

Background and Profile

Stonewater Zen Sangha and Keizan Scott Sensei

Stonewater Zen Sangha is led by David Keizan Scott Sensei, a Dharma successor within the lineage of the founder of the Zen Center of Los Angeles, the Venerable Taizan Maezumi Roshi (1931-1995). Keizan Sensei is the UK and European representative to the White Plum Sangha, the international network of Soto Zen teachers within Maezumi Roshi's lineage. Keizan Sensei is also a widely published writer on Japan, Zen Buddhism, comparative religion and cookery. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Short History of Stonewater Zen Sangha

Maezumi Roshi's father, Baian Hukujun Koroda had been a prominent and well-connected priest in the Japanese Soto Zen Sect who introduced his son to the Rinzai master, Koryu Osaka Roshi. Maezumi Roshi received Soto Zen Dharma transmission from his father and went on to study under the Rinzai master, Nyogen Senzaki Roshi, and another Soto master, Hakuun Yasutani Roshi in the USA and Japan. He received *inka* (the final seal of approval) from both Yasutani Roshi and Koryu Roshi, and integrated *koan* study into his Soto Zen teaching methodology at the Zen Center of Los Angeles and Zen Mountain Center in Southern California.

Maezumi Roshi visited the UK several times, beginning in the early 1980s, when his Dharma successor, Dennis Genpo Merzel Roshi, agreed to lead *sesshin* in England several times each year, which he continued to do until the end of the 1990s. In the 1980s and 1990s Genpo Roshi built a strong core of experienced and committed Zen practitioners in this country, before withdrawing to focus on his work in the USA. With the support of David Keizan Scott (who was made a Dharma holder by Genpo Roshi), another of Maezumi Roshi's Dharma successors, Charles Tenshin Fletcher Roshi began leading *sesshin* in the north of England in the 1990s. A strong centre of practice for the British Sangha began to develop in Liverpool at the Stonewater Zen Centre, in Hope Street; and in 2009, Keizan received Dharma transmission from Tenshin Roshi.

Stonewater Zen Sangha today

Stonewater Zen Sangha has grown to include students from across the world, coming together for *sesshin* and training periods in and around Liverpool and the Lake District, or in their own local areas. The regular annual programme of events includes two weeklong *sesshin* near Crosby, Lancashire, a month long training period in the Lake District, concluding with a *shuso hossen* ceremony for the head monk, and number other retreats and events in Liverpool and nationally.

Keizan Sensei places particular emphasis on the importance of Sangha, encouraging students to work together to build a strong sense of community within their practice. Three Dharma holders and five assistant teachers assist him; and he maintains close links with Zen Mountain Center in California, where Tenshin Roshi is the abbot.

Stonewater Zen practice

Beginners are welcomed at Stonewater Zen Centre and its affiliated local groups, irrespective of their background. Experienced Zen practitioners readily offer guidance and instruction in *zazen*.

Students in Stonewater Zen Sangha may be lay practitioners or ordained monks. There are three levels of commitment to practise: *shoken*, *jukai* and *shukke tokudo*.

Shoken is a ceremony in which one formally enters the student / teacher relationship; the student makes a personal commitment to the teacher and the teacher to the student. The short shoken ceremony takes place in private during a 1:1 interview session with the teacher. If a student wants to do *shoken*, he or she must ask the teacher to accept her or him as a student, it is not something that the teacher will initiate.

Jukai is the taking of the Mahayana Buddhist precepts. In doing this, students take refuge in the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. *Jukai* is a student's formal acknowledgement of his or her intention to lead life according to the Buddha's teachings. Students usually undergo a period of study before the *Jukai* ceremony. *Jukai* is a personal and public commitment to aspire to follow the sixteen precepts at the heart of Soto Zen practice.

Shukke tokudo is ordination as a Zen monk. The expectation of those wishing to become monks is that they have a mature Zen practice and a strong personal connection with Keizan Sensei. *Shukke tokudo* is a serious commitment to serve and provide pastoral support to the wider Sangha.

In keeping with the methodology of Maezumi Roshi, Keizan Sensei encourages students to practise *zazen* as sitting in pure awareness (*shikantaza*) or to follow the White Plum Sangha curriculum of *koan* study, depending on their individual needs. In the koan system students will typically work through 200 introductory *koan*, followed by more advanced *koan* collections known as the *Mumonkan*, the *Hekiganroku*, the *Shoyoroku* and the *Denkoroku*, and then concluding with Tokusan's 'Five Ranks' and the Mahayana Precepts.

Working with a teacher is central to the practice of Zen in the Stonewater Zen Sangha and optional interviews in *Daisan* with Sensei or with his Dharma holders and assistant teachers take place during the regular classes at the Zen Centre or locally in London, Northampton, Kent and Ceredigion. Keizan Sensei is also willing to support more distant Sangha members by email.

Interviews are open to practitioners who attend classes regularly and who support the Sangha. They are brief, face-to-face encounters that provide an opportunity to discuss Zen practice and seek guidance from an experienced practitioner. Their intent is always supportive but, since the core of Zen is self-knowledge, they can also be questioning or challenging.

All Stonewater Zen *sesshin* include opportunities for private interviews, as well as Dharma talks, work and exercise periods and ceremonies (such as the collective chanting of the Heart sutra).

Full details of the training on offer and the central practices and methodologies of Stonewater Zen Sangha will be found on the website at www.stonewaterzen.org

For details of local groups in London and Northampton go to www.swz-northlondon.blogspot.co.uk and www.swz-northampton.blogspot.co.uk. For activities in Kent email steeltgs@aol.com.