



# IMPACT

## Fall 2021

For many of us, this is a season of being “in-between.” We’re not at the pandemic’s greatest intensity, and yet it continues to affect how we go about our daily lives. In the midst of uncertainty, we can say that some things remain essential: growing food to nourish bodies and community, widening access to the Dharma, and finding ways to be present with one another when physical proximity isn’t possible. In this report, we are heartened to tell you more about the multi-year impact of two of SFZC’s well-established programs, and a newer initiative making Suzuki Roshi’s teachings accessible around the globe. All of this is made possible by your generous support of San Francisco Zen Center.

In this issue, we share stories about:

- Green Gulch Farm & Garden apprentices bringing their skills to the world
- Suzuki Roshi’s teachings reaching a new Spanish-speaking audience
- SFZC’s hybrid (online + onsite) programs shaping the future of practice



SAN FRANCISCO ZEN CENTER

*Tassajara*  
*Beginner’s Mind Temple*  
*Green Gulch Farm*  
*Online Practice Center*



# GREEN GULCH FARM & GARDEN APPRENTICESHIP

## 27

### years training Dharma farmers



Wendy Johnson, Co-Founder of the Green Gulch Farm & Garden Apprenticeship Program

Wendy Johnson, the Co-Founder of the Green Gulch Farm & Garden Apprenticeship, often points out that farming at GGF didn't begin with the apprenticeship program; twenty years of Zen farming preceded it. In the 2002 *Wind Bell*, Mick Sopko wrote: "Green Gulch drew people who knew how to, or wanted to, work hard...People like Steve Stucky, John Coonan, David Cohn, Peter Rudnick and Emila Heller were among the pioneers who developed and refined our present field system." Virginia Baker, Sukey Parmelee, Katharine Cook, Wendy Johnson, and Skip Kimura carried their teachers' energy into the garden's present location.

By the early 1990s, Wendy and others wanted to offer more practitioners an introduction to the reality they were already experiencing, the one in which "farming and dharma were one fabric...a gate that swung both ways." In 1994, she and fellow GGF farmer Daniel Green helped to found the apprenticeship program, with input and support from the GGF community. Wendy recalls initially seeking apprentices who burned with an inner intensity, a fierce determination that would sustain them through the demanding schedule of both farming and meditating.

For six months of the growing season, apprentices learn organic gardening or farming methods, sit meditation, participate in Dharma classes and retreats, and become intimate with the interconnection of human, plant, and animal worlds. They also explore how food and farming relate to social justice and reciprocity, attending to the myriad ways they are not only sustaining but also being sustained by other beings. From the beginning, centering the voice of the more-than-human world has been integral to the program. For Wendy, the guiding question is: "When you hear that other voice, how will you respond to its call?"





In the pages that follow, you'll hear from former Farm and Garden apprentices responding to this and other inquiries in their own words. They have taken their experience at GGF to all parts of the country and into many different vocations. They are teachers, nurses, doulas, counselors, natural builders, public health researchers, parents, and founders of small businesses, including a bread bakery, a seed and flour-milling facility, a regenerative cannabis farm, and many others. They work in policy for environmental non-profits, sustainability for large-scale businesses, forestry and environmental permitting, and regenerative landscape design. Many met their future nonprofit- or business-partners at Green Gulch, or their spouses—or both.



A number of former apprentices are still directly involved with farmers and farming. Betzi Jackson (2013) wrote to us that she helped set up a Denver-area co-operative providing women who are growing food in their yards the opportunity to combine their produce to sell at farmers' markets. She is now in the process of co-founding a farm focused on food access and equity. Jack Thomas (2016-2019) is the Co-Director of Friends of Alemany Farm, a nonprofit dedicated to boosting food security and food justice among low-income BIPOC residents of San Francisco. Linda MacElwee (1996) told us she provides technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, and landowners in the Navarro River watershed, helping them implement climate beneficial agricultural practices and restoring salmonid habitat.



In early 2021, SFZC surveyed former GGF Farm and Garden apprentices to learn more about how the apprenticeship program has impacted their lives. We asked if and how it prepared them to establish or expand regenerative agriculture practices, engage in social justice and/or community-building activities, or offer healing to themselves or the world. Many responded with a big "YES!" to all of these activities, and almost all of the respondents described how one or more became central to their lives as a result of the program. We received too many thoughtful and eloquent responses to publish here, so please consider what follows as a small but illustrative sample.





Emila Heller, Farm Elder

**Patrick Cordrey** (1994): The apprenticeship set me on a course of learning and eventually teaching organic farming. I have been farming for 25(!) years now, which is hard to believe because it feels like it was just yesterday...It's been a very fulfilling career and I'm still learning!

**Erin Esaryk** (2011): Zen Center was a "spiritual emergency room" for me that helped me heal, relax, and realize my connection to other humans and the earth. The apprenticeship and other work at Zen Center helped me discover my deepest intentions, which led me to the work I do now [as a researcher focused on how food and housing insecurity impacts people's health].

**Bill Shultz** (2017): The farm apprenticeship was a life-changing experience. The opportunity to live in community, work the land, and deepen Buddhist practice gave me a set of skills and the confidence to engage my life fully. The hands-on experience with the earth, paired with practice, illuminated what for me feels like my work in the world--to restore and protect land in my daily life and career.

**Lily Petroff** (2017): The time was so formative for me. I think one of the strongest impacts GGF has had on me is in the way it has refined my sense of spirituality - it was through my participation in the GGF Social Justice group, and visits and talks given by angel Kyodo williams, Kazu Haga, and Wendy Johnson that really made me understand and believe that anti-oppressive work is deeply spiritual, liberatory work.

**Hava Glick-Landes** (2019): My experience at Green Gulch gave me a very embodied experience of the values of work as practice and "no gaining mind" that before were mere intellectual ideas. Because of my time at GGF, I was able to let go of the excuses I was making to not pursue this career path [as a teacher], such as: "It will be too hard," or "I'll try so hard to make a difference and probably nothing will change and I'll just get burnt out." I was able to realize that work is *dana* [generosity], that every day of effort is a gift I give the world no matter the outcome, we just try our best every day no matter what. This shift in attitude is exactly what I needed to put down my excuses and go actualize my calling.

Wendy's guiding question —  
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respond to the voice of the  
more-than-human-world?

The apprentices also shared many of their favorite memories, including washing compost buckets, sprinting in rubber boots to unclog sprinkler heads, taking naps under the apple trees, field trips to regional farms, and close encounters with birds, bobcats, and bees. Wendy's guiding question—how do we incorporate and respond to the voice of the more-than-human-world?—was and is still present for the apprentices, continuing to guide them in their work, practice, and deepest values.

In this spirit, we close with a memory from Samuel Senerchia (1998), "One time a big red-tailed hawk was caught in the fence, and I heard her longing to be free. I spoke to her and asked if I may help her find her way out. With great care I approached and took her up in my arms. She trusted me and was calm, so I trusted her, and together we found a way to open space where I opened my arms and she opened my heart. Such a gift to be so intimate with such a wild, powerful, beautiful being."



## SPANISH-SPEAKING SANGHA

**1000+**  
**beings engaging  
weekly with the  
teachings**



Sozan Miglioli, President of San Francisco Zen Center

When Sozan Miglioli became President of San Francisco Zen Center in January 2021, he brought his experience as a Zen Priest, former advertising executive, husband, and many other roles. Of his many identities, one in particular drew attention around the world: San Francisco Zen Center's President was now a native Spanish-speaker from Argentina.

"Here you pick up a stone and underneath there's a Zen Center—or at least a Zen student," Sozan joked in a recent interview. But in many parts of the world, including many Spanish-speaking countries, it's not easy to reliably access Zen teachers and traditions. He recognizes that his unique background allows him to serve as a bridge between Zen in the U.S. and the Spanish-speaking community around the globe eager to become more intimate with Zen teachings.

Sozan's approach to building connections across differences in language and geography is informed by his own trajectory as a Zen student. When he first encountered Suzuki Roshi's teachings at San Francisco Zen Center in 2013, he was struck by the warm expression of this practice and its intention "to meet people where they are." Today, still inspired by the meeting of warm hearts and warm hands, each week he offers several different programs that welcome Spanish-speakers to enter the practice whether or not they have previous experience with Zen or the ability to commit to it for the long term.



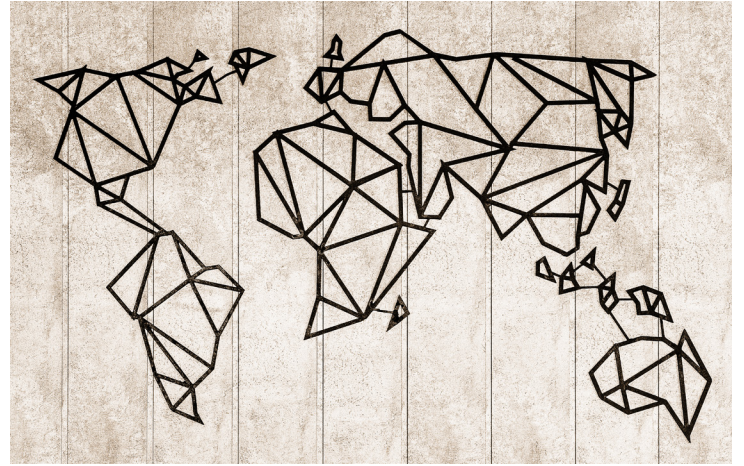


Sozan Miglioli, with students Tenzin and Juan Andrés

One program, [Zen Cotidiano](#) (which translates to “Day-to-Day Zen”), is an online platform and community that provides participants with the opportunity to explore a particular theme from a Zen perspective. Recent topics have included “Vivir en Armonía” (Living in Harmony) and “Ser en el Mundo” (Being in the World). The sangha spends a month engaging with each topic, meeting weekly online. The same program is offered twice weekly at different times to accommodate participants across various time zones. Each gathering begins with silent meditation, followed by a facilitated conversation that allows participants to reflect on how the theme relates to suffering, cultivating inner steadiness, and living in relationship with all beings.

In addition, Sozan posts almost daily a teaching, personal reflection, or new episode of his Podcast, *Palabras en el Camino*, on his [Instagram](#) account, to which more than 23,000 people subscribe and from which over 1,000 users download his podcast each month. He also sends a weekly e-newsletter with original content to over 1,000 recipients, using a secular approach to introduce Zen-inspired topics, including the human being’s potential for transforming suffering. Sozan has heard from some recipients of the e-newsletter that they wait all week to receive it and have had their lives profoundly changed by engaging in the conversation and community.

As a result of these and other efforts, seven Spanish-speaking Zen students from around the world (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, the U.S., Uruguay) are studying the precepts with Sozan this fall and winter. Many of these students intend to travel to the U.S. in early 2022 to receive Jukai at Beginner’s Mind Temple.



Their circumstances continually inspire him to find new ways to offer Spanish-speakers the opportunity to “to hold and grow in suffering, in order to go toward the cessation of suffering.”

When asked what motivates him to make these offerings, Sozan invoked his bodhisattva vows. His regular contact with family, friends, and Zen students living outside the U.S. has made him acutely aware of the challenging conditions many face, including living in complex social and political landscapes, not having access to COVID-19 vaccines, and failing to receive other needed support during the pandemic. Their circumstances continually inspire him to find new ways to offer Spanish-speakers the opportunity to “to hold and grow in suffering, in order to go toward the cessation of suffering.”

For Sozan, what has made these offerings possible is residential practice, the support of his teachers, and his ongoing learning at San Francisco Zen Center. The training and encouragement he receives at SFZC allows him to train and encourage others in their practice in return. As a result, Suzuki Roshi’s warm expression of practice is extending throughout the Spanish-speaking world.



# 8

## years offering hybrid (online + onsite) practice



Ryushin Paul Haller

Long before the pandemic, some SFZC teachers were offering hybrid programs—practice opportunities that include an onsite and online component—to allow Zen students to engage with the Dharma wherever they are located. Ryushin Paul Haller is one such teacher; he has been offering hybrid programs long enough (nearly eight years) to have observed his own thinking about them significantly evolve. He recently shared some of his learnings about hybrid programs and offered some surprising insights into how they may shape the future of practice.

Paul's original search for an online platform grew out of a desire to offer expanded practice opportunities to his sanghas in Belfast and Slovenia, and to provide additional continuity in between his twice-yearly onsite visits. Initially intending to open the online portion of a Beginner's Mind Temple practice period only to these remote sanghas, he ultimately decided to admit other Zen students. His assumption was that the participants residing in the San Francisco Bay Area would attend the onsite events. To his surprise, though, many students in the Bay Area chose to attend online. "That was an important learning for me," he said. It showed him "online is just a different modality that people will find appealing for different reasons."

That experience left him curious to better understand how technology can be utilized to support practice, an inquiry that remains alive in him today and shapes how he offers the Dharma. For the 2020 Tassajara Winter Practice Period, for instance, he offered an online version, launching the first hybrid Practice Period from SFZC's remote monastery. His classes often incorporate a combination of recorded lectures, home practice, online Q & A, and online small-group practice discussions.

“I’ve shifted my thinking of what Zen Center is,” he said. “I think of Zen Center as a web of connection of practitioners that has three physical localities but it also includes affiliated sanghas and many practitioners around the world.”



Technology plays a key role in how he solicits feedback: after a course, he will email a survey to his students, asking “What worked for you?”

What has he learned through this experimentation? He acknowledged that when he first started creating hybrid programs, he had a belief that the connection between teachers and students depended on an initial foundation of in-person intimacy. Experience, however, showed him otherwise. There were students in his classes from Sri Lanka, Europe, and Australia he had never met in person before, and he felt a genuine closeness to them. “This isn’t just an extension of what has already happened onsite,” he said. “This can have its own connectedness.”

This experience and others altered his notion of sangha, especially as physical location became less central to the experience of community. He offered the example of one of his students in Perth, Australia, a mother and television co-host, who gets up at 5am to practice before her kids go to school and her workday begins. He said, “You can live in Perth and feel like ‘I practice at City Center.’ ” This same student, as a result of her online experience, eventually traveled to Beginner’s Mind Temple (also known as “City Center”) to deepen her practice. Paul has known several international students who, after their participation in a hybrid program, traveled to the U.S. for a Tassajara practice period.

“I’ve shifted my thinking of what Zen Center is,” he said. “I think of Zen Center as a web of connection of practitioners that has three physical localities but it also includes affiliated sanghas and many practitioners around the world.” With hybrid possibilities abounding, he suggests that Zen practitioners will discover appropriate ways to spread the Dharma through an increasingly collective process: “Instead of the notion that ‘We’re here and we do this—and you can come and be a recipient of it,’ it’s ‘We’re all we. It’s all us. And we’re all doing this together.’”





Together, we engage and build community.  
Your support makes this possible.

Our minds and hearts express the fullness  
of our gratitude.

**Deep bow.**



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