

**From:** Zen Studies Society <office@daibosatsu.org>  
**Subject:** Zen Studies Society Sangha Discussion with An Olive Branch, August 26-28  
**Date:** August 4, 2011 7:11:19 PM EDT

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Dear Zen Studies Society Sangha,

Our weekend gathering with facilitators from An Olive Branch is just three weeks away, August 26-28. It is being held because Sangha members have requested a forum, a safe place to be heard, to heal, and to express their hopes for the future. We have all experienced a lot in the past year or so, and many positive changes have already been made. This important meeting will be a chance for us to face the past with courage and honesty, grateful for the Dharma gifts we have received, but also cognizant of the difficulties, challenges, and pain we have experienced. It will be an opportunity to acknowledge the present in all its complexity with discernment and sensitivity. And it will offer us all a way to work together to ensure a future that is healthy, strong, and responsible, manifesting the Four Great Vows.

In addition to the planned activities, there will be ample opportunity for Sangha members to interact informally. Throughout the day on Friday, An Olive Branch facilitators will meet with participants one-to-one. That evening, the facilitators will meet with the Board of Directors, and with anyone else who didn't have a chance to speak with them earlier.

Saturday will begin with a short morning service and zazen. After breakfast, there will be an overview of the discussion process and a presentation from An Olive Branch. Then we'll review a timeline of key events and decisions in the Zen Studies Society's history. This timeline will keep us all on the same page as to the events themselves, not just as we experienced them individually. We will all have a chance to reflect on the timeline, ask questions and provide input.

After lunch and a brief rest period, an adapted "Samoan Circle" will take place: an inner circle consisting of myself, the Board president, facilitators, and three open chairs, within an outer circle of Sangha members. Everyone will have an opportunity to take an empty chair in the inner circle when she or he wishes to speak. This will ensure that every person's views and feelings are heard and acknowledged, and will encourage deep listening by all. By honoring each other's different experiences, we can promote understanding and compassion. This will help us heal, and create a healthy new community.

Saturday evening, small group discussions will focus on how to move forward in building trust, responsibility, and harmony. Sunday, after morning service, zazen, and breakfast, we'll have a large group meeting to hear and synthesize the ideas from the small groups, and discuss action steps. The program will close with an informal lunch.

The gathering is free, but *dana* (contributions) to defray costs will be gratefully accepted. This weekend is for all of you who care about the Zen Studies Society and want to move forward in a positive direction. We want your voice; we want your energy and concern. I really hope you will be able to attend. Be sure to make your reservation now, since space is limited; email [office@daibosatsu.com](mailto:office@daibosatsu.com) or call 845-439-4566. If you can't attend, and would like to contribute your thoughts, please send them by email to that address, and they will be shared with the group. For more on An Olive Branch please [click here](#). If you would like to speak with the facilitators from An Olive Branch before the weekend, please contact [barbara@an-olive-branch.org](mailto:barbara@an-olive-branch.org).

Gassho,



Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat, Abbot, Zen Studies Society