



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

We have been having a mild winter in the Pacific Northwest; some days have already felt like spring with February just beginning. My 60th birthday party, Nov. 5th, was a grand success at our local Pippy's Café. Thank you all who attended and made it a festive event.

There were 25 people in attendance at Rohatsu Sesshin. Seishun as our Shika (host) managed the whole week with great skill. Daikan as our Dai-Tenzo (Chief Cook) assisted by Seiho and others made sure we were well fed. Ganko kept the pace going strong as our Jikijitsu (Time Keeper). Rinzan kept the beat as our Densu (Chant Leader). Sendo and Gavin kept us all lubricated as our Jishas (Tea Servers). Tendo ably attended my needs as Inji (Abbot Assistant). Josen kept the money flowing as our Fusu (Temple Accountant). Gavin did Jukai (Precept – Dharma Name Ceremony) on the morning of the eighth day along with Carole Folsom-Hill who renewed her Jukai vows and formally joined the Chobo-Ji sangha. You can read more on this ceremony later in this issue.

We had another great year-end Toya Party on December 13th, with some particularly great skits by Kyosei and



Rev. Paul Ashby. Our New Year's day Chant – Bell-Ringing – Potluck was also a success, opening the sutras, dispelling

delusions and refreshing our Great Vow to be openhearted in all our actions. Our community has been working closely recently with two organizations to help bring an openhearted response to this world of suffering: [Patacara](#), assisting, once a month, in a Teen Feed to youth and young adults struggling with poverty and homelessness in South Seattle, and with the [Faith Action Network](#) which works with multi-faith communities to support the building of a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

In the middle of January, I attended what I hope will become a yearly weeklong East Coast Rohatsu Sesshin at the new Blue Mountain Zendo in Andreas, PA. There were only 12 people in attendance, but what a strong group!



Several people had substantial breakthroughs into the depth of their True Nature. It was a very gratifying experience to be associated with such dedicated practitioners. Special thanks goes to Joriki Baker Osho for hosting this event.



Seattle Rohatsu Sesshin 2014

On January 31st we held an all sangha members meeting/council examining our practice environment, looking at what is working and what needs improvement. We had good attendance and received valuable input. Genko Ni-Osho will be summarizing what we have learned and will report to the wider sangha a summary of the thoughts and ideas generated.

In this issue of PMN you will find a listing for New Temple Posts beginning March 1st, a Board Report, a book review by Tendo, a Teisho transcription from Rohatsu Sesshin, and announcements for our upcoming Zen Intro Series, Building Skillful Means sessions for better communication, Spiritually-Based Gestalt Workshop, Domyo Burk Sensei's upcoming visit, Spring Intensive, Spring Sesshin and our **Annual Meeting April 12th, 11:30AM**. It is my hope that you will enjoy these and the other offerings in this issue.

Josen and I are about to embark on a journey to Germany sponsored by Monika Jion Winkelman that will include a four-day sesshin; we will return mid-day on February 15th.

With gassho,

Genjo



Building Skillful Means Precept Class Series Four Week Intro Series

Last year Chobo-Ji began offering classes in the ten grave precepts as a prerequisite for those preparing for Jukai, but open to everyone to attend. These classes are held on two consecutive first Thursdays prior to each weeklong sesshin.

Our discussions have been pretty lively as we explore what it means to live in accord with the precepts, and the challenges and paradoxes that arise when we bring these to bear on our daily lives. It is clear that a strong intention – our Bodhisattva vow to care for all beings – requires skillful means to fully manifest in our lives, and so we must make an effort to learn these skills as well.

Because interpersonal communication is such a huge part of our life together, the abilities to speak and to listen deeply are two of the most important skills to practice. Beginning March 12 Chobo-Ji will be offering the opportunity to learn and practice some simple techniques to deepen our speaking and listening as part of the precept class series. We will work initially with the chapter on Listening in Norman Fischer's book *Taking Our Places*, the same text being used for the precept classes.

The first two communications sessions will be led by Genko on Thursdays, March 12 and June 4, 7:30 to 9 pm, following the two-part precept classes in January and February, and in April and May.



The second meeting of our Precept Class facilitated by Genko Ni-Osho is scheduled for February 5 from 7:30 to 9 pm, at Chobo-Ji. We will be working with Norman Fischer's book *Taking Our Places*, (specifically the chapter on the precepts, which is about 40 pages long). Please bring materials for writing with you. If you are planning to take Jukai (formal acceptance of the Buddhist Precepts and path of practice) you must attend both classes of the series.

Of course drop-ins, whether beginners or senior students, are always welcome to these lively, informal discussions! The second series will be held on April 2nd and May 7th.

Spiritually Based Gestalt

with Leonard Shaw, MSW

Feb 7 & 8

Time: 9:30am-5:00pm

Fee: \$150-\$300 (sliding fee scale)
Sangha Members: 50% discounted fee

Participants will learn the blending of Eastern and Western psychology, to empower and educate themselves and others. (Some didactic materials and handouts will be provided to reinforce this learning.) The workshop is almost entirely experiential with exercises, art therapy, and Gestalt Therapy practices.

You will also learn:

- 1 How to transform medical issues into powerful consultants.
- 2 How to deeply heal traumatic experiences.
- 3 How to guide couples to a breakthrough when each thinks the other is avoiding a serious problem.
- 4 Three powerful communication tools for discussing loaded subjects.

Contact Leonard at 206-322-5785 for more information.

Starting Tuesday, February 10 we will begin our Intro to Zen series. These four weeks will cover the basics of Zen meditation and our different ways of practicing mindfulness at Chobo-Ji. Topics include the posture, breathing and mechanics of Zen meditation, walking meditation, sutra chanting, our tea service, our meal service during week-long retreats (sesshins) and the use of koans (Zen parables) in Zen. The Complete Series Schedule is, 2/10, 2/17, 2/24 and we conclude this series on 3/3.

Beginners and seasoned practitioners are all welcome. Classes are each Tuesday from 7:30-9:00pm. After the final class, participants are encouraged to attend the Sunday, March 8 half-day sesshin. Suggested donation for the series is \$40, which includes that mini-sesshin (all are welcome regardless of ability to pay). If you know of people who may be interested in Zen and meditation, please [give them this flyer](#) or post it at your local library or grocery store!

Domyo Burk Sensei

Please join Chobo-Ji sangha on Sunday, February 15, from 9 to 11:30am, for meditation and a talk by Domyo Burk Sensei, the abbot of Bright Way Zen Center in Portland, Oregon. There will be informal tea and conversation after the talk.

Domyo is a Soto Zen priest, ordained and given Dharma transmission by Gyokuko Carlson Roshi of Dharma Rain Zen Center. She is also the author of the recent new edition of *Idiot's Guides: Zen Living*.

Domyo's training at Dharma Rain gave her a profound respect for both lay and priest practice, and a passionate curiosity about how to inspire and support deep Zen practice in the midst of lay life. We look forward to sharing the morning with her. [For more event information click here to see the flyer](#). Please feel free to email, print and share the flyer with people who might be interested, in the event.

Qigong Practice

Chris Grabowski will be offering Qigong lessons for our sangha every other Saturday morning in the Chobo-Ji zendo starting February 21. (Naturally, this schedule will change during sesshins, as Chris gives evening lessons to all sesshin participants.) Chris teaches a deeply healing form of Qigong and will emphasize movements that are particularly beneficial for maintaining our wellbeing during the winter. Wear comfortable clothing.

Pay what you can afford to give (Chris wishes to share part of that dana with our temple).

Time: 9:30 to 10:30am.

Qigong dates prior to Spring Sesshin are:
Feb 21 and March 7

Ordination Fundraiser

Our Chobo-Ji resident, Jaye Seiho Morris, will be ordained as Unsui this spring. Congratulations to Jaye for the realization of his long-held dream, and congratulations to Chobo-Ji, also! Our Zen community will be deeply blessed by the ordination of such a dedicated and sincere follower of the way. Jaye recently moved his entire family to Seattle from the East Coast so that he could practice with us. It was a major change and commitment for them all. To help make Jaye's dream a reality, he could use a hand from us. The Sangha Relations Committee invites our practitioners to help Jaye to purchase his monk's robes. Our fundraising goal is \$1500. For those wishing to give, you can drop a check made out to Chobo-Ji in the donation bowl with Jaye's name on the purpose line so we know it's for his fundraiser, or follow this link to gofundme. Thank you for your support.



Gassho,
Sally Zenka

Spring Intensive

An intensive covers roughly the same time frame as the traditional temple kessei period, beginning with the first sesshin for that season and ending with the second. It's a time for concentrated study and practice. Chobo-Ji participants receive dokusan twice weekly between sesshins. Zenka says, "I'm deeply grateful for how supportive regularly doing the intensives are to my practice and highly recommend them."

Chobo-Ji's Spring Intensive will start March 8th with mini-sesshin, and conclude on June 26th. The purpose of the intensive is to give students the maximum opportunity to release entanglements by giving one's self to the Dharma.

To participate one must commit to:

- 1) ZAZEN: Five hours of zazen per week, most, if not all, mini-sesshins, and attend two weeklong sesshins full-time (or nearly full-time) during the intensive. This is the most important ingredient of the intensive.
- 2) Do a minimum of five hours of samu (working meditation - gardening or cleaning) per week. Most of these hours can be in your own home, garden or community, but at least one should be at the temple.
- 3) Read one book of your choosing from the Chobo-Ji Bookstore and write a review of what you have read.
- 4) Keep a journal about your practice, at least one paragraph per week, and email a minimum of one paragraph per week each Friday to Genjo Osho on how the intensive is working on you.
- 5) Come to Dokusan at least once a week or if out of town try and schedule a Skype video call with Genjo Osho.



New Posts

Beginning March 1st

Scott Ishin Stolnack
Shika (Host - Manager)

Dee Seishun Endelman
Tom Shodo DeGroot
Edwin Kyosei Beatty
Tenzo (Sesshin Cooks)

Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik
Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

John Daikan Green
Anne Sendo Howells
Steve Ganko Hanson
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Jay Seiho Morris
Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Ralph Muzan Leach
Sally Zenka Metcalf
Inji (Abbot Assistants)

Carolyn Josen Stevens
Fusu (Accountant)

Steve Ganko Hanson, John Daikan Green,
Sogetsu Hernandez, Anne Sendo Howells,
Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sally Zenka Metcalf
Introductory Zazen

Spring Sesshin

March 20th - 27th

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a **deposit and application** by **March 15**, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. Please drop it by or mail it.

The cost of sesshin is \$250 (less dues). Sesshin will start Friday evening, 3/20, 5:30PM with informal supper, introductions and orientation. Sesshin from Saturday to the following Friday runs from 5am - 10pm. We provide sleeping accommodations for those traveling from out of town (**an additional \$10 per night**); please bring a sleeping bag, toiletries, sitting clothes, work clothes and a towel.

Mumonkan

Case 38

A Buffalo Passes Through

Fifth Day Rohatsu Sesshin, 2014

Koan: Goso said, “To give an example, it is like a buffalo passing through a window. Its head, horns and four legs have all passed through. Why is it that its tail cannot?”

Mumon’s Commentary: If you can penetrate to the point of this Koan, open your Zen eye to it, and give a turning word to it, you will then be able to repay the four obligations above and help the three existences below. If you still cannot do so, work with the tail single heartedly until you can really grasp it as your own.

Mumon’s Poem

*If it passes through, it falls into a ditch;
If it turns back, it is destroyed.
This tiny tail,
How extremely marvelous!*

As this is the Fifth Day, we’ve passed over the peak of Rohatsu Sesshin, and most of us have had a chance to do some samadhi cruising, floating gently atop the waves of thought, feelings and sensations. In deep samadhi we are able to dip our keel into the deep, slow, still waters that we call “The Absolute,” and vocalize in Zen as “Mu.”

If we’re not yet in samadhi by this point, it’s probably because there’s a whole lot of composting that needs to be done, which is totally okay. Composting, combusting and releasing our inner turmoil is often a prerequisite to samadhi. If you’re making the effort to simply be here in this room, show up and stay with the breath, that’s all that is needed. If you’re flooded with material that’s complex and feels oppressive and annoying, please know I’ve often felt the same. Been there done that, sometimes sesshin after sesshin with only little glimpses of my head above water. A sesshin where so much time is spent composting and combusting can feel very frustrating. Nevertheless, such a sesshin can be very productive. Even a little spaciousness may invite a flood of old material that we’ve collected in the course of our complex life. This is how it is sometimes, and we must

learn to be grateful for the opportunity to sit here using our breath as a kind of furnace to combust old material as it surfaces. It’s not pleasant, but it needs to be done. Use the breath to burn through or digest everything and anything that feels problematic. This work is its own kind of samadhi... Compost Samadhi (laughter).

Some people at sesshin will alternate between a vast spaciousness and Compost Samadhi. This, too, is okay, nothing wrong with it. Spacious Samadhi helps the artificial walls between conscious and unconscious, self and other, fall away. Then anything that’s been stuck in our unconscious may rise to the surface and then we may have to give over to Compost Samadhi. Alternating back and forth between these two kinds of samadhi may prove to be a very productive sesshin for cleaning out closets of old material.

It is possible to do a sesshin where you start to coast, rather than cruise. And I highly advise against coasting. That is really a waste of time and is very different from cruising. After a few days our bodies have learned how to do sesshin and it’s not a terrible burden anymore, we’ve gotten used to it. Now able to roll with the punches, we may let ourselves daydream and run movies in our head, saying, “Well, what’s the next movie I should play?” It’s like sitting on our couch at home with a DVD player deciding which DVD from our collection to start up; this is where we start to coast. (laughter) We have plenty of time to be a couch potato elsewhere in our life. Sesshin is too rare and precious an opportunity to waste it being a couch potato.

If you’re tempted to coast, make a concerted effort to step out of your cocoon of self. Switch channels from your movies or fantasies to one of the core koans such as, “What is this?”, “Who is asking?”, “Who is sitting here?” Initially when we

ask, “Who’s sitting here?”, we get some superficial answers like “This physical form.” or “This identity with a name.” or “This person who has such-and-such a family life with a specific family of origin, genetic background and personality type.” We are definitely selling ourselves short if we define ourselves by our vocation, rank, talents and limitations, successes and failures. These ways of defining our self are very boring (laughter) and limited. Now that you’re loosened up, in a more vulnerable and pliable condition, if you press on with your investigation of who is sitting here, you’ll realize that you are much more than you ever thought. You are not just a person of a certain age, genetic composition and personal history. You are so much more. If it’s true that the greatest delusion is that we are separated individualities, then sitting here on the cushion it shouldn’t be too difficult to feel yourself seamless with the earth, even with the whole cosmos and beyond.



One good way to start a natural samadhi is to sit just like a mountain – be a mountain sitting on the cushion. That’s one reason robes are nice, whether ordained or lay robes, when worn they can help you feel like a mountain atop a cushion. There’s the foothills [pointing to his knees], here’s the peak [pointing to the top of his head]. A mountain is well planted and rooted in the earth, and seamless with the whole planet. If you can sit like that, the distinctions between you, a mountain and the whole earth become as transparent as the distinctions between your nose, face and the rest of your body. Sitting here like a mountain planted in the earth, it is not difficult to realize that you are seamless with the whole planet.

You might think being a mountain is just using your imagination, but imagination is a great place to start to free your mind from the shell of our ego identity. With your

mind's eye, even if you are not looking out the window...everybody close your eyes for a moment...with your mind's eye, everybody should be able to look out that window right now. Just see this room, see everybody in this room, for me and the altar behind me. With my eyes closed, with my "imagination," I can see—my mind can fly to any corner of this room and see everyone in it and look out the window. It's not magic, it's not special, but it is amazing that the mind can shift perspective and not just be limited to looking out our eyeballs. Imagination falls short of reality, but it is a great tool, use it.

When we listen to a beautiful symphony, we're taken away, right into the music. When we see a beautiful painting, we're taken away, right into the painting. Our mind's eye is free to roam, not just in this room, but over the entire planet and over the whole universe. Our "mind" is seamless with that dimension of the universe called Mind with a capital "M." I'm not making it up. Everyone has this capability to fly! Haven't you ever flown in your dreams? From a Zen perspective, all of reality is but a dream, like a bubble in a stream. You are probably aware that I'm a pilot so I know exactly what this beach looks like from the air, from 1000, 2000, 5000 feet up, but I don't need the experience of being a pilot to be able to see this location from up there. I can fly with my mind's eye and so can you, there's nothing magical or special about it. I can fly with my mind's eye right up to a satellite view of Puget Sound and I don't have to stay orbiting around the planet. I can go out to Mars, Saturn or Jupiter. And I love the view of stepping out of the galactic plane and looking at this galaxy of several billion stars, crossing an expanse of over a hundred thousand light years, our sun being one little dot in the Milky Way, just like the pin points of light which we could see the



other night. And you could say, he's just imagining it. Well, try it for yourself, fly a little!

Don't be a couch potato watching old movies. You're welcome, as long as you keep one foot in this zendo, to fly over the whole universe, see its past, present and future. And who is it that can do that? You want to know what it's like to be a bear, tiger, fox, orca or an eagle? Try it out! It's not just imagining, but it begins there. Where do you think true insight comes from? Often it starts with a little imagination. When he was a young man, Einstein imagined what it would be like to ride a light beam, and from that came his insight about special relativity. You probably all saw the blue heron walking slowly through the Puget Sound, in cold, still waters. In slow kinhin (walking meditation) our slow steps are a lot like those of the blue heron, and it's not as difficult as you might think to look through the heron's eyes, fox's eyes, orca's eyes. Try it out!

I had a dream the other night about Hitler here at sesshin. At this point in sesshin, it's a whole lot easier to see through Hitler's eyes, Gandhi's eyes and the eyes of our Zen ancestors. By the middle of sesshin, Rinzai, Mumon, Joshu all become much clearer. We have all been beaten up, tenderized, by the rigors of sesshin, making us more flexible, pliable and dynamic. Don't you feel it? I suspect everyone is more sensitive and perceptive. Can't you sense each person more intimately? I think you all feel that you know me more intimately and I know you more intimately. I mean we sense each other's quirks, idiosyncrasies, strengths and limitations. Even looking in the mirror, we are able to see our own foibles and strengths. Even though we're barely speaking to each other, we know each other more intimately. And why? It's not a magic trick; it's not just our imagination. The artificial barriers between self and other on the fifth day of sesshin are worn thin and we can feel each other much more directly. Each of us is a node in a net; we are all interconnected and interdependent. Each one of us is entirely unique, but also totally connected to each other, and in the middle of sesshin we begin to recognize each other as different nodes in one fabric. Is this just imagining or is it for real? I have no doubt that we know each other better, so it's real.

I said on the first day that in samadhi you'll start to "hear" the silence or stillness within each note of this Symphony of Now. Shorten that up. You'll start to feel the

Presence. When we're standing on the beach, I hope you feel the Presence of the water, the Presence of the trees, the Presence of the buildings on the property and the interior Presence of each of us. I don't know how to better point at it, but I hope you're feeling the Presence at this point in sesshin. And, if you're not, if you're putting in DVD's, take them out and hear the Presence. It's subtle but it's there. Feel the Presence of the standing trees, of the blue heron walking in the cold water, of the gently washing waves. There's a wonderful *jisei* poem by a woman Zen master. I wish I could remember her name, but it goes something like this:

*No more questions about the moon.
Standing among the trees
Listening to their voices
When there is no wind.*

She's talking about the Presence which transcends life and death; it has no beginning, no end and *is* the manifestation of everything seen and unseen. All this is just another way of saying Muuuuu.

Zen Master Goso said, "To give an example, it is like a buffalo passing through a window. Its head, horns and four legs have all passed through. Why is it that its tail cannot?"

This is a simile and the buffalo is a stand-in for THIS, all manifestations of reality. The window is one of those big Chinese windows, seen in some Chinese restaurants. It's really a big circular door, and it would be easy for a buffalo or ox to pass through the door. Material things pass through open doors easily. Goso says, the whole buffalo (all of manifestation) can easily pass through the door, its head, horns, legs and torso easily pass through. Yet, he goes on to say, "But the little tail cannot. Why is it that the tail cannot?" So the tail must be a stand-in for something. There are a couple of ways of looking at this tail. Either way invites some valuable insight. You can look at the tail as being that little part of yourself called the ego identity. Why can't the ego identity easily pass through? A more traditional, powerful way to look at it is that the tail is a stand-in for the Absolute/ Presence/Mu or the Root of all Manifestation. So, why can't the tail pass through?

Continued on next page...

In Zen, we say from an Absolute perspective, there's no life and death, there's no coming and going, there's nothing to do, nothing to attain, nowhere to go, it has no beginning or past, nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess. This is all true when looking at things from the Absolute perspective. Of course, if you look at the very same reality with a discriminating or relative lens, all these truths are turned upside down! Which way is up?

This is a fun koan, "Why can't the tail pass through?", but many people have told me they hate it. If you say the tail can pass through, it falls into a ditch and is destroyed. If you say the Absolute can pass through, it is sullied. If the Absolute is something you can name, codify, describe or define it's fallen into a ditch. And if it goes back it is destroyed. Deeply investigate this simile and you will likely arrive at several helpful insights into the nature of reality. But if you settle for not investigating, "It's just a stupid question," your own potential for deep realization takes a hit. With great determination, investigate why can't the tail pass through. "This tiny tail, how extremely marvelous!" "If you can penetrate to the point of this Koan, open your Zen eye to it, and give a turning word to it, you will then be able to repay the four obligations above and help the three existences below." You can read the footnotes about the four obligations to your parents and nation and such, and the three existences, desire, form and formlessness. If you are able to determine why the tail cannot pass through an open window and give a Turning Word, when your response is simple, obvious and confident, then you can better meet your obligation to the Great Vow, to have a caring, open heart towards all creatures great and small, animate and inanimate. In addition, you will find that you can live your life with more freedom, less worry, less feeling burdened, less needing to get ahead, less needing to be secure. So, it's worth the investigation to come to your own realization of why the tail cannot pass through.

Someone said in Dokusan this morning that we should have Zen Improv Classes (laughter). That's not a bad idea! Improvisation is needed to approach koans without dependence on words and letters and philosophical formulations. It's not that

philosophical understandings of the relative and the absolute nature of reality aren't fun to play with, but we need our minds and hearts to be more flexible than just playing with philosophical baubles.

Checking koans are the subtle twists inside most cases. For example, "What is the gender of the Buffalo?" You might be tempted to say, "It's either male or female," and I'd say, "2% of the answer," or you might say, "It's both male and female," and I'd say, "Better, about 25%." You can say, "neither," and I'd say, "Another 24%," but you'd still be missing the big picture of this simile. If it's neither male or female, nor both male and female, what is it? Quick!

Many times coming to dokusan you try something and my job is to eliminate it. (laughter) My biggest tool is negation. I might say, "Is that all?," "Go sit some more," "Putting that aside..." "Go a little deeper," or just simply ring the bell. If you haven't turned a koan over many times, you haven't really looked at it thoroughly. We get confused because our discriminating mind is looking for *the* answer. There are always many ways to respond to the same koan, and often these responses on the surface

can sound completely opposite to each other. After a while, as we begin to see the whole picture, our minds literally become more free to juggle what we call the relative and absolute at once. This flexibility of mind allows us to be more capable in our everyday lives. This flexibility and depth of understanding allows us to be more caring, productive, creative and certainly less worried, fearful, and burdened.



"If you still cannot do so, work with the tail single heartedly..." so that you can become more skillful at dipping into your own depths, your capability for true insight. We are all well practiced and skillful in using

our rational faculties. Every one of us excels in deduction and discrimination. We may not have taken a course in logic, but we're all great at it. No one in this room needs a course in discrimination or critical thinking. We tend to categorize almost everything and try to find formulas on how this is connected to that. Even if there is little direct association or correlation, we often lump things together! We make these connections all the time. Oftentimes we are right, sometimes we're wrong, but we love to make connections! Our brains excel at making connections.

But we're not so bright at inviting insight. Insight needs to be cultivated, experienced and then tested. We test our insights by living life. If they work, we keep them. If they don't, we throw them away. If an insight is bench testable, a scientist formulates a hypothesis and tests it experimentally. If our insight is about something other than the workings of physical reality, we must test the insight through life experience.

But where do insights come from? I don't know, but I do know that sesshin makes us vulnerable and raw enough to have new insights. How do we invite insight? First we need to relax, let go and let be. We don't make insights, they freely bubble up when we are open and ready. In all likelihood, everyone is a lot more relaxed about his or her life. It's not nearly as troubling as you thought, is it? (laughter) At this point in sesshin, everything starts to become more relaxed and clear and that's when insight can start to flow. Koans are like can openers or door knockers to our inner heart-mind. In time, insights start to bubble up. However, insights still need testing. Some can be tested in the Dokusan room, others on a scientific bench, still others will need to be tested in daily life.

Sometimes, like our formulations, our insights are off, too. But very often, they are right on target! Over time, I'm really learning how to trust my insight over my instincts for survival and I'm much happier for it.

This teeny tail! How extremely marvelous! A Zen Master said, "This teeny tail, you may describe it but in vain; picture it but to no avail. When the world collapses, It is indestructible!" Now when you apply that

verse to the Presence I was talking about, “You may describe it but in vain; picture it but to no avail. When the world collapses, the Presence is indestructible!”

Zen Master Dogen wrote, “This world is but the tail of a buffalo passing through a window. The tail is the Mind that knows neither passing nor not passing.” Master Esai, who first introduced Zen from China to Japan said, “The True Mind has no form. It’s impossible to measure how high the sky is yet the Mind soars above it. It’s impossible to fathom how deep the earth is yet the Mind plunges further than that. It is impossible to surpass the light of the sun and the moon yet the Mind goes beyond it. How boundless is this Mind?” So, if you’re sitting here watching DVD’s, you are really missing out! (laugher)

Master Hakuin says of the tail, “Always the same is the moon before the window (the moon is a stand-in for the tail and the absolute), yet if there is only a plum branch, it is no longer the same. He who attaches himself to words is lost. He who abides in letters is ignorant.” If we’re stuck in our logical, sequencing mind, our discriminating definitions of this and that, our formulations of what’s right and wrong, or our philosophical baubles, we are lost and we will remain in ignorance.

Listen, please, for the Presence. Disappear into it, if you can. You may find yourself disappearing into Nature. You may find yourself sitting atop a sublime peak, the only person on the planet. Or you may find yourself in the vast Void out of which all This arises, before the Big Bang. Finally, you may find yourself sweeping the floor or chopping vegetables with deep open heartedness and peace of mind. Don’t waste a precious moment of this sesshin.

With gassho,

Genjo



Winter Board Report

by Scott Ishin Stolnack
President, Chobo-Ji Trustees

Here is a short list of some of the topics the Chobo-ji Board has been processing:

Clergy statement. The Board received a letter from Michael Hull objecting to our statement in the last issue of Plum Mountain News characterizing his actions as misconduct. The Board and the Ethics & Reconciliation Committee stand by our statement. Yet the situation has made us realize that we do not have a grievance procedure in place to make sure people have an opportunity to be heard if they feel wronged by our decisions. The Board has asked the Ethics and Reconciliation committee to research and recommend a grievance procedure. When the Board approves a new procedure and puts it in place, we will offer Michael a chance to use it.

Prison ministry. The Board has been working with Genko Ni-Osho to process a request from a formerly incarcerated sex offender to practice at Chobo-ji. There are no immediate plans to bring former offenders to Chobo-ji. Genko and volunteers from Chobo-ji and other Buddhist groups are arranging an alternate offsite practice location.

Deepening practice at Chobo-ji. Our first priority as a Board is to support a safe and wholesome practice for our sangha. To support this priority, Chobo-Ji held a Community Council at the Zendo on January 31. The purpose of this Council was to explore how we can hold and strengthen a nurturing and wholesome community. A number of Board members were present, and the meeting was very useful and positive. We will process what we heard and report back to you. If you have thoughts on this matter please let us know – talk to me, another Board member, Genjo or Genko.

Membership. Our goal is to have a broad and engaged membership. A broad membership brings in ideas and energy and strengthens our sense of community, and financially supports the Practice Center. The Board recently approved an update to our bylaws to more clearly articulate our membership process. Stay tuned for more information coming soon.

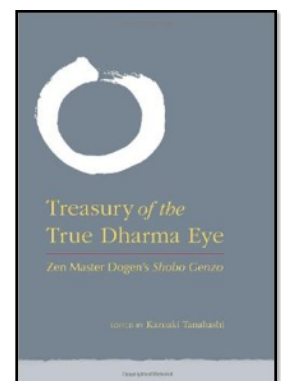
Rohatsu at Camp Indianola. The operators of Camp Indianola recently modified their fee structure, which will mean a very large increase in the cost of renting our usual buildings for Rohatsu sesshin. After surveying the membership and after much thought and debate, the Board voted to continue renting the same buildings for Rohatsu 2015, with fundraising and a fee increase to offset the higher charges. Much went into this decision. During the coming year we will work on fundraising and creating an appropriate fee structure, as well as exploring a path forward for a venue for future Rohatsus.

Annual meeting. The Chobo-ji annual members’ meeting is Sunday, April 12, at 11:30 am after the mini-sesshin. At this meeting the members hear an update on the Board’s work and elect the Board of Trustees. Trustees are on two-year terms: about half of us are up for re-election this year. We hope you can attend.

Center finances. At our January meeting the Board reviewed our financial status for 2014 and passed a budget for 2015. The Center ended 2014 in good financial health, with a positive cash flow. We have a solid budget for 2015 and continue to operate within our means. Thank you to all who support the good work of Chobo-ji.

Shobogenzo Reading Group

January 29th was the initial meeting for the Shobogenzo reading group. You will find upcoming topics some Thursdays over the course of the year in the [temple Google calendar](#) and in the weekly email bulletin. Please join as you can in exploring this comprehensive brilliant text by Zen Master Dogen.



Endless Vow

Review by Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick

"In the United States and also in China, all we can do is conduct this great sesshin [Rohatsu]. This, I believe, is the essential of essentials. Zazen, kinhin, zazen, kinhin. ." (p.87)

It snowed the night before Rohatsu but, as seems to so often happen here in Seattle, that weather system moved right through and it became clear and cold for most of next week. The traces of snow that remained by nightfall froze and persisted throughout that week which had the byproduct of causing one to be extra mindful when walking out of doors. Rohatsu was held at a retreat center right on the Puget Sound which this week was calm with only barely audible gentle swells disturbing its surface. Across the water and a fair piece of the mainland the Cascade Mountains, pure with fresh snow, provided a broken horizon for the cold rays of the late autumn sun to illuminate. A few days into sesshin, during outdoor kinhin under the icy blue sky, I recalled the following haiku by Sōen Nakagawa:

*Clearness!
sky and water
reflecting my heart* (p.52)

I had brought [*Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Sōen Nakagawa*](#), with me to Rohatsu to read during spare moments. There weren't too many of these, but every so often something would strike me and I'd flip through the book for a corresponding passage or poem almost like a capping phrase to that event. The book was fresh in my mind as it was my text for the Autumn Kessei which I had begun reading during Autumn Sesshin. It seemed fitting to return to it during Rohatsu and just as in the previous sesshin moments in my practice and in the life and poems of Sōen Nakagawa would momentarily align.

Endless Vow is a collection of excerpts from Sōen Nakagawa's journals, letters and

published poems and there are quite a few long gaps when either he wasn't writing or the material had been published elsewhere. The picture it gives is fragmentary and very personal: clearly not something he'd written with publication in mind. The loose strands are threaded together by a long biographical introduction from Eido Shimano, who was a dharma heir of Sōen Roshi. Shimano paints a picture of an introverted loner driven to practice who chaffed against the rigidity of the Japanese monastery system. In his biographical sketch Eido Shimano writes:

Sōen Roshi's independent spirit, creativity, and aesthetic sensitivity were extremely attractive to me as a young monk, and I fell in love with him, as did his American students. (p.21)

In America, we delighted in calling him untamed; in Japan, they called him untrained, and some turned away from him." (p.24)

I connected strongly with Sōen Roshi's reverence for the poet-monks of Japan, his many solitary retreats, his penchant for



travel and his devotion to Bassui. I had just this summer past spent two months bicycling in the mountains of the Cascades and Sierras sitting zazen at sunrise and sunset and contemplating the sayings of Bassui presented in [*Mud & Water*](#). Like Sōen Roshi the wandering poet-monks are a profound influence on myself and while we travel in different worlds the nature of my travelling has brought me closer to them

and reading them has influenced my travels. I write my own minimal poems on my wanderings, because I find in a few words a way to express things that I can't otherwise say.

*Endless is my vow
under the azure sky
boundless autumn* (p.70)

But if there really is one aspect of Sōen Roshi's character that defined his life it was his dedication as manifested through his many vows. In contrast to his unconventional, rebellious and wild nature that seems to reinforce that, if not exclusively American, *particularly* American emphasis on individuality, vows instead constrain ones actions. "On October 3rd [1931] I made a vow to live on one meal a day, following the Buddhist scripture. This has resulted in a new-day clarity and expansiveness in my life." (1, p.52) This was an additional restriction to an earlier vow he had made to only eat nuts, seeds and raw vegetables. Placing these sorts of constraints upon his life, along with other such vows as walking barefoot around a mountain, chanting a text some large number of times and actively encouraging and praising others in such dramatic life-modifying ways, stands in contrast to romantic notions of the rebellious wanderer. As I took Jukai during Autumn Sesshin, which *is* a public vow that we Western followers of the way make, I spent much time contemplating vows and how serious of a matter are they. How many of us take these vows in the spirit that Sōen Roshi did?

*Vow fulfilled
I enter the disk of the sun
this autumn day* (p.128)

Another of Sōen Roshi's great vows was to spread the Dharma around the world and especially to establish an International Zendo, a "place where true Dharma friends can gather from all over the world, a place not limited to just Buddhism or Zen" (1, p.63). By the late 1960s, with related Zendos in Hawai'i, Jerusalem, New York City, London, Cairo and International Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-Ji in upstate New York he had fulfilled this vow. Much of his later years had been spent in this effort. This

great vow of Sōen Roshi's through which he worked so hard planting seeds is truly an *endless* vow. The seeds must be spread but then they must be nurtured. Sit after sit I pondered this koan, coming to the understanding that while I may not have the missionary zeal of Sōen Roshi, I am compelled to nurture it lest it grow fallow. And at this moment of Zen in the West nurturing is perhaps what is truly needed. In January 1973 one month before I was born he wrote:

*Great bodhisattvas
small bodhisattvas
together begin the Ox Year* (p.137)

Sōen Roshi's later days were marked by a head injury and increasing isolation. His journals became equally terse with some years only containing an entry regarding the year's poetic theme and his attempt to realize it. "Sōen Roshi always said he admired "plain, natural and direct behavior," but he was such a complicated, indirect, and convoluted person." (p.45) This comment from Eido Shimano is perhaps the most vital lesson to be found herein. Sōen Nakagawa was a Zen Master in the contemporary era and his complicated nature was right here for everyone to see; the rough edges hadn't been smoothed away by time as with the ancient masters. This renders him approachable, his experiences attainable. Their flaws are a gift of the contemporary masters, allowing us to see ourselves as imperfect, complicated, and multifaceted as we are, in them.

*Autumn light
fills the room
vacancy* (p.111)

On the sixth day of Autumn sesshin I felt strangely joyous and filled with light during the later morning sits. There was a beam of sunlight coming in behind the altar that caught the incense smoke which was swirling in these absolutely mystical eddies. I was completely transfixed by this until the complex edges (where the fascinating bits always are) drifted away and it was just smoke particles dancing in the light.

Death Poem

*Mustard Blossoms!
There is nothing left
to hurl away* (p.137)

60th Birthday Poem

by Dee Seishun Endelman



There he is

Walking the dark path

His robes spread like wings

His feet splayed and determined

His driving cap for winter

Australian hat for summer

His brown eyes softer each season

Like an innocent

Which is to say an ancient

Who has bloodied himself on towering brambles

And now sits in the simple flower garden

Even when on the move.

He leaves hardly a trace these days

But don't tell him that!

He wants to be left to the path

Conversing with the 10,000 things.

This letter is to express my desire to formally become a member of the Chobo-Ji community... In recent years when I returned to practice with the community, it was a pleasant experience to recognize several faces. Each time I return to Chobo-Ji I experience an increasing sense of belonging and connection within the sangha...

After many years of service in and following the Christian path, this process has served me most especially by discovering the courage to relinquish my fear of publicly acknowledging I no longer accepted the tenets of Christianity and wished to follow the path of Zen Buddhism. I have found along the way more self-consistency with my values of integrity, authenticity, compassion and notice less anger and more peacefulness in daily life...

Chikyo, my current dharma name, means "mirror of wisdom." It reminds and motivates me to realize that I am a mirror for others to discover their wisdom and honors my own wisdom manifested in this chosen path. I would like to retain this dharma name also as a reminder of my connection to the Prajna Mountain Order and the Zen Peacemaker Order. An addition to the dharma name symbolizes for me the coming together of the Soto and Rinzai traditions, both of which hold for me significance in my journey.

Carole's new Dharma Name is Mu-Chi-Kyo: Empty Wise Mirror.



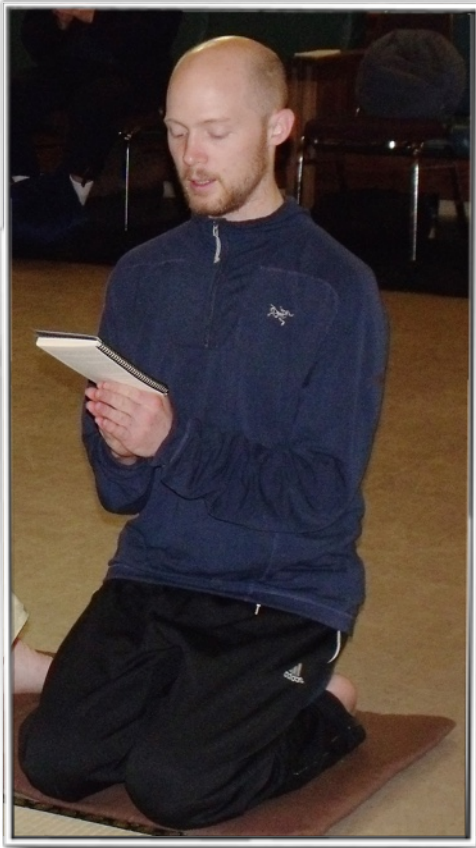
Jukai Ceremonies

On the morning of Dec. 7th, 2014, the final day of Rohatsu Sesshin, Carole Folsom-Hill and Gavin Mackay formally accepted the Buddhist precepts and received a Dharma Name. Carole has had twenty-year association with Genjo, but it was during a two year chaplaincy training program directed by Roshi Joan Halifax that she first did Jukai and received the Dharma Name Chikyo. She writes:

Continued on next page...

Gavin began practicing Zen a few years back. He writes:

I came to Zen because I needed help. I had been suffering from multiple physical ailments that impeded my daily activities... I met doctor after doctor but to no avail... Now that we have the sob story out of the way let's get to the success story! I'm still here and getting better slowly but surely. Even though I've had great help from surgeons and physical therapists I would not have made it this far without Zen. Not only is mindfulness of my body integral to my physical recovery, Zen has also helped me let go of basing my identity on position or affiliation and helped me reconnect with the light-hearted, open, more adventurous me...



Sometimes when I'm feeling rather clear and I read the Four Great Vows I really feel like "Yeah that's it! You hit the nail on the head there." But I'm not clear all the time (more like most of the time) and during those times the ten grave precepts point me in the right direction... One night I was returning home after a lovely day of Sesshin and was struck by the thought, "Oh geez! Just because I've left the Zendo doesn't mean I have to leave my breath. If

I'm busting my butt, working to being a kinder, open, loving being then this should be a practice that I'm engaged in at all moments of my waking life." Taking the precepts is another way I can engage in this practice. I look forward to exploring them and watching the ways in which they will change my relationship with myself and of those around me.

As for Rinzai Zen I really love the writings in the Rinzaikoku. There was one chapter I read a while ago that I think went something to the effect of "If you're not speaking from your experience then all your words will reek of shit as soon as they leave your mouth." How wonderful! I also love the no fluff of Rinzai. He works so hard to cut any unnecessary words that might confuse or misdirect whoever is listening and tries to cut to the heart of the matter as directly as he can...

Finally taking Jukai will not only allow me to formally vow to the precepts but also give me a chance to give back and commit to the Dharma, teacher, and sangha that I have benefited from so very much.

Gavin gave me the following hints about a possible Dharma Name. He said that he always has loved hiking mountain trails, "Then when you reach the top your perspective changes. Even if you can see something familiar down below, your relationship with it has changed and it gets swallowed up in the vastness of the wider view." He also spoke to me about a hawk, "Today on my walk there were many hawks gliding effortlessly above long forgotten temple ruins giving a keen eye to everything below. Before I felt that hawk would be too cool for me! I certainly don't feel hawkish but it's something I've been aspiring to. For so long I've felt dull and in need of sharpening. Zazen has and will sharpen me more."

Gavin's new Dharma Name is O-Zan: Hawk Mountain.

Jukai candidates need to petition in writing at least one month prior to the ceremony. Jukai candidates usually have attended regular zazen at Chobo-Ji for a minimum of six months (including at least two week-long sesshins), must be regular financial supporters of the temple, and feel ready to give themselves to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma & Sangha).

Closing Incense Poem

Rohatsu Sesshin 2014

The moon is mirrored in the water.

*Who hears the wisdom
of the distant Mountain?*

*Eagle, Hawk circle effortlessly
overhead.*

Winter at Chobo-Ji





Spring Odayaka Sesshin

May 22nd - 24th
with Genko Ni-Osho

Friday 7am-8pm

Saturday 7am-8pm

Sunday 7am-4pm

Odayaka means peaceful and this Sesshin is a little less arduous with more dialogue than our weeklong Sesshins. It is especially suited for Dharma Dragons (practitioners over 60) and others looking for a more spacious daily schedule.

A vegetarian breakfast, lunch and dinner will be served each day with zazen, kinhin (walking meditation) Dharma Dialogue (private interviews with the teacher), Dharma Talk, chanting, qigong, dialogue and personal time for reflection and integration.

Cost is \$100. To hold a spot please send a deposit of at least \$25 by May 11th. For questions email: zen@choboji.org.



Important Dates to Remember

Daily zazen: M-F, 5:30-6:30 AM; Sat. 7-8:30 AM; M & W, 7:30-8:30 PM; Sun. 6:30-7:30 PM

Dharma Talks, Sundays: 2/15, 3/1, 3/15, 3/29, 4/5, 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/17, 5/24, 5/31, 6/7, 6/28

Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30-8:45PM (except 3/24 & 6/23)

Precept Class with Genko Ni-Osho ...

Spiritually Based Gestalt Workshop, Leonard Shaw, MSW ...

Sunday Morning Practice (Talk by Domyo Burk Sensei) ...

Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Building Skillful Means, with Genko Ni-Osho ...

Sunday Morning Practice (Zenka's senior student talk) ...

Spring Dai Sesshin ...

Precept Class with Genko Ni-Osho ...

Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Annual Meeting to elect the Board (quorum needed) ...

Sunday Morning Practice (Talk to be announced) ...

Precept Class with Genko Ni-Osho ...

Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Sunday Morning Practice (Talk to be announced) ...

Spring Odayaka Sesshin (with Genko Ni-Osho) ...

Building Skillful Means with Genko Ni-Osho ...

Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Sunday Morning Practice ...

Feb. 5th, 7:30am - 9pm

Feb 7 & 8, 9:30am - 5pm

Feb. 15th, 9am - 11:30am

March 8th, 5am - 11:15am

March 12th, 7:30am - 9pm

March 15th 9am - 11:30am

March 20th - 27th

April 2nd, 7:30am - 9pm

April 12th, 5am - 11:15am

April 12th, 12:30pm - 2:30pm

April 19th, 9am - 11:30am

May 7th, 7:30am - 9pm

May 10th, 5am - 11:15am

May 17th, 9am - 11:30am

May 22nd - May 24th

June 4th, 7:30am - 9pm

June 14th, 5am - 11:15am

June 21st, 9am - 11:30am



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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