



THE ZEN STUDIES SOCIETY  
DAI BOSATSU ZENDO KONGO-JI

SHINGE ROKO SHERRY CHAYAT ROSHI, ABBOT

August 5, 2011

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. Friday afternoon, 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 the opportunity to reflect on this timeline, ask questions and provide input.

After lunch and a brief rest period, an adapted "Samoa 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 go to the second page of this PDF. 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

An Olive Branch, a project of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh, is a facilitation and mediation organization dedicated to the resolution of disputes within spiritual and non-profit communities. With a strong Buddhist foundation, we bring the calming influence of a neutral third-party to sanghas, churches, and temples, to help them address those difficult situations that can rip spiritual communities apart. We share our expertise with groups dealing with clergy misconduct, changes in leadership, interpersonal strife or other difficult situations and conflicts. See <http://www.an-olive-branch.org>.

An Olive Branch has been hired to lead the Facilitated Sangha Discussion by the current Board of Directors of ZSS, which has legal decision-making authority for the Society. It is our understanding that the ZSS Sangha has been deeply wounded by the events of the past year. In order to facilitate healing within the Sangha and move past the fractures in the community, we intend to create a space in which the voices and feelings of all Sangha members can be heard and honored. In the true spirit of Sangha, we invite you to participate in this effort. Toward that end, we encourage each of you to bring two “gifts” with you: FIRST, a desire to share your heartfelt feelings about being a member of the ZSS Sangha, and SECOND, a capacity for deep listening to others whose experiences may have been very different from yours. We in An Olive Branch believe this is the best way for you to move forward as a community, and we will do our best to help. We will work within the context of the ground rules that we all set at the beginning of the discussion. Please note that this Facilitated Sangha Discussion is not an organizational meeting in which Sangha or Board business will be conducted.

If you would like to talk with An Olive Branch facilitators before the August 26th weekend or make an appointment to speak with us on August 26th, please contact Barbara Gray, [barbara@an-olive-branch.org](mailto:barbara@an-olive-branch.org).

Meet the team from An Olive Branch who will facilitate the discussion:

Dr. Barbara Gray serves on An Olive Branch’s Advisory Board, is a Professor of Organizational Behavior and directs the Center for Research in Conflict and Negotiation at The Pennsylvania State University. Dr. Gray, who is the project leader for the ZSS project, has 35 years of experience studying, intervening in and writing about conflict, negotiation, and multi-party collaboration. She has provided third party expertise and facilitation for numerous public, not-for-profit and private sector organizations around the world and offered negotiation and collaboration training to many others. She has received precepts as a Soto Zen student of Rev. Dai-En Bennage and serves as President of the Board of Mt. Equity Zendo in Pennsdale, PA.

Dr. Katheryn D. Wiedman serves on the Executive Team and Advisory Board of An Olive Branch and is our lead facilitation consultant. She is President of CenterPoint Institute, a consulting firm providing capacity-building services to nonprofit organizations and foundations since 1988. She has facilitated many strategic planning processes and other capacity-building projects; planned and executed national and international conferences, and conducted and reported on research projects for over 160 nonprofit organizations. Dr. Wiedman’s areas of professional expertise include management, strategic planning, facilitation, research, board development, project management, and volunteerism.

Rev. Kyoki Roberts, our founder, serves on the Executive Team and Advisory Board of An Olive Branch. She is our lead mediator and intake person. Kyoki is the Head Priest of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh, a Soto Zen Buddhist temple, has served as vice-chair of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, and chairs the SZBA Ethics Committee. Kyoki has been mediating disputes and facilitating non-profit boards for more than 25 years including 10 years as mediator and trainer for the State of Nebraska and Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska, and has offered a workshop on Difficult Conversations across the United States