link to that talk: <https://houstonzen.org/dharma-talks/2020/3/15/jisan-tova-green-presence-in-the-time-of-social-distancing>

I met with sangha leaders, board members, and practitioners at all three centers, and enjoyed



Texas hospitality. A member of Houston ZC wanted to be sure I saw bluebonnets (the Texas state flower) in bloom and invited me to walk along Buffalo Bayou (photo above; I'm wearing an Austin ZC t-shirt).

The city I returned to had just begun to shelter in place. The airport was nearly deserted. San Francisco Zen Center had already closed to the public. I began two weeks of quarantine, which ended last night.

I'm wondering how I can support Branching Streams sanghas at this time. One practical way is **an offer of technical support for your online offerings** from Jon Voss, member of Mid-City Zen Center in New Orleans. **Jon is offering classes on April 8th and 10th for Branching Streams leaders or sangha members who wish to learn more about using Zoom** (see below).

Tips for connecting your community through Zoom from Jon Voss

San Francisco Zen Center, and many others, are using Zoom to power online zendos, classes, practice discussions and the like. Zoom (<https://zoom.us/>) provides video conferencing services for individuals and organizations alike. It has become an essential part of both business and social life during the coronavirus pandemic. You do not need a Zoom account to participate, but you will need to download free software, available for Mac, PC, iPhone and Android devices. Free call-in numbers are also available for those without computer access.

With a free Zoom account, you can host meetings of up to 40 min without cost. For meetings of over 40 minutes, or to access features like breakout meetings, you will need a Pro account, which costs \$14.99/mo.

Tips for those thinking of using Zoom for an online zendo:

1. Try it out! There are many live zendos you can visit now, including SFZC (<https://www.sfzc.org/online-programs/online-zendo>), or try a smaller one like Mid City Zen in New Orleans (<https://www.midcityzen.org/virtual-zendo>).
2. Create a Zoom account and invite a few friends to try it out.
3. Adapt your in-person zendo experience to one that works online. Have a schedule for bells, choose chants, etc. It may take a little practice, but it's doable!
4. Share with your community.

If you're interested in learning more, Jon Voss (bio: <http://consulting.jumpslide.com/jon>) will be hosting a beginner and intermediate class next week for Branches and Streams members. Jon hosts the Mid City Zen virtual zendo, and has pretty much been living on Zoom the last few weeks. Meeting info is below, but contact jon@jumpslide.com if you have any questions.

Beginner class (all you need to host an online zendo)

We will cover: setting up a Zoom account, trying out bells and other sounds, managing sounds and video, muting/unmuting all, changing participant names, Zoom settings and security.

Intermediate class (online zendo + hosting talks and groups)

We will cover: having breakout discussions, taking questions, moderating, co-hosts, screen-sharing, recording and posting talks.

Please register for one or both classes by emailing jon@jumpslide.com. These classes are free.

Branching Streams support calls

I am exploring the idea of a weekly support call for Branching Streams teachers and leaders, based on support groups Tenku Ruff, the President of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, has initiated for SZBA members. I participated (by Zoom) in Tenku's call last Thursday. About

twenty people, including several Branching streams teachers, checked in about how our centers are doing and how we ourselves are doing. Please let me know if you'd like me to set up such a group for Branching Streams.

San Francisco Zen Center update

Those of you who have practiced at or visited Tassajara, Green Gulch Farm, and/or City Center may want to know that residents at all three centers are staying healthy and it's very quiet at all three centers. A Health and Safety Committee meets regularly to share current information and make decisions about how to maximize the health and safety of residents. We are learning how to stay connected while observing physical distance.

The April Tassajara work period was cancelled, and Green Gulch is closed to visitors this month. SFZC is offering an online zendo, and online dharma talks and classes, reaching many people beyond the Bay Area.

A book that will lift your spirits:

[A Wild Love for the World: Joanna Macy and the Work of Our Times](#), edited by Stephanie Kaza, was just published by Shambhala. Here's a message from Stephanie, a keynote speaker at our 2019 Branching Streams conference:



“Greetings to all, wherever you are, in whatever degree of seclusion due to the pandemic. May you all be well and stay healthy as we live through this epic time in history. **This is a wonderful book!** There is much love here and the book is so needed in these difficult times. Let us

celebrate that!” The book includes essays by Taigen Leighton of Ancient Dragon Zen Center and others whose names will be familiar to you.

For further inspiration

I receive newsletters from many Branching Streams groups. I was delighted by the Spring newsletter compiled by members of Chris Fortin’s Dharma Heart sangha in Sebastopol CA. It includes Chris’s encouraging words, an interview with sangha member Susan Spencer who makes Jizo statues, poetry, and artwork. You can access it from the Dharma Heart Zen website: <http://dharmaheartzen.com/>

Annual Contributions: Thank you to those sanghas who have already made your annual contributions to Branching Streams. And a gentle reminder about your 2020 Branching Streams annual contribution if you haven’t. I’m aware that many Zen Centers and sanghas are losing revenue at this time. Please let me know if you need to give later in the year.

I’ll end with a dedication that we chant at the close of the online zendo each morning:

May all beings be free and safe from harm.

May all beings be happy and fulfilled.

May all beings be healthy and strong.

May all beings have ease and joy in their lives and be free from suffering.

Warmly, with deep bows

Tova

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