



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

Seattle has been having wonderful spring weather; our flower garden, vegetable garden and Zen garden all have new plantings and are looking good! I apologize for this issue being tardy, but I've had little time to pull it all together. Since our last issue of PMN, I've traveled to Bonn Germany, Victoria BC, San Diego and Walla Walla to lead short sesshins. Of course here in Seattle we recently completed our weeklong Spring Sesshin and a one-day sesshin for about twenty Seattle University students. At Spring Sesshin Scott Ishin Stalnack received a brown rakusu and became Chobo-Ji's fourth lay Sensei, and on the last day Jaye Seiho Morris was ordained a Zen unsui (Cloud and water person – novice priest). At the conclusion of the Walla Walla sesshin, Mikel Swayze did Jukai (Precept and Dharma Name ceremony). There will be more on these ceremonies later in this issue.

Spring Sesshin was a huge success, with 34 people participating, 22 fulltime, hosting ten people from out of town. Ishin was our very capable Shika (host/manager), Dee Seishun Endelman, Tom Shodo DeGroot and Edwin Kyosei Beatty shared Tenzo (chef) duties providing us with scrumptious meals, Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik kept us on track as our Jikijitsu (time keeper), John Daikan Green assisted by Anne Sendo Howells kept the beat as our Densu (chant leaders), Seiho and Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick made sure we were well supplied with fluids and snacks as our Jisha (tea servers), and Ralph Muzan Leach and Sally Zenka Metcalf ably supported me as my Inji (abbot assistants). Genko Ni-Osho gave a beautiful Dharma Talk, which has been transcribed for this issue, and served us much appreciated whisked green tea on middle day. Also from this sesshin you will find a transcription of my Teisho from sixth day, "Stepping Forward



from a 100' Pole" and my closing incense poem.

The Bonn Sesshin, hosted principally by Monica Jion Winkelmann, was really amazing, and the group was so strong



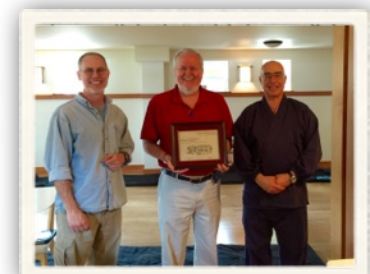
that they have already invited Carolyn and me to return next year and this may become an annual event. The Bonn group has started meeting monthly as a Rinzai Zen Study group, and I'm delighted by their enthusiasm. My semi-annual weekend intensives at [Zenwest](#)



(BC) and Walla Walla were also very fruitful. In Walla Walla once again I got to meet with prisoners at the penitentiary, speak with students at Whitman College, spend a day at Vista Hermosa with both Tri-Cities and [Walla Walla sanghas](#), and gave a Sunday talk on "Balance in a Changing World." There was also a great turn-out for the three day sesshin at [San Diego Aikikai](#).



Chobo-Ji had morning and evening Buddha Birthday celebrations on April 8th, and a fine Annual Meeting on April 12th where Rev. Paul Benz, Co-Director of the [Faith Action Network](#), presented Chobo-Ji with a



certificate of membership in this faith-inspired statewide partnership striving for a just, compassionate and sustainable world through community action. In our association with [Patacara Community Services](#), Seishun has been organizing a Chobo-Ji contingent to sponsor a monthly [Teen Feed](#) that serves up a hot dinner to 25 youth and young adults struggling with poverty and homelessness in South Seattle. The Shobogenzo Reading Group, Eight Week Intro Series, and Qigong Practice continue to be offered and can be found on our [Google Calendar](#). Genko Ni-Osho, in addition to her prison work and Tibetan Buddhist studies, has been teaching Precept Classes and Skillful Means classes here at the temple, and is soon to lead the next two upcoming Odayaka Sesshins (it is not too late to submit [an application for Spring Odayaka](#)).

Recently, I celebrated the loss of a dear friend of mine, [Fr. Bill \(Bix\) Bichsel](#), SJ, with hundreds of other mourners at St. Leo's church in Tacoma. I have known Bix



for 30 years. My family has spent numerous Christmases with him. I was on many protest marches with him and once got arrested with him at the Trident Submarine



base in Bangor, WA when we tried to meet with the base commander about the need for nuclear disarmament. He was 86 when he died. There is no doubt in my mind that he was a living Bodhisattva. He will live on in the hearts and minds of many.

Also included in this issue are reports on membership, the Annual Meeting and finances (we collected over \$17,000 during Seattle's annual Give Big Day). [Summer Sesshin](#) is coming up fast, June 19-26; please be sure to submit your application by June 14th. For sangha members on the East Coast, I will be doing a three-day sesshin at [Aiki Farms](#) in Ledyard, CT from June 5th-8th. I'm also planning a three-day [Wenatchee sesshin](#) with the Stone Blossom Sangha in July, followed by a trip to Rochester, NY for the annual [AZTA](#) meeting and a [Native American Bearing Witness](#) retreat in South Dakota which both take place in August.

As you can see we are a growing sangha with satellites in many locations, keeping me pretty busy. May your spring be warm and bright and I hope to train with you soon.

With gassho,

Genjo

Annual Meeting Report

On April 12, 2015, twenty-six Chobo-Ji members and their guests met for a potluck meal and annual members' meeting. Five of our nine board members were up for re-election (board members serve two-year terms): Dee Seishun Endelman, Sally Zenka Metcalf, Bob Daigan Timmer, Justin Myozan Wadland, and Scott Ishin Stolnack. All five were re-elected by the membership. In addition, Emily HoU Ross and John Daijo Lowrance stepped down from the board; Chris Zenshin Jeffries and Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez were appointed to fill their seats for the remaining year of their term of office. We are very grateful to Emily and John for their leadership and service to the sangha, and to Chris and Lynn for volunteering their time and care.

After the election by

the membership, the board elected its officers for 2015 as follows: Scott Ishin Stolnack, President; Steve Ganko Hanson, Vice-President; John Daikan Green, Treasurer, and Justin Myozan Wadland, Secretary. Our recently instituted tradition is for the board President to serve two consecutive one-year terms, to be succeeded by the Vice-President. Therefore the plan is for Steve to take the helm and for another board member to step up as Vice-President in 2016.

The year in review...

Financially, we continue to be in a strong position. Rental income covers building operations; membership dues, sesshin fees and donations support our programs. We continue to operate well within our means. Our member base is slowly growing, with supporters across the country as well as in Europe and Canada.

2014 saw significant departures and arrivals. Some dearly loved residents moved away from the center, and the losses were tough on many of us. But with loss came opportunity, and we welcomed two new residential pillars in Jaye Seiho Morris and Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick. The change was an opportunity to examine our process for choosing new residents as well as investigate how to maintain that core community. We also arranged the first "Healthy Boundaries for Clergy" course for Chobo-Ji clergy (happening in April and May 2015). These collective changes, some of them subtle, open the possibility for a deeper exploration of practice and community at Chobo-Ji.



Another item the board processed in 2014 was a request from a recently released sex offender to practice at Chobo-Ji. This topic became another koan for us all to investigate, as it brought up issues of safety and core Buddhist principles. There were two significant outcomes from this process: first, a group of volunteers from Chobo-Ji and other local sanghas have arranged to sit with this person at an offsite location. Second, discussions around the topic of safe and wholesome interactions led us to institute “skillful means” workshops, led by Genko Ni-Osho, to help us all become more mindful in our interpersonal interactions.

Many good things happened at Chobo-Ji over the past year: Zen introductory classes, precepts classes, daily zazen, Odayaka and week-long sesshin offerings, a new grievance procedure in the works, a new membership brochure in the works, emergency preparedness and community outreach, senior student talks, book groups, beautiful landscaping, flowers, vegetables, new friendships.... Please come sit with us, become a member, and/or volunteer with one of our working groups. Email us at zen@choboji.org and we'll get you started!

Respectfully,

Scott Ishin Stolnack

For the Chobo-Ji Board of Trustees

Financial Report

Many good things happened at Chobo-Ji in 2014, and one of them is that for the first time since we moved to Beacon Hill, we had a very “normal” financial year. Nothing very dramatic happened either on the income or expense side, and the result is a sense of settled and stable finances. Income for the year was \$152K. Our major revenue sources were tenant and guest income of \$72K, dues of \$32K, and sesshin payments of \$27K, with the balance coming from general donations. Our total expenses were \$101K, giving us a net income of \$51K. Our expenses were divided into three major categories: zendo operations, \$19K, building operations, \$66K, and support for Genki Roshi's widow, \$15K. Our balance sheet remained strong with \$171K in cash and other current assets, \$2.1M in building

assets, and \$367K in retirement investments. On December 31st, we owed \$575K on our mortgage, leaving us with a net worth of \$2M.

We have implemented good financial management planning and monitoring tools with an annual budget and 5-year cash flow projection. We are in the process of diversifying our retirement investments, and recently purchased a new membership, donations and events database that will allow us to track donations and dues more easily and divide up some of the record-keeping tasks.

Our financial health is grounded in the committed and generous support of our members and friends that goes back many years. We make every effort to be good stewards of the resources contributed so that Chobo-Ji can maintain and nurture Zen practice. Recently, thirty-one of you contributed over \$17K during GiveBIG, the Seattle Foundation's annual on-line giving event. Thank you so much for this support and for all the other amounts and ways that each of you contributes to the life of our community.

Carolyn Josen Stevens
Fusu (Temple Accountant)

Membership at Chobo-Ji

Our sangha is growing! More people attend Introduction to Zen all the time. New people listen to podcasts, or meet our teachers at retreats and events in the wider world. Many of these folks seamlessly join our sangha of practitioners, and then begin to investigate what it takes to become Chobo-Ji members. Historically, we've had a rather informal membership procedure, but this influx of wonderful people, whom we want to support well, has inspired us to clarify our membership process.

By June, the beautiful new Chobo-Ji Membership Brochure, created by our own graphic designer, Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez, will be available in the Zendo lobby—complete with an application form tucked inside. The brochure details Chobo-Ji history, teachers, programs, and activities, as well as membership benefits. The application form explains our take on

membership dues donations and gathers information for our brand new user-friendly database software.

Much thought and research went into the new membership process. At the heart of the discussion was dues donations. We discovered that many Zen groups have levels of dues giving. After studying the history of how our members pay dues, we chose not to adopt such levels.

Chobo-Ji recommends a dues payment of \$75 per month, with the caveat, “More if you can, less if you can't.” Some members pay \$10 per month; some pay \$100. Their payment reflects their commitment to Chobo-Ji membership and their financial means. (Letting us know when you'll be making a significant change in dues payments provides helpful administrative clarity.)

At the heart of it, dues donations, being dana, are deeply appreciated, whatever the level. People's different circumstances are viewed with respect and caring. In gratitude, Chobo-Ji trusts that sangha members will express—in the best way they can—what their practice at this temple means to them.

If you wish to expand your support for Chobo-Ji by becoming a dues-paying member, please fill out an application and submit it by mail or in person. If there are other members of your household who also wish to become members, our new database would be happiest if each person fills out a separate application. Within a month of receiving your donation, the Board of Directors (as dictated by our Bylaws) will ratify your membership and you'll receive a welcome letter.

The Sangha Relations Committee (SRC) is grateful to everyone who weighed in on our new membership process. Your insights and refinements were invaluable. Special thanks go to Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez for her beautiful graphic design. We look forward to hearing from the wider sangha about the process and the brochure. Talk with any SRC member: Sally Zenka Metcalf, Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez, Carolyn Josen Stevens, and Edwin Kyosei Beatty.

Summer Sesshin

June 19th - 26th

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a *deposit and application* by June 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, 6/19, 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.

Dharma Talk 5th Day

Spring Sesshin 2015

by Genko Ni-Osho

Reading from the Shalistamba Sutra, the Rice Seedling Sutra:

- Due to the condition of ignorance, action arises;
- due to the condition of action, consciousness arises;
- due to the condition of consciousness, name and form arise;
- due to the condition of name and form, the six sense spheres arise;
- due to the condition of the six sense spheres, contact arises;
- due to the condition of contact, feeling arises;
- due to the condition of feeling, attachment arises;
- due to the condition of attachment, grasping arises;
- due to the condition of grasping, the potentialized level of karma called existence arises;
- due to the condition of existence, birth arises;
- due to the condition of birth, aging and death arise.

Reading from that sutra reminds me very much of my mother who could, among many other interesting things, read Hebrew, and had memorized and recited vast swaths of the Torah in Hebrew. I remember her especially reciting Ecclesiastes. You may remember it: "To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under Heaven," and then, "a time for this, a time for that" and so on. The sound of those lines in Hebrew is so beautiful, it sounds like raindrops dripping from the eaves, and so the sound of the rain this week, while thinking about this passage I was going to talk about today, really vividly brought that memory up for me.

These lists were very important teachings. When you see a list like this, you know it's a very, very old sutra, intended for oral transmission. People could memorize lists much more easily than paragraphs or long, convoluted commentaries. If you knew how many points had to be remembered - this has twelve points - you could say, "Well, I have these nine, so I just need three more," and then talk to your friends and figure out the missing three, so you'd be much more likely to remember them all.

So this is a very old sutra that lists the conditions that are known as the Twelve Nidanas. The Twelve Nidanas are also known as Interdependent Arising or Interdependent Origination. All of those are names for the twelve links in this chain.

We don't study lists much in Zen. I don't know if that's because we don't particularly enjoy lists or what, but it's good to do this from time to time—to hear these lists and begin to understand them. In fact, we chant this list every day; we just don't even realize it! In the Heart Sutra we chant about the five skandhas and the six senses and further on we chant, "No ignorance and no end to ignorance, no old age and death and no end to old age and death." Those are the first and last points on this list of twelve. Some translations say, "No ignorance and no end to ignorance up to no old age and death and no end to old age and death." So they add "up to" in there to remind you that there are ten other points in between.

The other thing that the Heart Sutra reminds us is that, for each of the negations that we have, we are also supposed to have some commitment to exploring the positive

aspects. That's why we say, "No old age and death and no end to old age and death." We're negating these Twelve Nidanas by saying "no old age and death" and yet we're also saying "no end to old age and death." The Nidanas are still here. So we negate but also affirm. And the reason for this is that the negative is not possible without the affirmative; we cannot have one without the other. So it's important to really understand that.

The links in Interdependent Origination are often shown in the Bhavachakra. If you've never seen it, it is a fabulous depiction of some of the key teachings of Buddhism. The Bhavachakra means "The Wheel of Becoming," and in the hub of it are the three poisons. "Greed, anger, and delusion" is how we say the three poisons in our meal chants, but they can also be said as "craving, aversion, and ignorance." In either case, they mean leaning into something, leaning away from it, or being confused about it. But those are the three very fundamental forms of delusion we have about the way things are.

The next ring out on this wheel of becoming is the 10 wholesome and 10 unwholesome actions, and there are lovely pictures of mayhem that people are doing resulting from these three poisons. The ring after that shows the six realms of samsara. One of them is the human realm, and there are the others – gods and demi-gods, hungry ghosts, the hell realm and the animal realm.

And the outermost ring shows the Twelve Nidanas. All of this is held in the mouth of the demon Mara, who represents death or impermanence. In any event, you have this very vivid wheel—it almost looks like a Hieronymus Bosch painting – and all of these activities are going on in the mouth of this demon.

Actually, if we look at it as Zen students, we can recognize it. It is the flip side of the Enso—which is on all of our rakus, it's on the wall over there (pointing at the scroll to the left of the altar)—the Enso is the point at which, for the moment anyway, we've resolved all of this samsaric stuff. If we flip it over, we see all of this activity, all of this mayhem going on. So it's really important that we consider both sides of this coin, samsara and nirvana.

We can look at this wheel of becoming from the very traditional point of view, which is that there is reincarnation. If we don't get off this wheel of becoming, this samsaric approach to life, we're going to come back over and over again until we get it right. Or we can look at it just in terms of our own lifetime, or we can look at it just in terms of this moment now. So this wheel of becoming reflects all of those time frames or you could say it reflects no time frame at all. It's more about how we look at things.

The traditional starting point is ignorance; this is at the top of the wheel and at the beginning of what I read: "Because of ignorance..." this arises. Even though ignorance is the starting point, because you've got to get on this wheel somehow, each link is not dependent just on the immediately preceding one; it's more like a samsaric web. That's what interdependent origination means in a certain way – that once you get involved at one point, the whole business kicks in.

So, if you think you are not caught in it, think again. Because according to the traditional view, if you're here in name and form, you're caught in it. That's the teaching.

Ignorance is the beginning—it's in the hub of the wheel as one of the three poisons—and it's also at the edge. What this ignorance is about is not general stupidity, but ignorance of the principles of suffering, selflessness and impermanence. It's by those three characteristics that a teaching is to be accepted—that it accords with the Buddhist understanding of impermanence, selflessness and suffering. Everybody in this room gets that to some degree or another or we would not still be sitting in this room! I don't have to explain these characteristics very much but it's important that, if we are to move past getting caught in this web, we dig as deeply as possible into them. So, when we find ourselves in confusion, caught on as opposed to engaged with our suffering—there's a big difference between being caught on and engaged with suffering—we can be certain it's because of a lack of a deep understanding of one of these aspects that make up ignorance.

In Zen koan practice, we start with the koan Mu, and Mu is the way that we try to begin to break through that ignorance. However,

there's a reason that Mumon placed the koan Hyakujo and the Fox directly after the Mu koan (even though we don't always go directly from Mu to working Hyakujo because it's kind of difficult). He's saying to practitioners, "If you think you're pretty special because you had a really nice Mu experience, you're not (laughter). Get over it, folks, you're not!" With Mu, we may open to an intuitive understanding of the true nature of reality, of suffering, impermanence, and selflessness, but, without further work, it closes up on us pretty quick.

And now that we have that perspective, it's time to double down on understanding karma – cause and effect – in the context of that Mu experience. It's really important that it be in that context. In Zen, we do recognize that we are living in a relative world. We call it this "dewdrop world," but it's not so easy to translate the



expansiveness of the Zen experience on the cushion into the everyday world, which brings us to the next link, which is karmic formations, sometimes translated as action. But I like karmic formations better because it's a reminder that every moment of our lives, we're bringing baggage along with us, based on our karma, and whether you see that as karma accumulated from generations and generations or just the karma generated in this life, it's still a bunch of baggage.

So we bring our habit patterns, our concepts, our experiences as we have had them, to whatever the next moment of our life is. These are the karmic formations—they are largely based on ignorance, habit, not paying attention. One of the most

important parts of our practice is really trying to identify what those habits and patterns are for us. They are not the same for any of us. There are some that we have in common, of course, but each of us has our own particular set and flavor of habit patterns and it's such a critical part of our practice to explore and get to know them, at least with a strong motivation not to cause harm. Once we have gotten to the point where we say, "I'm not going to cause harm," then we can move into the positive, "I'd like to do something to benefit beings," but "not causing harm" is a great start. And one way we can do that is being aware of our habit patterns and how they affect us.

There are several aspects to karma. To have a complete karmic action, there are 5 parts: formulating a plan, initiating it, carrying it out, completing it, rejoicing in its completion (Not, "Oops, I screwed up" but "Yep, that's what I wanted to do, intended to do, and it's good") and our initial motivation—why did we do this. So each of these aspects strengthens the karmic consequences, as you can see. If something happens accidentally and you weren't motivated to do that, there's less of a karmic effect in a technical sense. So this is why it's so important to examine our motivations for whatever it is that we do.

Mindfulness of our actions is key here—if we're not careful, our karmic formations color how we perceive this moment and continue and grow and accumulate into the next moment. Sometimes, we here in the West tend to dismiss the notion of karma, but it's really absolutely key to find your own understanding of this principle. Anyone who has raised children knows this is true. I was so happy to hear Ishin Sensei earlier this week, when he spoke of the importance, in his own practice, of burning up old karma, before it was visited on his daughter. This is absolutely what our practice is about, exactly that, burning up old karma before it harms someone else.

You don't have to accept the idea of literal reincarnation, right? You don't have to accept it to agree that our collective and individual homework as human beings accumulates and multiplies until we complete it, until we play it out and use up all the karmic consequences that have built up in our own lives.

Continued on next page...

The next link in this chain, the third link, is consciousness. Every moment—this is another place where this interdependent origination is true—every moment co-arises with the moment of our consciousness that experiences that moment. So if you think there is one solid continuous conscious monitor sitting here experiencing moment after moment after moment, it's not. What is happening is this consciousness is changing as well, this consciousness is constantly changing in response to the experience. So the "me" that is experiencing this talk is different from the "me" that is sitting on the cushion in zazen.

Because our moments of experience arise so quickly, one after the other, these moments of consciousness arise one after another—we think, in our ignorance, that we are perceiving a solid continuum between these moments and we say, "Oh, that's my consciousness doing that, that's my experience!" It's absolutely critical to penetrate that and understand the radical impermanence of our experience, and the consciousness of that experience, to really understand how impermanent, how deeply impermanent things are. This is a core principle of interdependent origination.

There is not a world out there that we are experiencing with our mind, contained somewhere in here (our head). It's just moment after moment after moment of consciousness and experience arising together. Until we are able to penetrate this truth, we will continue to be caught on the karmic formations that weigh us down and shape our consciousness due to our inability to recognize those formations and let go of them. And because of our inability to recognize and resolve these karmic formations, we inevitably end up in the next link which is Namarupa, or name and form.

Name and form—you know, we're carrying a lot of baggage with us so we tend to solidify that entity of the self and identify with the body that is experiencing that baggage. We identify with all of the aspects of that body and all of its activities. In the Heart Sutra, the first list we hear is the five skandhas, the aspects that make up our senses and so forth, and we are invited by the Heart Sutra to examine our attachment to each of these, and to all of them together. This is Namarupa, the five skandhas.

Coming from that is the next link, our six sense perceptions. Perception is one of the skandhas. Because we have imagined ourselves to be separate from that world out there, we create some kind of bridge to bring it back together again and that's our perception, how we perceive what is out there with our senses—sound, sight, taste, smell, touch and our mental faculties. They arise for the sole purpose of trying to pull this whole situation back together again from the separate ones that we have created! When those sense perceptions meet up with that outer world, we call that contact.

That's the next link, contact. Because we understand ourselves to be separate from that object of contact, we experience and make note of a response to this contact. We haven't been in contact, now we are, and our initial response takes the form of feeling tones. And some of you have heard me talk about this before. These are not feelings, what we call emotions, that's not what this is about. These are the basic feeling tones - pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. They don't have a lot of charge to them at this point. They can be intense—pleasant can be blissful, unpleasant can be excruciating, and neutral can be really zoned out—but anyway these three feeling tones are what we first experience in relation to the object that we are contacting. If we are not careful, we go almost immediately from that feeling tone to the storyline that we have in our baggage, that we attach to that experience.

That storyline kicks in pretty quickly. We begin to react based on our initial feeling tone—I want this, I don't want this, I don't care—and there's usually a "because" after this, explaining why we feel the way we do.

And this next link is called craving or attachment. We begin to form an opinion about what we are experiencing. I was watching as we were working with the meal bowls at the beginning of sesshin, and noted that all of us fit into one of the categories of pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feeling tone as we interacted with the meal bowls. So there are some of us that have a touch of OCD and love lining up the meal bowls just so - finally there's a practice that "gets me" (laughter) - and we line them up very carefully! I can get them lined up even better; it's very satisfying! Then the unpleasant feeling tone, which becomes, "What is up with these people?? Just put

the meal bowls down! As long as there is space for all of them, it doesn't really matter! Move on! Let's get on with it!" There's another way you might experience unpleasantness: "Oh, I don't like doing this! I'm not doing it right. Someone is going to notice I'm not doing it right, and they're going to tell me about it. This is going to be embarrassing and painful." This is also a form of aversion we have.

And ignorance, confusion? That's like, "What?? What did he say about the meal bowls? I'm still trying to figure out the chopsticks (laughter). I'll deal with the meal bowls later!" That's neutral. That's "I don't have an opinion about the meal bowls. Give me a minute!" (laughter)

Craving grows out of this basic leaning in, leaning away, or I'm not there with the experience yet. It's kind of interesting to watch ourselves as our minds calm down and our experiences calm down. My guess is that most of us, if we are attentive to the meal bowls as we're putting them down now, don't have an opinion about it. It's just, "Put them down." We don't move past that initial feeling tone. We don't attach a storyline to it. That's one way we can break down the cycle - to slow down enough to notice and disengage from that storyline. If we stay stuck in the storyline, we go into the next link, which is grasping.

We grasp at the object of our desire (or experience revulsion at the object of our displeasure), and we grasp at the notion of our self that stems directly from the confusion we have created through seeing our self and the object as solidly and separately existing. So there are two things we are hanging on to. There is the object or experience we are having and there is the "me" that's having this opinion about it. That's all grasping and it snowballs, it snowballs. And then we begin to develop a whole theory about this. "If I ran my own Zendo, here's how I would do it." We have ideas about what's the best way to do practice. Is it this way or that way? And "I'm going to do it this way because this is the right way," so all of those kinds of grasping can come out of that one activity. What happens with grasping from a traditional point of view is that it plants karmic seeds that ripen over time.

Mumonkan

Case 46: Stepping Forward

Sixth Day Spring Sesshin, 2015

That's what we do when we practice baseball or basketball or piano or anything; to get good at it, we repeat it over and over again. We try to plant the seeds of correct practice, but we can as easily plant the seeds of damaging, harmful practice.

And the next three links, in terms of the traditional understanding of the nidanas, show how new or unresolved karmic formations settle in, take root, sprout and grow over time, and these are the ones that become actualized in the next cycle of existence. They're shown as three stages—the physical process of conception, birth into one of the samsaric realms, and, inevitably, old age and death. So these are the last three, and the only way to stop this cycle of death and rebirth is to stop it at one of these links, most especially at ignorance. But another place is where we move from feeling tone into story line. I hope that this is one thing that zazen does for you, that sesshin does for you, that it helps you begin to drop those story lines of what is going on. We can see the entire twelve link process at work in every moment in our lives. And when we approach a situation in our habitual way, with our sense of separation, we can see the suffering, feel the suffering, when we approach it in this way. We create the name and form that's separate from what we're experiencing and have to build the bridge; there are all sorts of problems that come out of that.

So that's the bhavachakra, the wheel-of-becoming side of the samsara-nirvana coin, and that side can seem very, very far apart from the other, the enso side. And they are, when we are stuck on one side or the other. But what we are doing here in practice is beginning to spend time on each side of this coin, beginning to get familiar with and to appreciate the aspects of each that will inform the other. We need to get better at the dance between samsara and nirvana. They are each utterly, completely dependent on the other, like two sides of a coin. You cannot have one without the other. You cannot be fully present with one without the other being fully present. It will not happen. You can't fully appreciate the one without the other.

So I invite you, with what we have left of sesshin, to continue this dance.

Koan: Master Sekiso said, "From the top of a pole one hundred feet high, how do you step forward?" An ancient Master also said that one sitting at the top of a flagpole one hundred feet high, even if he has realized "it," has not yet been truly enlightened. He must step forward from the top of the pole one hundred feet high and manifest his whole body in the ten directions.

Mumon's Commentary: If you can step forward and turn back, is there anything you dislike as unworthy? But even so, tell me, from the top of a pole one hundred feet high, how do you step forward? Sah!

Mumon's Poem

*The eye in the forehead has gone blind,
and he has been misled
by the stuck pointer in the scale.
He has thrown away his body
and laid down his life –
A blind man is leading other blind men.*

Most koans provide the "answer" in the question. The question is certainly how to approach the koan, but as soon as you are intimate with the question, the question often becomes the solution.

"How do you step forward from the top of a hundred foot pole?" This is referring to what do you do after so-called enlightenment, and the answer is here: step forward from the top of a hundred foot pole and manifest your whole body in the ten directions. That's the answer. So what do you do from the top of a hundred foot pole? It gives you the answer, there's nothing to figure out, but what does that mean? To reach the top of a hundred foot pole is symbolic of coming to your own realization of your own deep nature. There are lots of ways to say it: immersed in the collective unconscious, intimate with *Mu*, the third eye is opened, you see and accept and delight in this multidimensional universe. It is when you have some breakthrough that you don't feel stuck in your normal egoistic perspective and your heart is full of wonder.

In Zen practice, this sort of breakthrough has always been considered just the beginning of deep training. Sometimes it takes a few years to get to that point. Often it only takes a few days if life has already prepared you, which it often does. When you are ripe, the fruit falls. There are some people I've met who are very earnest and sincere about their training, but are so doubtful about their own glimpses of open-heartedness that never establish sufficient confidence in their own experience. This is sad, but not the end of the world. Millions of people have never had a "top of a hundred foot pole" experience. Millions more have experienced it, but have no idea how to proceed or process it. Many who haven't had such an experience live full, productive, happy lives, many who have had such an experience don't.

From a Zen perspective this kind of breakthrough is as high as you can go, but as I have said that is just the beginning of further training. A hundred feet is not that far. After all how high is the sky? The sky is of course a whole lot higher than a hundred feet. I like thinking about how high the sky is, so I'm going to digress.

You gain perspective when you climb a mountain or fly in an airplane, you start to see the world in a different way. Get high enough and you can even start to see the curve of the earth. From the space station you can see most of the globe. Out at the moon, you can see this jewel of a planet hanging out in the midst of vast space. We really have no conception of how vast space really is. Just recently, a couple of space craft left the solar system and are now in interstellar space, over 11 billion miles from earth. They've been traveling since the 1970s to get out there; however, in interstellar space they are still trillions of miles away from the nearest star.

Broadcast radio waves are traveling outward from Earth at the speed of light. We've been sending out radio signals saying, "We are here" since the 1920s or something like that, and those radio waves have gone out less than a hundred light-years. Within a hundred light-years from here are a few hundred stars, not a lot. It is possible that there is even some intelligent life within this distance that is already

Continued on next page...

listening in. However, one hundred light-years (each light-year is 5.88 trillion miles) only covers the local neighborhood. When you see the Milky Way, you're seeing our galaxy, which has around 300 billion stars. The Milky Way is at least 100,000 light-years across. Therefore, it will be a hundred thousand years from now before our first radio broadcasts, traveling at the speed of light, get to the other side of the galaxy. To reach our neighboring Andromeda galaxy will take over 2.5 million years. In the visible universe, there are around 100 billion galaxies, most of them billions of light-years away and this is only in the slice of the universe that we can see. How many slices are there? We have no idea. In other words, we have no idea how big the universe is. Some speculate that it could be infinite. There is also speculation that there are multi-universes!

Well, that's how high the sky is, and do you know how high your enlightenment can be? One hundred feet! Therefore, we shouldn't take our enlightenment too seriously! The most we can know is how much we don't know!

When I was ordained back in 1980, Genki Takabayashi, our founding abbot, gave me a calligraphy that is framed up over my desk upstairs that says, "30 years of Zen practice." It was his expectation that taking up robes meant at least a commitment of thirty years. Seiho is getting ordained tomorrow, and I have the same expectation of him, that he's committed to this task for the next thirty years or more, should he live

so long. He has committed to do every sesshin that Chobo-Ji offers until he has reached at least 40 weeklong sesshins in his lifetime and learned well every post. These are my expectations of anyone wanting to be an unsui. But what if he doesn't live up to these expectations? No problem, he can volunteer to lay down his robes at anytime. Maybe one week after he puts them on, he will conclude that it is not a good fit, and choose to lay them down. Of course I will be disappointed if this happens, and it is not at all what I expect; however, on another level, it is my job to have no attachment to how he lives his life. How anyone lives one's life is really not our concern. On the other hand, if you wear the robes then train in Zen for least thirty years, or as long as life allows. Give your all to help Rinzaï Zen practice take root in the West. If you choose or are not able to meet these expectations of an unsui, then lay down your robes. It's all right by me; no one is asked to make a personal contract with me.

Whether lay or ordained, the deepest realization we can have is only a hundred feet high. This height does give us a broader view, and from a Zen practice perspective this is just the start of decades of maturation. If you have reached the top of the pole, give yourself a few decades to mature and marinate in this realization. In time, Followers of the Way live a life that more fully actualizes the Great Vow. Our Great Vow is to live our everyday life with lovingkindness and a caring, openhearted attitude. It doesn't sound complicated, and it's not, but it isn't easy. It's not easy because we are often taken over by our instincts for survival that insist that we don't have enough so we better work to have more of everything, more possessions, more territory, more money, more youth, more security and more beliefs about right and wrong. In other words, we get caught up in the rat race. This drive to have more is a part of our genetic make-up; we can't escape it. We have to learn how to live with these impulses without being directed by them. We are the product of billions of years of evolution that says, "You must survive and you will have a better chance to survive and procreate if you are king or queen of the hill." There is a natural conflict between our instincts for survival and insights about living a full and compassionate life. It takes decades of training to accommodate and harmonize these competing needs and insights.

Realization, the view from a hundred foot pole, helps us in developing some mastery over our genetic predispositions. Even though a hundred foot pole is not all that tall, in order to climb it, you have to risk your life. There are no safety ropes on this pole, and it is amazing how many people will say, "I don't want to climb that pole. I might fall!" A big part of realization is learning how to let go of your narrow egoistic perspective, and many are so attached to their own view that they will not risk even trying to see through another's eyes. Many feel that they might lose themselves. It is true, as Zen Master Dogen says, "To study the Way is to study the Self, to study the Self is to forget the Self." Yup, realization means a temporary ego death! Moreover, when you get up there, what is Zen practice going to ask you to do? We're going to ask you to step off. "Heck! You mean I have to climb that scary pole, and then you're going to ask me to step off?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, then, I think I'll go do something else ..."

And that's okay. But if you climb the pole of your own realization, Zen practice will ask you to jump off once you get there.

What does this mean? For some reason people come to train. They show up, contribute time and money. They must feel like they are getting something for their time and effort. At a certain point, they work up to doing a sesshin. During or after sesshin, many people tell me, "Oh, this is really good. It's changing my life. I'm getting some perspective. I'm seeing things I've never seen before. My depression has lifted. My anxiety has lifted. My doubt has lifted. I'm feeling some grace in my life. Instead of getting angry that someone is cutting me off on the freeway, I can even say, 'Wow. They're having a bad day.' That's a lot better. I want to do more of this."

At a certain point, people will say to me, "I want to give something back. I want to do more than just show up and contribute financially." It is about this time that I suggest they consider doing Jukai (the Precept Ceremony). Time and again when people get a little distance from the rat race and their own instincts for survival, they



naturally start to come to the pure precepts, and to the golden rule to not cause harm and to treat others as they would like to be treated. “Well look, I want to walk in this life trying not to cause harm to others, maybe doing some good ...” Once we gain some perspective then we naturally want to be good to each other and the planet for this and future generations.

Several times a day we chant, “Shu Jo Mu Hen Sei Gan Do.” This is our great vow to care for all beings animate and inanimate, great or small. We vow to have a caring heart. This is the flag we are putting out in front of us. When we make a habit of walking towards this flag, we are ready to do Jukai. At this ceremony each person gets a “Zen bib,” the little patchwork quilt that we call a rakusu which represents a piece of the Historical Buddha’s robe. It has one’s new dharma name inscribed on the back of it. The new name means you’re working at leaving behind millions of years of genetic history. By taking Jukai you’re saying, “I’m here living an ordinary life, one where I hope I’m not doing harm, doing some good, and I’m declaring my intention to cultivate an open and generous heart.”

At Chobo-Ji, the requirements for Jukai are that you attend periodic zazen, make a regular monthly financial contribution, complete our precept class or its equivalent, write a letter to me petitioning for Jukai, and attend at least two seven-day sesshins. How you live your life becomes your effort to actualize our Great Vow. How you live your life while on the temple grounds is important, but not nearly as important as how you live your everyday life out in the world. Even when we fully intend to live life with a caring, open heart, life is a minefield and every now and then we may blow up. Shit happens and we will always be fallible human beings. If there is a blow-up in our community, then for a time the harmony of this sangha is disturbed. Thankfully, our sangha has demonstrated repeatedly that we are strong enough to bear small meltdowns. However, how are we with our families? How are we on Interstate 5 when it’s crowded? How are we at work? If we are not living up to our Great Vow, we may be causing harm.

There are some people attending this sesshin that have done forty sesshins or more. Undoubtedly, anyone who has done this much practice has gotten a lot out of

training. In some cases, they really don’t have to do any more sesshins to remain grounded and productive in this life, and yet they return. After forty sesshins, a weeklong retreat is kind of like a welcome booster. People at this point stay on principally because they want to support the sangha. There are some people who have brown rakusus who are outwardly manifesting this fact, and there are one or two others who have done this much but don’t have brown rakusus yet. All of them are pillars of this community. Without these pillars this building would have a hard time standing. Carolyn, Josen, my spouse doesn’t come to many sesshins these days; nevertheless, she is one of these pillars and supports this sangha in many unseen ways; for one thing, she puts up with me!

In addition to Rinzan and Seiho there are some others at this sesshin in the queue to become unsui (ordained Zen monks). What motivates someone to become an unsui? Are the ordained somehow special or superior to the laity? Perhaps unsui can go an inch or two above a hundred-foot pole? No way. An unsui should above all be ordinary; however, the robes declare they are dedicated to propagating this practice for this and future generations. To be an unsui means that they see this as their principle obligation or responsibility in life. Everyone who does Jukai has already signed on to serving this world, but an ordained is vowing to principally serve others by learning how to carry forth this tradition.

There’s lots of other ways to serve the world. You can serve the world by being a janitor, a bus driver, a physician, a gardener or a farmer. Of course it is not so important in what capacity we serve, it is far more important how we serve. If you are a bus driver, how are you driving the bus? If our Great Vow genuinely leads our efforts, then likely the way in which we serve is excellent. For some, they feel strongly that propagating Zen practice for the next generation is the best way to serve the world. It is their aim to model the form and ritual so that it inspires this generation and the next to practice and train.

Obviously, in our temple system, an unsui is not required to have Zen practice as the only priority, just his or her first priority. In fact, I strongly encourage unsui and Oshos associated with this temple to have an

additional means of serving this world that is independent of Zen practice. I’m very interested in well-rounded monks; I’ve seen first hand the dangers associated with staying more than a few years in a monastery. At this point, Chobo-Ji doesn’t offer or even encourage monastic training. I’m not at all interested in unsui who are dependent on the sangha to feed and cloth them.

Back to the koan, when and if we get to the top of the hundred-foot pole, how do we throw ourselves off and show ourselves in the ten directions? Just give it all away. We can’t keep anything anyhow. We’re here in this physical form for such a short time; therefore, why not exhaust ourselves completely by giving everything we’ve got. There is no need to try and protect ourselves. Of course we fail miserably from time to time. Work to stay on track by letting go of defenses and giving yourself completely to the task in front of you. In reality, any difficulty is only in our head. At the height of a hundred foot pole, we feel united with all things and with Mu (emptiness – infinity). From such a perspective it is relatively easy just to give everything without any need for reciprocation. When we feel this kind of unification, we have access to an unlimited amount of energy in every second. Therefore, we realize there is no harm exhausting this life completely. Give it all away.

If you are not ready to show yourself in the ten directions, you can slide down the pole! Some people get enamored with this, “Look. I can climb up and slide down!” Well, that’s fun! Have you shown yourself in the ten directions? And you say, “Not today. Not yet.” Then as needed take ten, twenty or thirty years until you are ready to give yourself over completely. Often it takes decades before we are ready to throw away our ego agenda. As I approached thirty years of Zen training, Eido Roshī rightly said, “Okay. Another thirty years.” I don’t know if this body has that many left to give, but why not? At a certain point it no longer matters how many years we have left, we are just enjoying to the fullest what we have by exhausting it completely.

Some people get stuck on top of that hundred-foot pole and never want to come

Continued on next page...

down. People who cling to the top are usually closer to psychosis than true enlightenment. Some take their “enlightenment” so seriously that they tell me that they’re Buddha or Christ incarnate and ask why I don’t recognize them? That’s scary! Mumon’s poem has this to say to those stuck on the top of a hundred-foot pole. “The eye in the forehead has gone blind, and he has been misled by a stuck pointer on the scale.” It may be stuck right in the middle, but if it doesn’t swing, it’s no good at all.

Rinzai Zen emphasizes the importance of breakthroughs or kenshos, it also emphasizes, once you have had a breakthrough, to quickly throw it away! The last thing you want to do is to become a guru or a prophet, and yet Zen as an institution has gotten very stuck in the idea of a Zen master as being some kind of a guru, sage or living bodhisattva. Yuck! Anyone following such a “Zen Master” is misled by a stuck pointer on the scale. Egos are so tricky! Even after multiple genuine breakthroughs, our ego wants to take credit and claim that we are great or enlightened. All real masters know how not to get caught by this trap, but I’ve known many “masters” who have fallen into this hole of arrogance and self-aggrandizement. This ego trap can be avoided by throwing away our enlightenment, and by throwing ourselves into service and loving action. If your brand of service and loving action includes wearing robes and modeling this training and practice for future generations, okay, but remember this form of service doesn’t make you special or better than anyone else exhausting themselves completely through some other avenue.

There are two ways to read this next line, “He has thrown away his body and laid down his life, a blind man leading other blind men.” One way to look at it is to think, this is a person with a stuck pointer. He thinks he’s a guru or a Zen master, and if he thinks that then he’s thrown down his body and laid away his life, and he’s a blind person leading blind people. I have this opinion about anyone who claims to be a guru or a sage. The Dalai Lama is venerated in this way, and yet he begins every speech, “Don’t look at me this way. I’m just a human being!” However, no one seems to be listening, and nearly everyone venerates his “Holiness.”



When Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama were on stage together at the Hec Edmundson Pavilion, a few years ago, they were just like two kids playing. This gives me some hope, just two kids playing on stage having fun, and not taking themselves at all seriously.

Another way to interpret this line about the blind leading the blind is to realize that even if we truly give our all to being a musician, a bus driver, a physician, a farmer, an unsui or whatever, still the best we can be is the blind leading the blind! True loving action arises from NOT knowing. If we know what to do, our actions likely arise from our suppositions, opinions, and prejudices. When we don’t know what we are doing, we are free to creatively respond to the circumstances. It can all feel kind of foolish but we are not afraid of looking foolish. I can’t even explain it well, but let’s go straight on together.

With gassho,

Genjo

Sensei Ceremony

On the morning of March 21st, 2015, the first full day of Spring Sesshin, Scott Ishin Stolnack renewed his jukai vows and



became a Sensei (lay teacher) at Chobo-Ji, receiving a brown rakusu. Ishin has served in every post, done over 40 weeklong sesshins, is currently our Board President and first did Jukai at the end of Autumn Sesshin in the year 2000. There is no doubt that Ishin’s practice is a strong asset to this sangha and the community at large. We all can look to him for examples of a caring heart and loving actions unchained to preferences.

Tokudo Ceremony

On March 28th, 2014 Genjo Osho ordained Jaye Seiho Morris, a Chobo-Ji resident, an unsui (cloud and water person – Zen monk). As an unsui, Seiho has the authority to give introductory Dharma talks, lead zazen services, and marry couples. He has spoken of his intention to be an unsui since at least his Jukai ceremony in 2009. He trained extensively before ever coming to Chobo-Ji, including being a resident at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in NY. He has recently completed four consecutive sesshins at Chobo-Ji and has committed to do four sesshins a year, until at least 40 weeklong sesshins in his lifetime is reached.

Seiho writes in his Tokudo application letter:

...When I took Jukai with you, I had the awareness that the formal commitment to the Dharma was going to be a kind of “Reverse” origami. It was the opportunity to more deeply discover and unfold into my True-nature.

This pilgrimage of reverse origami has led me in the practice of helping others wherever I stand. This effort has been to the best of my ability, such as it is.

The practice has been primarily in understanding that I must be diligent in helping and healing myself first. A broken bow has a hard time firing the arrow straight.

With this in mind, I’ve been actively engaged in the past 27 years of my life through Twelve Step programs. The other has been the 25 years I have been consciously unfolding Zen. One of the most important things I’ve learned, as I’ve heard



you yourself say many times is, "Not yet complete... Please continue..." Despite not yet complete, I have a spark, happiness and love. It's the feeling that I have become useful by learning to accept responsibility for my life through the practice of Zen.

A second understanding has emerged through my healing process. It is learning to use my actions as arrows aimed towards the target of helping others. Kanzeon has a thousand arms, a thousand hands, and the eye of the Dharma in each palm, prepared to help each person not according to her need, but the needs of the person... Selflessly... Lovingly... "Caring for all sentient beings."



In picking up the kesa and robe of a Rinzaï Zen Buddhist Priest, I will have the opportunity to help teach others the practice of Zen, expanding the rakusu into a kesa and robe. In passing on to them the practice of Zen and what I have learned from you Genjo Osho, I have the opportunity to help them experience dignity and grace, with the possibility of ending their suffering and discover awakening, should their practice and effort be sufficient...

Forehead Touching Floor... Palms Upward Facing Vast Blue Sky,

Jaye Seicho Morris

When it came time to give Seicho an extension to his dharma name, I chose MuDo. **Mu** (無) means "no – not – nothing," **Do** (道) "The Way." So together it means the Empty Flow of the universe in action atop a Clear (清) Peak (峠) – SeiHo.

Closing Incense Poem

Spring Sesshin 2015

Who steps off a hundred foot pole?

One Mind does not know up from down.

The Path has no direction but loving-kindness.

The peak of Mount Rainier shines clearly.

Jukai Ceremony

At the recent, May 2nd, Vista Hermosa day-long sesshin, Mikel Swayze formally accepted the Buddhist precepts and received a dharma name. Mikel has practiced many years of Zen with Genjo in Walla Walla but only recently started coming to weeklong sesshins at Chobo-Ji. In his Jukai application letter he writes:

...At 66 it's time to stop standing at the spiritual edge and instead to let myself go to take the leap of faith that my heart says is the right thing to do. Much of this new found confidence stems from a sense of increased self-acceptance and self-love engendered through our interviews at the retreats. Furthermore, these talks have jogged my memory to times in the past when I felt grounded and connected with this wonderful world... I guess what I am trying to say is how the sesshins reawakened a larger view of the world – one that I can feel an integral part of.

Of course there are times when I am still irritable, prickly and overly concerned with

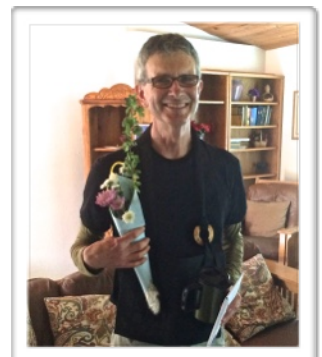
my own well-being, to name just a few elements of a "darker" side. But these elements tend to be less sharply defined, less edgy and on top of that, they tend to have a shorter duration... Following the Buddhist path has definitely made a softer and more accepting person out of me.

This "softening" process is far from complete, should it ever be complete in even the most advantageous conditions, and therefore my path points to Chobo-Ji. Already, I have been fortunate in making contact with some of the fine folks at the temple. And I can see that there is much to learn from them.

...May I be able to generously give of my heart to everyone I meet at Chobo-Ji as well as everyone outside of it. If this can be my legacy for this short journey of mine on the planet I know my life will be meaningful.



Mikel also spoke to me about the precepts telling me that through his study they have become "more than just two-dimensional words to think about. The sayings appeared nuanced, shaded, open to change and interpretation moment by moment as well as deeply profound... Through the precepts I could see and feel the fundamental issues facing human existence, my existence, others existence, now and always." As for a Dharma Name, Mikel mentioned walking *samādhi* where he sometimes becomes one with the earth and sky. His new dharma name is Ten (sky or heaven) Ho (walk).



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: 5/17, 5/24, 5/31, 6/7, 6/28, 7/19, 8/2, 8/23

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

Board Retreat ...

Sunday Morning Practice (Zen & Creative Process) ...

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

Building Skillful Means with Genko Ni-Osho and Seishun ...

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

Summer Sesshin ...

Writing from the Heart with Monika Jion Winkelmann ...

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

Dharma Talk by Sharon Salzberg ...

Couples Workshop with Leonard Shaw, MSW ...

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

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

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

Autumn Sesshin ...

May 16th, 9:30am - 4:30pm

May 17th, 9am - 11:00am

May 22nd - May 24th

June 4th, 7:30am - 9pm

June 14th, 5am - 11:15am

June 19th - June 26th

July 11th, 9am - 3pm

July 12th, 5am - 11:15am

July 12th, 7pm - 9pm

July 25-26, 9:30am - 5pm

Aug. 16th, 5am - 11:15am

Aug. 28th - Aug. 30th

Sept. 13th, 5am - 11:15am

Sept. 25th - Oct. 2nd

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Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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