



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

As I write this letter, my daughter Adrienne and I are in Hamilton, MT visiting with my dying mother. The doctors say she only has a few months to live. She tells me she is in no pain, but it is obvious that she is wasting away. Mortality of those who are closest to us, and of course our own mortality, brings life into focus. I lost a half-brother on January 1st and Kyosei just lost an older brother a few days ago. I'm sure all of us can think of one or more members of our families or Sangha who are on the cusp of life and death. Let's send them all strong supportive Nen (primal heart-mind thought energy), so that their transition or recovery is as smooth and peaceful as possible.

Our Rohatsu Sesshin, held at the Gwinwood Conference Center in Lacey, WA, December 3-11, was a deep success. Of course we all missed the majesty of sitting on the shore of Puget Sound at Camp Indianola, but Gwinwood has its own charm and easily accommodated the twenty-four people in attendance. Rev. Rinzan was our Shika (host-manager) and kept us well organized and Eddie Daichi Salazar ably assisted him. Our Dai-Tenzo (chief cook) was Anne Sendo Howells who, along with Scott Ishin Stolnack and Sally Zenka Metcalf, saw to it that we had nutritious and delicious vegetarian meals. Rev. Tendo was our Jikijitsu (time keeper), and made sure to keep us in line and on time. Rev. Daikan, assisted by Gavin Ozan Mackay and Rick Gendo Testa, served us tea, coffee and snacks as our Jisha (tea servers). Daikan also cared for our general health, and when one participant experienced heart trouble, he spent many hours accompanying this sangha member to the hospital. Edwin Kyosei Beatty and Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez served as my Inji (abbot assistants), and I very much appreciated the support around dokusan and teisho. Last but not least, there was the constant support from wife Josen;



without her I would have a much harder time trying to fulfill my role as abbot, and she also serves as the temple Fusu (accountant) to keep our finances in order. On the last day of sesshin, Gendo was ordained as an unsui (cloud and water person – Zen priest in training), more on this later in this issue, along with a transcription of the middle day teisho and my closing incense poem.

Just after Rohatsu, I had surgery to repair a lower-back herniated disk. I must have blown the disk during the last day of samu at Autumn Sesshin. I am now fully recovered from surgery, but my right foot and ankle are still numb in places. Since the last issue of Plum Mountain News we had a fun Toya party



on December 17th; this time I did get my drone to perform a proper zendo inspection. After our one-week holiday break, we rang in the new year with chanting, 108 rings of our kansho bell, and a fabulous potluck. From January 25 - February 6, I was in Germany at the

invitation of the Bonn Rinzai Sangha, now named "No Rank – No Name Sangha." Because of the great organizing skills and determination of Monika Jion Winkelmann, with assistance from others in the Bonn



sangha, I was kept very busy. I met and gave a talk with Dr. Paul Koppler, who also has 40 years of meditation training, on how to face crises both personal and social. I led a one-day mini-sesshin in Bonn, and in Cologne I gave a talk on reaching our deep heart-mind. I also gave a talk hosted by Thomas Christaller Sensei at his dojo in Bonn on how to respond to our crazy world. The trip concluded with a five-day sesshin. It was a fabulous journey for me, and I think there are roots growing in this sangha; plans are already being made for me to return next year.

As I write this, our three-day Winter Odayaka Sesshin has just concluded with 25

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participants. The last day's teisho was about how *there is no right or wrong in the Tao*. *How can this be?* [Please have a listen](#). Odayaka sesshins have a lighter schedule and structure than our weeklong sesshins. This schedule is best for those new to Zen or for those who don't have the time or energy for a longer sesshin. Chobo-Ji offers half-day mini-sesshins once a month, three-day Odayaka sesshins twice a year, and week-long sesshins once a quarter. Please participate in our sesshin schedule at the level that is appropriate for you, as sesshin is the best opportunity to investigate our heart-mind more deeply.

In this issue you will find announcements for Spring Sesshin, Spring Post assignments, our Annual Meeting announcement, an update on Patacara Community Services, three articles by sangha members, a poem which Samuel Koelewijn wrote during the recent sesshin in Bonn, and an excerpt of an essay by Claude Anshin Osho, titled "Students Create Caricatures of Their Masters." I've also copied some helpful reminders on how to move forward in "Building a Healthy Spiritual Community."

I have recently gained new insight into the importance and depth of the student-teacher relationship. Accordingly, I am working on taking more ownership and responsibility in my role as abbot at Chobo-Ji. I'm learning to accept that the role of abbot is more significant than I had hoped, requiring more boundaries than I want. I've made many mistakes as abbot over the last 18 years; most of them have been around having insufficient boundaries between my role as abbot and my personal life. I've set more boundaries over time, and I've unfortunately learned I must set still more. I

don't want to be anyone's teacher, and I try to discourage anyone from seeing me this way. My role is to hold the form, point at the moon, and conduct koan study. Nevertheless, as long as I serve as abbot, I must respect that people will naturally see me as their "teacher." Therefore, I realize I must further deepen boundaries that are appropriate to protect the role, students and myself. As I recently said in a [podcast](#) of my last teisho from

Rohatsu, I take responsibility for the departure of any sangha members who have left because of words I've exchanged with them, and I am very sad when people leave because of my own shortcomings and faults. Of course, none of us "arrive." Always we can say to ourselves, "not yet." Each of us is a work in progress; wherever we are in our own development, we are just beginning. To help me in my development, I have cultivated a group of close associates; some are Zen teachers such as Anshin Osho, others are psychotherapists. My associates regularly communicate with me and I with them, and we share and process together anything troubling us; we are mentors for each other. It is with this group that I can share anything and everything, including my fears, personal history, frustrations and inner wounded hungry ghosts.

Beyond our upcoming Spring Sesshin and Annual Meeting, I will be traveling in April to sit with the San Diego and Walla Walla sanghas and to Portland in May. The Portland event will be to sit with the No Rank Sangha and confirm Rev. Rinzan as an [Osho](#) – Full Priest who can ordain unsui and give Dharma Interview and limited koan training. I am very happy for this event. Given the sadness and loss in my life lately, I'm looking forward to celebrating this association with Rinzan and the No Rank Sangha. Please consider coming down to Portland to celebrate with us on May 27, 2017.

May true Dharma continue to flower at Chobo-Ji and the sanghas associated with us.

With gassho,
Genjo

Students Create Caricatures of Their Masters by Claude Anshin Osho

Excerpt translated from German from the magazine 'Zen' No.31, 1996



Students almost always create an archetypical cult-image of their master. They (the master) should generate a special love and affection, they should be always calm and never freak out or get excited, they should not show emotions and of course never get angry. They should not make any errors on their path and today never take back what was said yesterday. They should always show you that you are the best, most beloved and favorite student and – if this doesn't work they should at least know your name and all life circumstances that you shared with them, even if it was some years ago. Their brain needs to be perfect. They are not allowed to become sick and definitely not allowed to die or if they die then they are not permitted to die until at least the age of 120 (as the master always needs to be there for **you**!). They are not allowed to sit in front of the television screen and for sure they are not allowed to watch the programs that you consider to be ugly. But they must know already everything that is happening in life and in the world. They are not allowed to have faults or what **you** consider to be faults. They must always show a smile on their face, and they are not allowed to ever be bad.

In short: Students create a caricature image, a kind of God image of a person and are upset and shocked when this person doesn't conform to this image.

It is even worse when students claim that their master is exactly like their self-created god and even worse when they attach themselves to this dream even after the master's death. These students take away the humanity of their masters whether male or female and these students take away the dignity of their masters as human beings.

Building a Healthy Spiritual Community

Excerpt of Chapter 27 from the book "Sex and the Spiritual Teacher" by Scott Edelstein, Wisdom Publications, 2011

The health of any spiritual community depends in part on each teacher, whose actions, words, values, and approach to life will reverberate throughout the community's culture. The converse is also true: spiritual teachers need the same support of their students and communities. When such support is absent or in short supply, teachers are much more likely to lose their way...

Healthy spiritual communities live by two essential principles:

- Spiritual teachers are normal human beings. They may be wise, but they are not infallible.
- Community members are responsible to one another. They trust and respect each other, and agree not to harm one another.

Not coincidentally, these are also the two essential principles underlying any healthy teacher-student relationship.

The ongoing application of these principles typically endows a spiritual community with these attributes:

- Recognition of each member's humanity – and their individuality.
- Recognition of each member's full inclusion in the community.
- Transparency and openness.
- A willingness of all members (including the teacher) to be wrong, to admit mistakes, and to learn from those mistakes.
- A willingness of all members (including the teacher) to change and grow.
- Clear, simple mission that is reflected in what the community

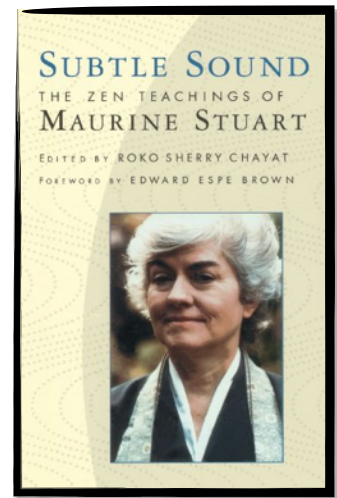
members actually do and say.

- Very clear, very public expectations of the teacher.
- Clear job descriptions for the teacher, other employees, and long-term volunteers.
- Clear and explicit terms of governance.
- Financial stability.

Resonating by Anne Sando Howells

I've been reading around in Maurine Stuart's *Subtle Sound*, usually at least once a week and sometimes more often, since September (it was my book for the Fall Intensive). Most often I've read bits of it early in the morning before driving to Chobo-Ji for zazen – when I could get myself out of bed early enough. Ten to twenty minutes of reading, always illuminating and inspiring, even with usually at least one interruption from cats wanting a second helping of breakfast. Before *Subtle Sound*, my book for these times was *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. I think now I'll keep both books handy. Like Shunryu Suzuki's, Stuart's teachings seem inexhaustible, because what they address is inexhaustible: the Zen student's practice. Her practical advice hits home, and I'm inspired by her ability to point with words at what is beyond words.

Maurine Stuart Roshi, a principal American student of Soen Nakagawa Roshi, died in 1990, age 67; *Subtle Sound*, collecting her Zen teachings and edited by Roko Sherry Chayat, was published by Shambhala in 1996. In these pages she's still alive. As an American and a woman, she is a teacher I connect with differently than I do with Suzuki. With Suzuki, I am simply the beginning student, spoken to directly. With Stuart, I am a fellow student, welcomed, even embraced. Suzuki is pure "teacher," sympathetic enough but not particularly fatherly or friendly (not unfriendly either). Stuart is motherly, sisterly, caring, companionable, sharing the sesshins with her listeners. I'd say the gender difference is quite evident, but the



cultural difference is a bigger part of it: actually Genjo Osho, in his kindness and openness, seems to me quite a lot like Stuart, for all the differences in personalities. The core Zen "message" is the same from all three teachers – quite reassuring to have so much consistency, no need to fuss over contradictions. But as a Rinzai teacher who talks about koans and koan practice much as Genjo does, and as an American teacher, Stuart's is the voice which merges with his.

Because during this period – fall 2016 stretching into winter 2017 – we've been going through a crisis at Chobo-Ji and I've felt knocked about some by the instabilities of it, I've found myself lighting on passages in *Subtle Sound* which help with difficult times. Right in the first chapter is as good a place as any to look for guidance – a passage whose statements are Zen commonplaces but like all Zen commonplaces, truths that must be understood over and over again:

We take refuge in the Dharma. The Dharma is our path. Everything in our life is a constant process of learning and discovering. Everything in our life is to be related to fully. Everything is the path, constantly changing, constantly becoming something else. There is absolutely nothing that remains the same even for one minute. So we have many ups and downs, many waves in the ocean of our life. Taking refuge in the Dharma means that we relate fully to every single thing that happens. (4-5)

Earlier in my Chobo-Ji experience I understood "change" as something that

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happened to me, in me, in my awareness. Chobo-Ji – meaning Genjo as my teacher, the senior students as the sangha, our beautiful space – represented calm, stability, what I could hope to grow into. Of course I was always aware that flux was here too: every sit and sesshin was different, the people present kept changing, everyone had moods, and so on. But the waves didn't seem very big. Sometimes in the past year, however, we've been surfing giant breakers – and I'm not even a surfer! I have been trying my best to "relate fully" to it, to this constantly changing path. As a prospective unsui, though, at moments I've asked myself, what have I gotten into? Is it wise to continue? Is this even a path?

My answer, at this point, is that I've just gotten deeper into life. Not for the first time, of course – I've gone through turbulence in the past that was more painful and difficult to handle for me personally. But as I write this, I know that this time around has been different not just because I'm older but because Zen practice has been providing me the impetus to face the real, exhaust delusions, encounter what happens as gates to truth, and all with as much of a caring attitude as I can summon up. On page 3, Stuart says, "We suffer so much because we want so much, think situations should be different from what they are." I've been seeing how easy it is to get so tangled up in wanting things to be different that one isn't seeing clearly how things are – making growth, positive change, more difficult. But the practice, when I persist, kicks in and brings some clarity.

In chapter 24, "True Seeing," Stuart tells a story about someone becoming a monk:

Funyomitta told his teacher Bashashita that he wanted to become a monk. Bashashita asked him what he would do as a monk. "Nothing special," Funyomitta said. His teacher then asked, "What will you not do?" Funyomitta replied, "Secular affairs." Bashashita asked again, "What will you do?" Funyomitta aid, "Sacred affairs." His teacher questioned him further: "What do you mean by 'sacred affairs'?" Funyomitta answered, "When I am tired, I sleep. When I am thirsty, I drink." Bashashita said, "You already have true wisdom. I am sure that your renunciation will be extremely meritorious, and I now ordain you as a true monk." (118)

I happened to read this chapter on January

1, the beginning of this year in which I'll be ordained, and of course I wanted to ponder it. It's "Ordinary life is Zen" and "Everything we do is practice." What is the monk "renouncing"? Self-importance, I think. Good writing, the general rule says, uses passive verb constructions very sparingly: active verbs give life to the sentence, and they don't let the do-er hide and thus avoid responsibility. Maurine Stuart points out that Funyomitta, in his initial responses, doesn't say "I." He doesn't say something like "I will polish my practice" or "I will help people." He says "Nothing special," and then "Sacred affairs." "Sacred" does sound special, but Funyomitta experiences the ordinary as sacred, and the "I" is almost irrelevant. We can notice that "I" comes back in when he says "I sleep" and "I drink," but these are the simplest of declarative sentences pointing to the simplest of actions necessary to the living. Funyomitta acts, he won't avoid responsibility, but life is what's sacred – "sacred affairs" are the Dharma acting through him – and "he" is nothing special.

A few days before I read this chapter, an old friend asked, in reference to my plan of ordination, "Do you feel brave?" My response was "some of the time." He said he thought I was brave. I said, "After all, what do I have to lose?" "Everything," he said. At the time, I thought he meant by this, it might not work out, it might be a mistake. Perhaps this *is* what he meant, but even though I hadn't yet really gotten this far in my thinking, I believe my words were coming from my (intermittent) knowledge that "I" have nothing to lose because "I" am nothing anyway. Any bravery involved is only the bravery required to take the next step into the unknown.

Sacrifice

by Murphy Zenun Davis

A few years ago during Rohatsu, I had an awakening. I had tuned in to the larger universe, and the boundaries between big mind and little mind were not fixed. It was a great and beautiful thing; and I didn't believe the warnings that it wouldn't last. Why wouldn't it? I knew it wouldn't end because It had always been there; I never *didn't* have It. I look back on my notes from that Rohatsu and read words like "Master of



the Universe" and remember how it wasn't an egotistical use of the phrase. I was master because I was aware of my true nature, which is no nature at all. I experienced the Way as "perfect like vast space where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess." I didn't "retain or reject" and therefore saw "the true nature of things." I was "calm and open hearted," and found the "Great Way to be neither easy nor difficult." In fact, every sutra we chanted made complete sense to me for the first time.

My ordinary, discriminating mind started driving again within a few weeks. For those few weeks I was sustained by the memory of what had happened, and indulged in a little self-deception by telling myself I was fundamentally different than what I used to be, that it was impossible to go back to ordinary mind. But I wasn't and I did. Remembering is not the same as being.

I ntellectually and theoretically, I understand that there is no forward and back and the reality I experienced is constant, whether I feel it or not. But the desire to feel it all the time is a powerful one. I kept sitting and coming back to sesshin, looking to repeat the performance, even though intellectually and theoretically I knew that whatever I experience at any given time is also It. No matter how many times I told myself that though, it didn't help. My practice ground down to a slow crawl.

Rohatsu 2015 might be the most interesting Rohatsu I've ever been to, though not because I rode the backs of dragons or time traveled or dissolved into the great and beautiful nothingness of the Tao. In fact, I slept a lot. And hallucinated, which is something I hadn't done for a while. (Once I hallucinated a gigantic sofa in the middle of the room so completely that I thought "Good thing someone put a couch there, so

Genjo can't see me sleeping.") My hip killed, and I had to sit in a chair, which I pretended didn't hurt my ego at all. I had no payoffs in the way I usually define payoffs: soaring insights, grand conclusions, kumbaya. Just half-hearted attempts to stay awake.

Afterward though, I felt strangely satisfied, as though I'd eaten a good meal or finished paying my bills for the month. I had no thoughts of making anything last, or even feelings of relief that it was over. I'd get hungry again, the bills would have to be paid again next month. But how could it be that I was so philosophical and accepting? I unsuccessfully fought sleep! I had no visions! There was no soaring! I had failed in so many categories.

My friend John Daikan Green was ordained unsui at Rohatsu 2015. Though some old bells went off about drinking Kool Aid, I'm happy to report that I enjoyed a curious maturation in my views of the step John was taking. As I witnessed the ceremony I enjoyed the great-and-ordinary realization that I've finally outgrown my belief that some people possess spiritual superiority over the rest of us. It's an old religious indoctrination that *intellectually and theoretically* I'd rejected, but there's always a tiny part of me that worried about not pissing off Jesus. At some point during the ceremony it sunk in that taking unsui vows is far from declaring Enlightenment and finishing the race. It's simply (!) the commitment to carry on the *forms* of the practice so it can be carried forward for future generations crazy enough to want to do it. How very practical, and how awfully nice that there are individuals willing to take that on.



Fast forward to San Diego sesshin, 2016. I wasn't hopeful that I'd get any fantastic experiences or deep insights that often come with the psychic deep cleaning sesshin provides. In fact, my practice crawled again and I'd begun to suspect that all this sitting wasn't really working on me. I wondered briefly why I was going, but didn't question it too deeply. I looked forward to the annual



base-touching with the San Diego sangha. I was happy my husband came with me so I didn't have to do all of the driving.

Friday evening passed pleasantly enough. My body felt good, my mind was relatively clear. Then Saturday happened. I'm not sure, but it's possible I experienced Great Doubt on Saturday. I slept and slept on the cushion, questioned the wisdom of what I was doing, and listened to the thoughts telling me it really wasn't working. Seriously, what **are** we doing and what kind of damage are we doing to our bodies? I have to think about things like my old age, and this can't be good for it. Plus, it's deadly boring. So I was already crabby when the woman-burning-her-face koan was introduced, and its insidious formulaic gender bias fed my impatience even more.

It was the tale of a woman in long-ago Japan who passionately wanted to join a monastery (the ultimate boys-only club), but was not going to be allowed admittance because her beauty would distract the monks. Her solution was to horribly scar her face. It worked; she was allowed to join. Even though I knew it was a different time, she didn't have the options I have, sexual tension is real, it's probably not even true, blah blah, my knees hurt just enough to want to rage against this age-old formula of exalting women's sacrifice while ignoring men's immaturity as they hold the power to grant or withhold favors. The story ended with the question: "*What would you do, how far would you take it, what would you sacrifice, what are you willing to do for this practice?*"

Good question. What am I willing to do?

I knew right away that the short answer was "Not disfigure my face." But that day, under those circumstances, the long answer made physical disfigurement feel like child's play. Since it occurred to me during my lowest point on Saturday (during a brief period of being awake), it lacked glory and rashness, and carried more authenticity because of it.

Mission accomplished.

Here's what it was: I'm willing to do THIS. I'm willing to go through as many Saturdays as there are left in my short, short life. If I never ride the back of another dragon, if I never dissolve into the Great Void again, if I never learn to stay awake, so be it. Not exactly the kind of pledge or insight some future Genjo will expound on 1,000 years from now, but it made perfect sense to me.

Sunday morning passed pleasantly enough. I wondered if Saturday had been necessary to get to Sunday, but I didn't really care about the answer. When I got home, everything looked the same, but different. My daily practice is going well.

And the woman who disfigured her face to become one of the boys? Apparently, she went on to live my 'long answer' and do great things. And the monks who initially denied her entrance? They're still around in one form or another, most grossly represented by our President-Elect and his followers, more subtly by the misogynistic blind spots driving the behavior of so many, men and women alike (myself included). Perhaps current events will galvanize all of us to deeper self-examination, help us uncover our biases and confront our collusion, and ultimately claim our responsibility in the situation we find ourselves in.

Starting with me.

I'm Kissed

by Samuel Koelewijn

I am a kissed man!

*Though my skin burns like fire and Mara laughs,
the stream of life flows from my eyes to my heart.*

*As I start to awaken to the warmth
of a deeper truth, I dream of love.
Waves are dancing, trying to make me crazy.
I see a creative field that connects us all
liberating me from demons.*

Please help me.

*I feel support and strength to walk
into the forest of my fears.
There is a guiding light I can trust!
My mind shifts and I am challenged
to make my life curious again.*

Is this really true?

*I kiss the world,
and I'm kissed like a newborn child.*

I am a kissed man!

Annual Meeting

The 2017 annual Chobo-Ji membership meeting and potluck will be held at the zendo on Sunday, April 9th. Please come help elect Board members, hear about what your Board and Committees have been up to, and give us your feedback on priorities for the coming year and beyond. It is important that a quorum of members be present, so please join us at 11:30 am, following the mini-sesshin. Even if you cannot attend the entire meeting, it is still worth attending the first part to have your votes counted – but of course we hope you can stay and help us envision the future of Chobo-Ji. If you are not yet a member, you are still welcome to attend and participate, and we hope you will consider becoming a member. Please bring a vegetarian potluck item to share if possible.

Main Topic for Discussion: The Finance Committee and Board have completed a reserve study to determine how much money we will set aside each year to provide for larger, irregular expenses such as building repairs. Apart from this prudent reserve fund, we are still left with some

surplus cash – and a variety of possibilities for what to do with these funds. The Committee and Board feel strongly that any substantial spending (or saving) should be guided by a *vision* of how best to invest in the health and longevity of the Sangha, and in its ability to contribute most effectively to our local and global neighborhoods. Accordingly, we will end the annual meeting with a Sangha-wide discussion in which we will share possible scenarios for how to use our surplus funds, and invite all present to offer additional suggestions and to weigh in on which options resonate most strongly with the membership. We look forward to hearing from you.

With gassho,

Chris Zenshin Jeffries

President, Board of Trustees

Light Inside the Dark

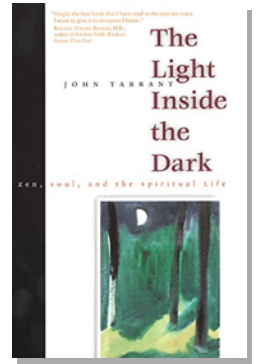
review by Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik

I had picked up [The Light Inside the Dark](#) after having read McDaniel's [Cypress Tree in the Garden](#). In the latter book, I was less impressed by Tarrant than his principal student, Joan Sutherland, whose approach to koans and understanding of Zen as the endeavor to become more intimate in the world was a beautiful evocation of my own orientation to Zen. To the best of my knowledge, Sutherland has no writings available. So I turned instead to Tarrant, her teacher.

Initially, I found the book intriguing. Tarrant begins with a definition of the “soul” and “spirit,” which I found as a helpful bridge between Zen and Western spiritual teachings. In a word, he describes spirit as one’s drive to know what is larger, beyond, greater than, or connecting with Higher Power, and he defines soul as the engagement with the everyday wonderful richness of the world. Tarrant uses wonderfully poetic language to describe these two drives. “Through attentiveness to spirit,” he writes, “we enter a place of reverence, of such deep witnessing of life that it is a kind of illumination. We see that woman, river, wind and star are all equal, and that death and life are both dreamlike

processes, themselves part of a greater unchangingness.”

In contrast, he writes that, “In love with the multitudinous world, the soul is pagan: It falls headlong into matter. Scattering its affections, it likes to merge - with chocolate, gardening, a fast car, a lost love. And while it brings delight, it brings misery too, joining with rage, vanity, and jealousy.”



In my mind, this differentiation neatly clarifies the two aspects of practice. We engage the spirit, Tarrant says, primarily through meditation. In this, I would say, we commune with mu, or as Genjo Osho puts it, the “black before black.” Off the cushion, we engage in soulfulness: gardening, sweeping, cooking, enjoying a hot cup of coffee, being one with the trees, enjoying bare feet on cold concrete, knowing our inner child, being able to sob with grief at the loss of a loved one.

Though the distinction is fundamentally an artifice, in that the two are inseparably conjoined (“like a box and its lid”), it is a helpful artifice that clarifies the two sides of the coin of Zen life. It also helps form a bridge with Western spiritual traditions where terms such as “soul” and “spirit” are more common.

Tarrant is clearly highly well read and well educated. In the book, he relies equally on Western, mostly Roman and Greek, myth as on Zen teaching, writing about Persephone and Orpheus as much as about Hakuin. Using both Eastern and Western thought, he charts the spiritual life as a movement first inward toward “darkness” and its concomitant suffering and doubt, then outward into life and light and finally into transcendence with a description of personal integration and the development of character.

This is a common, indeed archetypal journey found in all traditions, the hero who

seeks, is lost, finds and ends in domesticity. Where Tarrant fails, in my mind, is in adding anything new or interesting to a topic authors such as Joseph Campbell or Robert A. Johnson have written extensively about before. Moreover, Tarrant uses too many references without fully exploring any. I had a hard time reading the book without feeling like I was flipping through an author's note-cards rather than an organized presentation that might take me deep. Indeed, I felt like I was skimming the surface of Western and Eastern culture with someone so quickly distracted that I was having a hard time keeping up.

Also, it was not easy to read the book given reports of Tarrant's poor interpersonal boundaries. There was nothing in the book, in and of itself, that would suggest ethical lapses. He does not, for instance, excuse sexual misconduct, for instance. That said, knowing of his own behaviors, I read the chapter on "character" with some skepticism. Without having enough context, and indeed never having met the man, the only sense I can make of his own transgressions and his description of integrity as "the ability to set ourselves into the flow of life" is to imagine that his appreciation of the "soul" becomes conflated with "spirit" in such a way that the appreciation, immediacy and richness of the sensual world neglects the equally rich and tender care for boundaries. I may be wrong, again, not knowing him, but when I think of sexual boundary violations, I think of someone who believes that deep engagement in strong emotion is, in and of itself, a sign of the spiritual life. Perhaps what Tarrant and many others are missing, in addition to an appreciation of the archetypal characters of "spirit" and "soul," is an appreciation of "host," so that, as the richness of life flows in and out and through me, there is an understanding of the tender care this journey must engender if we are not to leave ruin in our wake.

The journey from dark to light to the marketplace can also be defined as the journey from home, into the world, and back again. When we have journeyed and returned, we become a host to everything. We invite in guests, our children and spouses, Mara, the flowers and trees and care for all of them intimately. Without an understanding of this archetype, the spiritual project runs the risk of becoming one of self-affirmation, self-indulgence and

self-affirmation leading to boundary violations where my seemingly soulful wants get confused with communing with the spirit.

Ultimately, where Tarrant's book fails is in its neglect of saying anything useful about being of service to others. Much of what he writes turns inward on itself so that the plethora of images and mythological references he spreads before the reader seem like nothing more than a vanity project suggesting "depth" where there is not any. In this, I am not maligning Tarrant's wisdom or his own practice. Again, I do not know him. I speak only of how I received his presentation in this particular book given those things I have heard about him.

Hidden Lamp

Anne Aitken's "Get on and Go"

Middle Day, Rohatsu Sesshin, 2016

Anne Aitken was a student of Master Yamada Koun. One day he asked her: "What do you think of death?" She replied: "Why, it's like when a bus stops before you —you get on and go."

Study Question: *How can you ready yourself for death without wasting time planning for it? Is it even possible to get ready for death?*

Here we are at the middle day of Rohatsu sesshin, and the time has gone unbelievably quickly. Anyone who has done sesshin before, especially a Rohatsu sesshin, knows that time will feel like it is going even faster towards our conclusion. It will feel like a ball rolling downhill, gaining speed as we come towards completion. We're now at the pinnacle of our climb, and I think most haven't felt like it has been extraordinarily difficult. Nevertheless, the rigors of sesshin have done what they can to wear down our self-made artificial barriers and ego-defenses. Hopefully, our instincts for survival are now taking a back seat. Undoubtedly, we are all more raw, vulnerable and nakedly exposed to both our internal world and the outer world we share

with each other. Of course, at such a time, we all notice each other's idiosyncrasies; we're more sensitive and because of this perhaps easily disturbed. At the same time, this sensitivity also allows us to easily penetrate the veil between self and other, life and death, and the ordinary and the absolute. In reality, of course, there are no barriers to begin with. Yet, the artificial barriers, produced by what we call a self or the ego, are now looser, more porous, and perhaps even transparent.

I don't know if you noticed it, but Mt. Rainier is peeking out between the trees across the lake. Wasn't the mist on the lake this morning wondrous? We may well be moved to tears, by the serenity. The mist on the lake speaks to us in a way that, prior to four days of sesshin, we would not have heard.

In Zen, we say practice is "facing this matter." And by "this matter," we mean this matter of life and death. What is this? How do we negotiate this matter of life and death? The koans that we're reading in [The Hidden Lamp](#) have brought us to an investigation of death. During these dark days, with winter-like weather, in the midst of Rohatsu Sesshin, there could not be a more appropriate time to examine death.

Our sangha had a recent death, that of Muzan, and he was reluctant to get on the bus, reluctant to cross over to death. He was, until close to the very end, hoping for one more reprieve. He would ask periodically in the last months, "Is it time to let go?" He knew that the day to drop this body was close; nevertheless, he was reluctant to get on the bus. When is it time to let go or is there still time to fight for life?

I remember Genki Takabayashi's, our founding abbot's, death a few years ago. I remember being with him in the nursing care facility when the doctor asked him, "Do you want to continue to fight for life or not?" It was a critical time in his life journey and he had to decide whether to stay on this side or



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get on the bus. At that time he said, “Yes, absolutely! I’m going to fight for life.” The next time I saw him, about a month later, he was having trouble eating the facility’s food and kept having me sneak out to a local Japanese restaurant to bring him treats, but you could see that he had lost the fight to live on. I had the good fortune to be with him when he decided it was time to let go of this life. I wasn’t with him when he took his last breath about a week later, but I was right there when he decided he was ready to board the bus. Throughout my more than 35 years with him, he always made whisked green tea for me. I’ve learned how to whisk a bowl of tea with instruction from Dr. Glenn Webb, Genko Ni-Osho and from Genki over the years. Of course, Genki was far more expert at it and he always enjoyed whisking a bowl of tea for all his many guests. But on this occasion, and only this occasion, he asked me to whisk him a bowl of tea. He took a few sips and coughed a little (because it was hard for him to keep anything down) and I knew then this would be the last time I’d see him in physical form.



In this koan, Anne Aiken, student of Yamada Koun, was asked about death, she replied, it was like a bus was coming, when it arrives, you step on and go.

We ask ourselves, where do we go? It’s what all religions try to answer. A lot of religions, including Buddhism, have used the metaphor of a ferry crossing a river to arrive at the other shore. Interestingly, in Buddhism, this image of taking a ferry is used on two occasions. One is on the occasion of great awakening and the other is the passage from life to death. Why is this? It’s said that the historical Buddha, on the morning of December 8, some 2,500 years ago, sitting under the Bodhi tree, seeing the morning star, Venus, had a great awakening and entered Nirvana. It is also said that, when he died, he entered “Final Nirvana.” “Nirvana,” which means the cessation of suffering, is used twice, once for great awakening and also for entering death without rebirth.

You’ve probably heard me say that lots of animals on the planet understand death very clearly. It’s just completely obvious that

many animals mourn death. However, we may be the only animal on the planet which not only understands death, but realizes that *we’re* going to die. This realization, which usually comes to us somewhere after five and before we are teenagers, brings on a brooding existential angst about the possibility of losing our own life and everyone essential to us. Religions try to speak to this existential angst by giving us an “answer” about where we go after we board the bus. Where do we go? Do we go to the “Pure Land”, heaven, or are we reborn?

One way or another, we’re going to die. Maybe we’ll go smoothly into the night like wading into a warm pool or lake, or maybe dying will be more like falling from a high cliff and doing a belly flop. Either way, we will die. Shunryu Suzuki uses another metaphor for death in his book [Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind](#); he says that birth is like water plunging from a waterfall, the seamless river separates into individual droplets. Each drop of the river is a “life.” Then imagine that those individual droplets awake to their individuality – that would be you and me – but soon, during free-fall, we realize, “Holy Shit! We are all falling to our death!” Suzuki goes on to suggest how wonderful it would be for the individual drops to return to the seamless river. This idea has been very comforting to me! We started out seamless with the river, we briefly have a sense of individuality or separation, and then soon return to the river from which we came. Notice that before the drop enters the waterfall, it has no individuality or sense of separation; after it returns to the river, it also has no individuality. But nothing’s lost and nothing’s created. In fact, all the atoms are still around, just in a different arrangement.

We also have this idea that death follows life and, in Buddhism, we have the idea that life follows death. In Zen, we’re introduced to the idea that life follows life and death follows death; death after death, life after life. After one spring, comes another spring. After one fall, comes another fall. It’s a little different way of looking at things, which, if you sit with it for a while, might shift your perspective.

Seeing the mist on the water this morning, also reminded me of one of my favorite books, *The Mists of Avalon*. The ferry person would bring travelers from one shore

to Avalon, through the mists, if guided by a priestess. If travelers reached the shore without a priestess, they ended up at a nunnery. If they reached the shore with a priestess, they entered Avalon, the same place but different. Where are we going this day? One of the first metaphors about death probably arose when our ancient ancestors, tens of thousands of years ago, saw fire, and how wood changed to ash and smoke. I imagine that they thought, death must be a kind of transformation like this, dust is left behind and something merges with the vast sky. Frankly, this metaphor also speaks to me.

Genki Roshi talked about having “Blue Sky Mind” and told us that we’re here in sesshin to open up to Blue Sky Mind. In our Zendo back in Seattle, there’s a calligraphy by a master calligrapher, Yamanouchi Sensei, that says, “White cloud, no mind” (Haku Un Mu Shin). And this speaks to another metaphor of life and death from a Zen perspective. What we think of as our individuality is like a condensation of water in the great blue sky appearing as a cloud and it, like our own personality, moves and morphs throughout its existence, constantly in motion, never the same, always changing from one shape to another. At some point, every cloud in the sky rains out or evaporates and is gone. The cloud was here and then it is not, but always the same sky! We are all like little puffs of clouds in the great sky; clouds dissipate, but nothing is fundamentally lost, created or destroyed.



The woman who gave her reflections on this case in the *Hidden Lamp* is Nancy Genshin. She is from the Maezumi lineage, and had this to say: “Going back to the koan, the bus had various destinations at different parts of my life. A very early destination was ‘the arms of Jesus,’ then it was ‘the Kingdom of God’ and then, ah, I read about nirvana. Then it became, ah, I’d be a Bodhisattva, owned by the Mahayana Company and then, excitingly, rebirth influenced by good karma. And then it became the theory of quantum physics, believed to be the most accurate description of true reality. And on it goes...let’s be honest, when all the props of religion fall away, what do we really know?” No

knowing! We're all going to get on the bus and then we'll see!

I don't know, but my thought is that our individuality is mostly lost when we die. Like the shape of a cloud, I think our sense of self dissipates entirely into the blue sky. It is not at all troubling to me that my individual identity is lost, nor does the thought trouble me that everyone's individuality may be lost. It's tragic in a way, because each person, leaf and cloud is entirely unique, and has never been before and will never be again. When each leaf falls or a snowflake melts, or any one of us dies, the unique nature of each will never be seen again. You've heard me talk about shifting one's perspective from the leaf perspective to the root perspective. My whole Zen practice journey, these 41 years, has been about learning to shift my perspective from the leaf to the root. Of course I recognize that I'm usually involved in my flapping leaf perspective, but occasionally and consistently, as the years roll on, it becomes a bit easier to shift to the root perspective. The root perspective is eternal. It has no separate identity, no form, let alone an adequate name. The root perspective is beautifully put in the Diamond Sutra, when the historical Buddha says to Subhuti:

Who sees me by Form
Who sees me by Sound.
Wrongly turned are his or her
footsteps on the Way
For he cannot perceive the
Tathagata.

Of course the root perspective can't be grasped in any way, but we can point at it, and with intention experience it from time to time. A wonderful demonstration of the root perspective experience can be found in the quintessential four lines of the Diamond Sutra that we read at every Chobo-Ji Summer Sesshin:

All composite things
Are like a dream, a fantasy
a bubble and a shadow,
Are like a dewdrop and
a flash of lightening.
They are thus to be regarded.

And so you should
Think in this way
of all this fleeting world:

As a star at dawn,
a bubble in a stream,
A dewdrop, a flash of lightning
in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom
and a dream.

Everyone is capable of shifting to the root perspective. When visiting this perspective, these lines make complete sense. Inside the root perspective, all fear of living life or getting on the bus is entirely extinguished. In deep samadhi, I often feel like a lump of clay inseparable from the earth. This is my way of saying "Entirely alone, atop a sublime mountain." As a lump of clay, we are completely seamless with the earth, no worries about yesterday or tomorrow or even today, totally content with the mushrooms, moss and the frost. In deep samadhi we are peacefully in harmony with the mist, trees, starlight and the approaching snow.

The Tathagata speaking to Subhuti in the Diamond Sutra is trying to share the equanimity of the root perspective. Sitting on the cushion, far beyond being disturbed by each other's idiosyncrasies, sink into deep samadhi. There you will fall in love with everyone in this room. Your heart-mind will embrace the building that's holding us, and the lake and the trees, the mountain and the mist. If we open more fully to our deep nature we will embrace all of humanity with all of its trials and tribulations, genocide and genius. Let your heart-mind embrace this planet, embrace this lovely star we call the sun, embrace our Milky Way galaxy of hundreds of billions



of stars, and eventually let your heart-mind embrace the whole visible universe of hundreds of billions of galaxies. Do you think your heart-mind is too limited to do this? Then you are wrong. Don't miss the grace and power of love and the vast boundless expanse of heart-mind!

We have a few short days left of this Rohatsu Sesshin. Let's have a glimpse or two of beyond the beyond, and with a bit of

determination bring a taste of this boundless heart-mind back into our everyday lives.

With gassho,

Genjo



Closing Incense Poem

Rohatsu Sesshin 2016

Snow blizzard SHOUTS winter's approach.

*In the dead of night arises
ancient compassion.*

Who hears the falling rain?

*The Mysterious Way abounds,
as the train horn echoes over Salish lands.*

Spring Sesshin

March 24th -31st

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a **deposit and application** by **March 19**, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. Please drop it by or mail it.

The cost of sesshin is \$250 (less dues for this month). Sesshin will start Friday evening, 3/24, 5:30pm with informal supper, introductions and orientation. Sesshin from Saturday to the following Thursday runs from 5am-10pm. We provide sleeping accommodations for those traveling from out of town (**an additional \$10-\$20 per night**); please bring a sleeping bag, toiletries, sitting clothes, work clothes and a towel. The final Friday, 3/31, begins at 5am and concludes around 10am.

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 is to my practice and highly recommend them."

Chobo-Ji's Spring Intensive will start March 12 with mini-sesshin, and conclude on June 30. 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 full-time (or nearly full-time) attendance at two weeklong sesshins. 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](#) (or consult with Genjo about a alternative selection) 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 to schedule a Skype video call with Genjo Osho. Skype calls can be short, 5-10 minutes maximum per week, or up to 20 minutes every two weeks, or 45 minutes once a month.

6) If local to Puget Sound, it is also expected that participants will attend the weekly Sunday night Dharma Dialogues.

New Posts

Beginning March 1st

Anne Sendo Howells
Edwin Kyosei Beatty
Shika (Host - Manager)

Sally Zenka Metcalf
Rev. Tendo Kirkpatrick
Tenzo (Sesshin Cooks)

Rev. Seiho Morris
Steve Ganko Hanson
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

Gavin Ozan Mackay
Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Rick Gendo Testa
Chris Doelling
George Gibbs
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik
Eddie Daichi Salazar
Inji (Abbot Assistants)

Carolyn Josen Stevens:
Fusu (Accountant)

Sogetsu Hernandez, Daichi Salazar, Gavin Ozan Mackay, Rev. Tendo Kirkpatrick, Chris Zenshin Jeffries
Introductory Zazen

Patacara Awarded City Contract!

[Patacara Community Services](#) is honored to announce that the nonprofit will be contracting with the City of Seattle to manage Camp Second Chance, a clean and sober encampment for unhoused neighbors located at 9701 Myers Way S. Seattle, WA 98108. Patacara has been the fiscal sponsor for Camp Second Chance since June of 2016.

Polly Trout, Founder and Director of Patacara, says, "The city contract will allow us to improve camp services, and also expand the number of camp residents from 25 to 60. Our primary goals are to provide a safe, healthy, supportive community for



people experiencing the trauma of homelessness and to move people as quickly as possible into suitable indoor housing." The city contract will allow the camp to add garbage service, water service, city electricity, case management, and client assistance.

The camp would like to thank their neighbors in Top Hat, White Center, South Park, Highland Park, and South Delridge for their compassion and neighborliness. "We are looking forward to continuing to be good neighbors here," says Eric Davis, Camp Site Coordinator. "We are committed to doing our part to reduce litter and crime and to provide kindness and care to those who are in need." Patacara is working with the Department of Neighborhoods to establish a Community Advisory Committee representing community stakeholders. The committee meetings will be public and the meeting minutes will be posted online.

George Scarola, The City of Seattle's Director of Homelessness, says: "Patacara has built a strong program at Camp Second Chance. I'm looking forward to working closely with Patacara to help more people experiencing homelessness secure stable housing."

The city contract will work on a reimbursement basis, which means that Patacara will need to raise \$30,000 in seed money by March 1 in order to ensure good cash flow for the project. So far, private donors have invested \$14,000.

Patacara is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. Chobo-Ji has helped sponsor many of Patacara's efforts and Genjo Osho is the current president of the Board. Their mission is to offer compassionate service to those who are suffering. Currently, their programming focuses on providing compassionate service to our unhoused neighbors in King County.

Tokudo Ceremony

On December 11th, 2016, the last day of Rohatsu Sesshin, Genjo Osho ordained Rick Gendo Testa as an unsui (cloud and water person – Zen monk and priest in training). Gendo did Jukai in 2014 and has been practicing Aikido, bodywork and Zen for many years. He leads the [Shoshinkan Dojo](#), the oldest running Aikido dojo in Rhode Island. Genjo and Rick met at [Aiki Farms](#) in CT, run by Robert Heiwa Burns Sensei, where Genjo sometimes leads three-day sesshins. Rick recently completed the requisite four consecutive weeklong sesshins at Chobo-Ji and has committed to do four sesshins a year, until he becomes an [Osho](#) (full priest).

Gendo writes in his Tokudo application letter to Genjo Osho:

I have given this matter a great deal of attention. I have considered becoming ordained and have surmised that this course would be correct to pursue. This learning to



do what my heart feels is correct regardless of consequence or fear has been a difficult ongoing practice. But I have some experience now with this practice. Enough to trust my heart and ask

to be considered as a candidate for unsui ordination. Please accept this letter as my petition for ordination. There is much I don't know. I don't know Zen from a scholarly perspective. I don't know if I am truly a worthy candidate. I don't



know how to be or become an unsui. But, the many years of deep inquiry have brought me to this.



This moment. This not knowing. This opportunity is an opportunity to go further into the not knowing. Maybe this is Zen. This not knowing, but deeply knowing at once.

When Genjo asked Rick for further clarification Rick wrote:

There is an underlying wish to pay it forward so to speak... I would like to draw my last breath knowing fully that I did as much good as possible. I may be able to accomplish this by committing fully to the Zen path and



preserving the traditional forms for future seekers of the way. Becoming an unsui will deepen and actualize my commitment to being of service to others. This serving others is unmistakably my life path... Zen training and its influence are now inseparable... I can open up more. I can surrender more... I can and will dedicate my life to upholding and furthering the Way for others.

Genjo Osho extended Gendo's Jukai Dharma name by prefacing it with the kanji (Ko -古 Ji - 慈). So Gendo's full unsui Dharma name then becomes Ancient Compassion – Profound Way (Koji Gendo – 古 慈 玄道). Then at the conclusion of the Tokudo Ceremony Rev. Koji Gendo gave everyone a delightful look into his heart-mind by giving a funny and meaningful Dharma Talk.



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, 7:30pm: 3/5, 3/19, 4/2, 4/16, 4/23, 4/30, 5/7, 5/21, 5/28, 6/4, 6/18

Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30-8:45pm (except 3/28 & 6/27)

Shobogenzo Reading Group ...

100 Meals a Month – cook party ...

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

Board Meeting ...

Spring Sesshin ...

Eight week Tue. night INTRO TO ZEN series begins ...

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

Annual Meeting (Board elections – please come) ...

Shobogenzo Reading Group ...

Shobogenzo Reading Group ...

Shobogenzo Reading Group ...

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

Shobogenzo Reading Group ...

March 9, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

March 10, 7am - 10am

March 12, 5am - 11:15am

March 12, 11:30am - 1:30pm

March 24 – March 31

April 4, 7:30pm - 9pm

April 9, 5am - 11:15am

April 9, 11:30am - 1:30pm

April 13, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

April 27, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

May 11, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

May 14, 5am - 11:15am

May 25, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

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To learn more about membership see: <http://choboji.org/membership-and-no-ranks/>



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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