

## Regular Practice Schedule

### Kansas Zen Center Monday thru Friday

6:00 to 7:00 am

### Saturday

6:00 to 8:00 am  
(kong-an interviews)

### Sunday

9:30 to 11:30 am  
(Beginner's introduction at  
9:00  
Dharma talk at 11:00)

### Wednesday

6:30 to 7:00 pm  
special chanting  
7:00 to 8:00 pm regular  
practice (kong-an interviews  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wed. of the month)

### Prairyerth Zen Center

Unitarian Universalist  
Fellowship  
4775 SW 21<sup>st</sup>, Topeka, KS  
785.478.3478 (Rebecca) or  
785.232.5958 (Bill)

### Tues. & Thurs.

6:00 to 7:00 am

### Thursday

6:30 to 7:30 pm  
(kong-an interviews first  
Thursday of the month)

### Kansas City Zen Group

Unity Church on the Plaza  
913.551.7792 (Bill)

### Tuesday

7:00 to 8:00 pm (kong-an  
interviews the first Tuesday  
of the month)



## Happy Birthday

Buddhist traditions from east Asia China, Korea, Japan — celebrate Buddha's birthday on April 8. People generally like to celebrate birthdays. Why not? After all, birth is amazing — suddenly this new person appears. It's totally miraculous. There they are, already who they are, already themselves. But it's not unalloyed joy. It hurts the mom like hell, maybe worse. And it's dangerous, for both mom and baby. Maybe it's not much fun for the baby either. Who knows? What the baby experiences, none of us remember. I remember the first time I saw a baby being born. I thought, "How can there be war in the face of this?" But of course there is war. Christianity holds up Jesus' birth as an icon of peace, but that doesn't stop anyone from fighting, except maybe on Christmas eve.

The stories about Buddha's birth exaggerate both the miraculous and the dangerous aspects of birth. First, the miraculous: Buddha's mother has dreams of a multi-tusked white elephant gently piercing her side. A sooth-sayer proclaims her baby will be either a great king or a great spiritual leader. As Queen Maya suffers birth pangs she leans against a tree which immediately develops lush foliage to shield her. Instead of a normal vaginal birth, Siddhartha is born from Queen Maya's side. And as soon as he's born he walks and talks — taking three or maybe seven steps in each of the four directions he says "in the heaven above and the earth below, only I am holy."

Now for the dangerous: Queen Maya decides not to give birth at home in the city

of Kapilavastu, but to travel to her parent's home in the nearby kingdom of Koliya. She doesn't make it, but gives birth while still travelling. And after eight days she dies.

There is something else about birth which people don't talk about much: it's inexorable. There's a strange contradiction here — nobody works as hard as a woman in labor, but she is in some sense just going along with a process that will happen anyway. She can't walk away from it once the process starts, no matter how much she wants to. She can't control what happens to her baby, whether it is born healthy or sick or even dead. She can't control what happens to her body. She can't control whether the baby is born quickly or slowly. But still she is working very, very hard, even though it hurts.

Not a bad metaphor for our lives.

Practice is like that also. When we start practice it usually feels pretty wonderful, but sooner or later we start being aware of the stuff we think we are escaping, the stuff Buddha called *dukkha*, usually translated as "suffering" but really more of a sense of unsatisfactoriness, of unease. At times this unease takes on cosmic proportions and seems unbearable. Early in my practice, I would want to run screaming from the room from sheer boredom — nothing big like anger or anxiety or fear, just boredom was enough to trigger the feeling that I would die if I sat there another minute. Of course I did sit there for more than another minute. In some sense, it is at this point that practice really begins.



### Regular Practice Schedule (cont.)

#### Tall Grass Zen Center

Manhattan, KS/785.537.8713  
(Margaret or Christina)

#### Tuesday & Friday

6:00 to 7:00 am

#### Wednesday

7:00 to 8:00 pm

Unlike a woman in labor, we may think we can, like Elvis, leave the building, but in fact we can't. We are in the grip of a process. We may think it begins with our birth and ends with our death; we may think we own this process and can control it; we may think this process is about us – but it doesn't, we don't and it isn't.

And even though this process is inexorable, it is very hard work. Practice is very hard work, but if we don't do some kind of practice we end up working even harder. The flip side of this is that practice is its own process, also inexorable. Sometimes our practice seems really clear, sometimes really spaced out, sometimes our personal obsessions take over – but whatever we think is going on isn't. If we are sincere, if we have great faith, great effort, and great question, then something happens no matter what the surface phenomenon happens to be. There's this great phrase, "by natural process," and that's exactly what it is, a natural process, like childbirth. Except, unlike childbirth, no baby appears, and there isn't a moment when we can say, "Okay, that's done."

So we leave baby Buddha, little Siddharta Gautama Shakyamuni, on the side of the road, in the arms of his mother. He's been bathed and swaddled. He's decided to stop walking and talking and go back to being just a baby. If you walked by at that moment you'd see a rich woman and her new-born surrounded by attendants. You might feel envy – oh, those people are so rich! You might feel compassion – how difficult it must be to give birth away from home! You might even be so caught up in your own stuff that you don't even notice – baby? What baby? In that moment a process has started that will go far beyond Buddha's life, that is still going on over 2500 years later. We are part of that process. So happy birthday Buddha, and thanks.

*Judy Roitman, JDPSN*

## Kansas Zen Center Special Events

### May 2, June 6, August 1 – Compass of Zen Class

12:00 pm - Kansas Zen Center (after regular practice)

### April 11 – Buddha's Birthday ceremony and Precepts ceremony

10:30 am – Kansas Zen Center

### April 13 – Public Dharma Talk by Judy Roitman JDPSN

7:00 pm – Lawrence Public Library  
707 Vermont St.

### April 22, 29, May 6 (Thursday evenings) – Foundations of Zen class

7:00 pm – Kansas Zen Center

### May 14-16 / 2 Day Retreat – Judy Roitman JDPSN

Retreat at KZC begins Friday at 6:30 pm and ends Sunday at 4:00 pm

### June 12 / 1 Day Retreat – Judy Roitman JDPSN

Topeka (location to be announced) – 9:00 am to 4:00 pm

### September 17-19 / 2 Day Retreat – Judy Roitman JDPSN

Retreat at KZC begins Friday at 6:30 pm and ends Sunday at 4:00 pm