



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

As I write this most of Seattle is having a snow day, about 3-4 inches so far. It is at times like these that I think of a famous winter haiku, perhaps by Matsuo Basho, that roughly goes as follows, "No sky at all, no earth at all, still snow flakes fall." In a whiteout, no sky or earth are seen, still the snow falls. Both heaven and earth are Shunyata (Emptiness—ineffable source), still the snow falls. Who perceives the snow falling? Who appreciates the virgin stillness of newly fallen snow? This *is* a good day.

Rinzan Osho, Daichi and I traveled to Poland in mid November. It was the first time for Rinzan and Daichi to visit Auschwitz; it was my third time to do a [Zen Peacemaker Bearing Witness Retreat here](#). What I came away with was a kind of resignation – collectively we are not going to evolve any time soon beyond our most primitive instincts to blame, dehumanize and be cruel to others not in our tribe. As much as I will continue to work for progressive causes, peaceful solutions, and a caring approach to all beings great and small, animate and inanimate, perhaps the best any of us can do is to be kinder to each other. Later in this issue Daichi shares some of his thoughts about this trip.

Our Rohatsu sesshin the first week of December was low in numbers but strong in spirit. Everyone participating had a rakusu and the collective depth of practice was palpable. Carolyn Josen Sensei served as our Shika (host/manager) and kept us all dedicated to the samu (work meditation) tasks needed to run a smooth sesshin. Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez served as our Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook) and was ably assisted by Eddie Daichi Salazar. The meals were stupendous, but at Rohatsu we are all so grateful for a warm meal to nurture us that it is hard to go wrong! Rinzan Pechovnik Osho served as Jikijitsu (time



keeper) and also gave the second day [Dharma Talk](#). Rev. Gendo Testa kept the beat as our Densu (chant leader). Rev. Seifu Singh-Morales served as Jisha (tea server) and made sure we were plied with ample tea, coffee and snacks. Rev. Sento Howells served as my Inji (abbot assistant) and she kept the dokusan (formal Dharma interview) line moving with balance and efficiency. All of the teishos I gave on the [Book of Equanimity](#) at Rohatsu can be found on [Chobo-Ji's Podcast page](#). Later in this issue you will find my closing incense poem and a transcription of my teisho given on the fifth day of Rohatsu, which summarizes the essence of all Zen training.

I got to spend a day, Dec. 14, with the [No Rank](#) sangha and then visit the [Portland Japanese Garden](#) with Carolyn for the first time, which even in late fall was spectacular. We had our Toya (year end party) this year as a brunch potluck on Sunday, Dec. 16. Our temple celebrated the life of Roshi Bernie Glassman by doing a 49th day memorial for him on Dec. 22. The zendo was closed between Christmas and New

Year, and we opened New Year's Day morning with our annual chanting, bell ringing and extraordinary potluck.

In November we tried to process some minor concerns using our recently revised [Sangha Advocacy Council and Ethics Policy](#); unfortunately, mistakes were made leading to misunderstandings and painful interpersonal ruptures. Accordingly, we are working now on yet another revision to our policies with the strong intention of making them more clear and compassionate for all concerned. We are grateful to [Tuere Sala](#), a guiding teacher of the [Seattle Insight Meditation Society](#), for helping us negotiate a difficult situation and for giving us suggestions for improvements to our process, so that similar mistakes will not be made in the future.

Our temple's commitment to NVC training continues to deepen. In early January we had the great pleasure of having [Kathleen Macferran](#) facilitate two more workshops for us. Later in this issue, Sally Zenka Metcalf writes more about this and what's coming up. The [Stone Blossom Sangha](#) in Wenatchee held a three-day sesshin led by Sharon Meho Sensei January 18-20. I participated on Saturday and Sunday. One of our kinhin periods on Saturday was at the Wenatchee Women's March. See more from Meho in this issue. The following weekend, January 25-27,

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Rinzan Osho led Chobo-Ji's Winter Odayaka Sesshin with 22 participants. Rinzan gives a report on page 10. Peter Shinke Ilgenfritz gave a Follower of the Way Dharma Talk on the evening January 20 and it was recorded and has been published as a [podcast](#). A few months back Dr. Jeff Chozen Skolnick gave the Follower of the Way Dharma Talk and I asked him to transcribe it for this issue. Finally you will find announcements for our coming Spring Practice Intensive and our Spring Sesshin the last week of March.

It is my hope that everyone in Seattle got to enjoy our brief snow days and that we all stay warm as we await the coming of spring. Take care.

With gassho,

Genjo

Follower of the Way Talk

Dr. Jeff Chozen Skolnick's
"The Heart of the Brain Sutra"

We begin with this quick fact from *Astrophysics for People in a Hurry*, a book by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. "In the beginning, nearly 14 billion years ago, all the space, all the matter, and all the energy of the known universe was contained in a volume less than 1 trillionth the size of the period that ends this sentence."

Let me begin by apologizing to those of you who find inspiration in the mystery of the Heart Sutra—because this talk is on the science behind the Heart Sutra. Although many people have expressed to me that science ruins the mystery and mysticism of all aspects of Zen, for me, it is the opposite. The Heart Sutra is a statement of scientific fact, as far as I'm concerned—a declaration or reminder of who (or what) I am. The Heart Sutra guides us to this realization. Personally, I'd rather be guided towards an actual Awakening than merely inspired. Inspiration comes from within as actual realization blossoms.

Nevertheless, in this talk, I'll try to be both factual *and* mysterious.

Back to the creation of the universe: from the miraculous moment space, time and energy came into existence until now, I believe the pinnacle of that evolution is found in the object I hold in this box. [holds up a small chest] *Until proven otherwise, I consider it the most amazing structure this universe has ever known!*

[Opening the box, reaches in and brings out a representation of the human brain].

Why is this biological organ almost as miraculous as the creation of matter, space and time itself? *Because it is that very same lifeless universe that has come to be able to know itself!!* Here are some obvious facts to back that up. First, (from Rick Hanson and Richard Mendius' book, *Buddha's Brain*) the human brain has mind-boggling complexity. It is made of 100 billion nerve cells, each capable of five-thousand connections. What this means is that the number of possible connections or "brain states" is 10 to the millionth power (10 followed by a million zeros)! By comparison, it is estimated that the number of atoms in the known universe is "only" 10 to the 80th power! Let that soak in—the human brain is a physical wonder.

It's also easy to see how it stands out from other animal brains—even our closest genetic relative, the chimpanzee. We have such unfathomable intelligence and abilities: We can dance ballet, write libraries of books, understand subatomic physics, create magnificent works of art and engineer astonishing technologies. What's more, we have a sense of self: Our brains spawn a representation of a "self" and can project that representation into the world as an experiential, though artificial, reference point.

More than that, like all animal brains, the human brain can register and know what it perceives. That is a miraculous aspect of any animal brain if you think about it. Most animal brains have awareness.

But infinite connectivity, extraordinary intelligence, a sense of self, and simple awareness are *not, as I said*, why I believe the human brain is the most miraculous thing since the universe came into existence. As I said, the actual reason is that the human brain *is aware that it is aware!* It knows that it knows. It has so-called self-awareness. In other words, the human brain has awareness that can reflect in on itself, to know itself. This biological organ can know its own existence, it knows it is alive, in a deep and intimate way.

This astonishing ability is brought to you by an astonishing fact: we don't actually



just have one brain in our head split into two halves. We have two separate brains in our head! We know from patients who have had the connections severed between the two brains that, with technology that can communicate with each brain separately, each has separate awarenesses, separate personalities, different preferences, ways of experiencing reality and reacting. Yet, somehow, even though there are two brains, we have a unified experience. These two brains *are* vaguely aware of each other. When intensely reflected in on themselves these so-called "dual interpenetrating awarenesses" know *aliveness!* This sense of aliveness is the same thing as your brain knowing *its* existence.

As I alluded to, this inner reflected awareness is normally in the *back* of our unified experience, taken utterly for granted; yet, that heightened sense of existence can be brought forward with

zazen or with koans so we are more acutely aware of being alive! That's an Awakening.

This sets the stage to understand the Heart Sutra. Yet, let me stop here for a moment and talk about my journey, what brought me to the understanding of the Heart Sutra we are about to explore further.

My story starts in 1972, sitting on the steps outside of my high school. While reading a textbook on psychology, I read something that gave me a jolt, like a lightbulb on low suddenly turned bright. Referring to the brain, the book stated how astonishing it is that this "collection of chemicals" *can wake up to know it is alive*. This mind-blowing assertion became an instant fascination, setting me on a course to study the brain and consciousness as an undergrad biology/psychology major, and after medical school, in neuropsychiatry training and during three years of doctoral education and brain research in neuropsychology.

In 1980, I discovered Zen. Fascinated by accounts of Enlightenment, I began counting breaths, and moved on to the practice of Shikantaza. Eventually, I was able to understand that Shikantaza can be separated out for ease of understanding into different skills that can be later brought together into one skill. These skills activate the small number of circuits in the so-called higher brain over the majority of circuits in the lower brain. This brings self-awareness into the foreground, while ordinary reality of the senses, thoughts, etc. falls into the background. I call these awareness-widening and detaching skills, BrainShifting.

Using BrainShifting while studying the brain, my practice accelerated. It led to whatever clarity I have about the Heart Sutra. So, let's then dive into this seemingly obtuse story, beginning towards the end.

In the last paragraph of the sutra, the Rinzai version inserts this odd, quirky little statement: "This is a truth, not a lie." For me, this should be the opening statement of this "Brain Sutra." It means to me, "This is a statement of scientific fact, not theoretical conjecture." What do I mean by this? Well, let's take vision and light as an example.

As we know, we see because light bounces off objects and lands in the back of our eyes upside down on our retina. From there, the light from this upside-down image stimulates cells on the retina to produce chemicals which, in turn, stimulate other cells in the eye that produce bursts of electrochemical pulses. These pulses of energy travel in various cells that join to become an optic nerve, carrying "light" information in the form of pulsing codes to the occipital lobes way in the back of our brain. There, those pulses of codes are reinterpreted in the back of the brain as an image. And voila. An image appears somewhere inside our head.

The point is that the image is our brain's interpretation of that light. We actually "see" the image inside our head even though it appears to be out there somewhere. We are not even seeing the actual light emanating from the object; we are "seeing" electrochemical impulses recreated in our head as an object. Artificially stimulate the optic nerve along its track with electrodes or stimulate the brain in the back of the head and you'll hallucinate seeing light. In other words, it's dark in your head. All your brain is "seeing" is what is inside its own cranium. "Out there" is an illusion. You cannot know there is an "out there," because it's all in here.

Ditto, your hearing, smelling, tasting, sense of touch. It's all recreated inside your head—"empty" energy pulses that take form as the elements of experience. Just like a dream or a hallucination created by a mental illness, seizure, metabolic change in the brain, deliria from sleep deprivation, or psychedelic drugs—all can create the elements of an experience. These hallucinations can seem as "solid" as what you believe you see in the world; yet, they are ultimately empty, because they are just patterns of brain electricity. There can be no way to prove that what you are experiencing in the "real world" is objectively real either, no way to know that there *is* an "out there."

In a relative sense, we have to live trusting form is real. But in an absolute sense, that form is shunyata, empty. The five Skandas can be interpreted as 1. Senses (information coming from outside, including what you feel on your skin, 2. Inner body sensations (such as emotions, organ pain, drives, levels of arousal, 3. mental content (thoughts,

beliefs, images known to be imagined), 4. Actions of the body (movements in space and time), and 5. The reference point of a 'you,' a self (that believes it is experiencing, deciding and acting). All as illusory as light. All the *empty* whirling patterns of electrochemicals inside a biological organ.

But what *about* movement? Don't you decide to act? Don't you determine what to think? Don't you have free will? Hopefully, you will find this more fascinating than scary; but, free will is a matter of definition. It is not conscious. Strictly speaking, it does not come from a conscious choice. The decision to think or move happens super-fast, in the microcircuits of the brain, before there is awareness that it happened. Your brain decides what to do and think and *then* you are aware of it. Yet, you believe you decided to do it. Again, it is just like dreaming. Dreams are written and directed by the unconscious brain. Yet, it appears as if we don't know what is going to happen next.

We can notice the illusion of choice more readily with slips of the tongue revealing what we would rather not reveal or when buttoning a shirt or when driving for long periods of time without paying attention to the act of driving. You can drive on a freeway and exit without consciously deciding to do anything. These things don't require conscious awareness to be executed. Do they require consciousness to be initiated? It seems like they do, but they don't either. There is evidence that most behavior and processing (even doing math) can happen without much or any awareness.

Consciousness and volition are empty, empty of solid reality.

So, what is real??? What can be known as fact? Back to the twin brains aware of each other, this knowing knowing is absolutely real. In essence, Rene DeCarte's axiom, "I think, therefore I am," can be reworded as, "I am that which is aware of being aware, therefore I know existence."

This inner-reflected awareness is in some ways similar to the eye of a hurricane. Surrounded by the eye are the winds and rains that represent all our experiences. This empty inner eye is *silent* of senses, *still* of

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movement and effort, *timeless* relative to the changing events that mark time, and *selfless* relative to self-reference point.

In other words, can we 100% rely on our senses, or our feelings and thoughts to know what is real? Not when you consider hallucinations, hypnotic suggestion, deliriums, brain storms of whatever kind and even normal hallucinations and misinterpretations of reality. How you know you "are" and the only thing you can know for 100% sure is real is that this empty "self"-knowing detects its aliveness. It is from this inner empty reference point that our brain can detect any aspect of its experience as not objectively real.

So, in our Heart Sutra story, we learn straightaway that Avalokiteshvara, the "Bodhisattva of Compassion," realizes that the five Skandas are empty—that ALL "consciousness and volition" are empty—just chemicals whirling inside a biological organ. Thus he, Avalokiteshvara, (or she: Quan Yin) is relieved of delusion and suffering. (We'll leave it to another presentation to explain why delusion always comes with suffering.)

So, we know that form, or information, the contents of experience, is empty. And we know emptiness is, after all, a kind of information, an aspect of experience. Therefore, form is empty and emptiness is form. Of course, form is just form—meaning we live in a world of form. You have to pay attention to a bus coming down the road or you'll be squashed. And emptiness is just that—empty.

The Heart Sutra goes on to say that the "Dharma," which appears to describe higher reality, is empty. When a collection of atoms (such as in the brain) can know themselves, in essence, this is the universe knowing itself! Our brain is empty of any certainty besides the certainty that it is alive. This empty aliveness pervades everywhere. That can be realized. When the brain realizes itself, when an empty knowing experiences life, that is a unity, or non-dual, realization.

So, how do we get through life if all consciousness and all volition are empty? How does the brain move through the day, experience life, act? Prajna paramita. Prajna

paramita is the brain's ability to trust itself, to trust its own unconscious processing. To trust that it is unconsciously registering form and unconsciously controlling action and thought. It is trusting the unconscious of the brain to receive information and act according to one's highest integrated abilities.

This formless and wordless realization is the highest and greatest dharani ("reminder" or short-cut of the teachings of the Buddha). And so, we cross over from living in illusion and delusion, from 'form' as the be-all-and-end-all of our lives in the foreground of our experience (where emptiness is invisible and in the background) to the opposite: where form is in the *background* and emptiness enters the *foreground*. And, thus, we can sum it up as gone, gone beyond, way beyond, to the shore of Enlightenment—yay! (Gate gate paragate, parasamgate bodhi svaha.)

Auschwitz Reflections

Eddie Daichi Salazar

The need to let suffering speak is a condition of all truth.

— Theodor Adorno

This past November, Genjo Osho, Rinzan Osho, and I spent a week in Poland visiting Krakow, and extended time at Auschwitz-Birkenow extermination camp. It was a place that I was visiting for the first time, and yet was a place that I already knew intimately. Let me explain. First, I am going to make a confession that I have never told anyone. In early high school, I had a fascination and an admiration of Hitler and the Nazis. I had a swastika flag in my bedroom. I read *Mein Kampf*, and the entire *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer. Oddly, my parents never said anything to me about any of this, especially my Pop who was a WWII veteran. It is even difficult to say what was at the root of this fascination, but I know that part of the appeal of that message sought purity. I have somewhat of an understanding of that message as it continues to this day. Thankfully, after high school, I drifted away from that ideology, and moved to other interests.

Fast forward to my late twenties. I began to have quite vivid nightmares that I was a prisoner in Auschwitz. These continued for many years. In my early thirties, through therapy, I was able to relieve the nightmares, but I have always carried the dreams with me. I never really understood why any of this was happening, yet something told me that I was to visit Auschwitz.

The three of us were part of the Zen Peacemakers retreat to Auschwitz, which was started by Zen teacher Bernie Glassman. This was the twenty-third Auschwitz retreat. And while we were in Poland, we got word that Bernie Glassman had died back in Massachusetts. So this particular retreat took on a much deeper meaning, as many of the participants were his students in the Peacemaking Order.

Auschwitz was a complex of three main camps, and forty sub-camps. Auschwitz-I was a former Polish military barracks



converted to incarcerate mainly political prisoners and Polish resistance. The first gas chamber and crematorium were established there, and are still intact. Today, Auschwitz-I is a museum, which has whole rooms of shoes, human hair, eyeglasses, and, what brought tears to my eyes, children's clothing and shoes.

Auschwitz-I was deemed far too small, and so Auschwitz II-Birkenau was built and opened in 1942, and designed as a mass extermination site, and began to accept Jews from all over Europe. The scale of Birkenau is vastly massive by any measure. There were four gas chambers and crematoria, which could gas and cremate 10,000 daily. A train transport would arrive and could carry an average of about 5,000. Three quarters of those were immediately "selected" for death on the arrival platform.

The Book of Equanimity

Case 23 - "Roso Faces the Wall"

Preface to the Assembly

Bodhidharma's nine years are known as wall gazing. Shinko's three prostrations are outflowings of heavenly activity. How can the traces be swept away, the footprints eliminated?

Main Case

Attention! Whenever Roso saw a monk coming, he would face the wall. Hearing of this Nansen remarked, "I always tell others to receive directly even before the empty *kalpa* and to realize themselves even before the Buddha came into the world, but still I haven't found half a man, let alone a whole man. If he is thus, he will be stuck in the year of the donkey.

Appreciatory Verse

*Plain water has flavor;
subtly transcending the senses.*

*It precedes forms,
though seeming endlessly to exist.*

*The Way is precious,
though seeming massively to be foolish.*

*Inscribe designs on a jewel
and its glory is lost;
a pearl even from an abyss
naturally beckons.*

*Plenty of bracing air
clearly burnishes autumn's swelter;
far away a single tranquil cloud
divides sky and water.*

The Way is precious, and whether we realize it or not, we're all followers of the Way. Everybody at this sesshin already realizes this much. We are the manifest flowering of consciousness in this part of the universe, and this alone reveals that we are all primarily Buddhas. When we understand that we're an integral part of the flow and flowering of the universe, we can't help but start to feel some responsibility to be caring and openhearted

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The remainder were processed in the "sauna" for forced labor and were given enough calories to last roughly three months. When our Peacemakers group arrived at Birkenau, I immediately knew the place from deep in my memory. It was exactly how I experienced it in my dreams many years prior. We arrived each morning for many days and sat several rounds of zazen on the platform site next to the train tracks. The ground beneath us shook with the millions of footsteps that passed to their immediate or slow deaths. Some of our zazen rounds were punctuated with the litany reading of many names, albeit only a few that were known. The vast majority of names will never be known.

We also had guided tours of the entire camp, such as the various barracks for segregated populations; men, women, even children, of all ethnicities. At lunch, we were provided a simple soup to remind us of the meager ration provided to the prisoners.

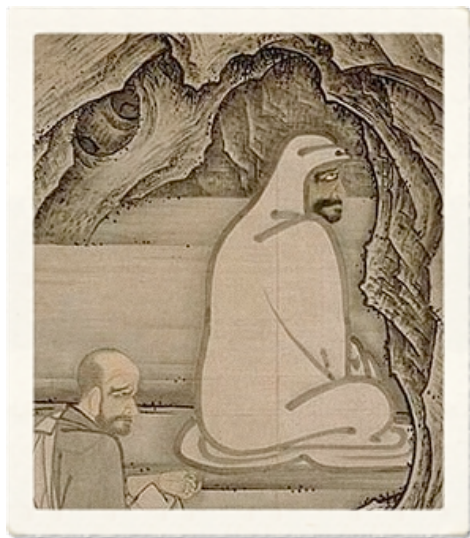
It is difficult to describe all the emotion that was brought up for me in this whole experience. Being part of a Zen group was a helpful container to carry the horror and the inability to find any kind of meaning in any of it. My Zen training has taught me to hold this huge part of shared human misery as one giant koan. As such, I spent my zazen then and now stepping into the experience of every part of this deeply painful drama.

What was it like to be ripped from family, home, community, and sent in trains for many days to an uncertain future? What was it like to be the train conductor, knowing that he was bringing thousands of people to their deaths? What is it like to be the German populace that saw these trains roll through town, knowing what they carried? What is it like to be the barking dogs that fostered fear in the terrified arrivals? And even, what is it to be the SS officer charged with ramp "selection?" In embracing each of these as koan, we quickly realize that each of us are all of these. We carry this horror deep within our shared human DNA. It is not an aberrant episode that can just be left to history. This and many, many other situations of mass exterminations even today call us to examine our own complicity in human suffering.

When I was having the nightmares all those decades ago, the way that they were resolved was, in a group therapy context, I was able to recognize that I was never going to be "liberated" from the camp. Instead, I was invited to push the fence out as far out as I could push it and invite others into the camp with me. I realized, years before I became Buddhist, that I was never going to resolve suffering, mine or anyone else's. But the "answer" to the koan is inviting the whole universe into the camp with me. There is no answer to suffering. But there is compassion in sharing the suffering that we all know. I will always be haunted by my experience with Auschwitz. As it should be.

in the world, and this is the start of our Great Bodhisattva Vow to care for all beings. And when we occasionally have a loving heart not only for our species, but also for our planet and indeed the whole universe, then we're manifesting as the Tathagata, the Buddha's Heart-Mind.

It is both our inheritance and our responsibility to be a follower of the Way. The way of Zen however, can seem massively foolish, just so many tricks of phrase or some inscrutable actions. For example, Bodhidharma, who founded the lineage that became Chan Buddhism in China and Zen in Japan, faced Emperor Wu, went to the Land of Wei, and sat at the Taoist Shaolin Temple Shorin-Ji facing a wall for nine years! Now that seems damn foolish doesn't it? As foolish as it may seem to face a wall for nine years, Bodhidharma by this very act was telling us he had nothing to teach! Eventually, Eka, also known as Shinko, got his attention with prostrations in the snow and by foolishly cutting off his arm to demonstrate his willingness to die for the Dharma!



As we know there are plenty of Zen teachers, but there is not one who can teach Zen. As a Zen teacher, I can't give you awakening. Each one of us must find it for ourselves; nobody can give it to another. A good teacher, no matter the discipline, points us to where we might find the answers so that we can investigate for ourselves. A good teacher will say, "Look here," or "Experiment with this," with the idea the student will learn for themselves. In Zen, the very best teaching might be, "Go

look at a wall or a floor. There you'll find everything that you need to be a caring follower of the Way." In other words, "Go do zazen." That's really the extent of Zen instruction. The rest is holding the form so that we can do zazen, and in Soto Zen they literally sit facing a wall. We sit looking at the floor, but it's all the same.

Look long enough and we will encounter the inconceivable, an infinity beyond this multidimensional universe. Look long enough, and truly we will learn everything we need to know about being an actualized follower of the Way. Look long enough and we will get beyond our ego defensiveness and our instincts for survival. Look long enough, and we will transcend our crabbiness, anger, fear, delusions, attachments and preferences.

This is the Zen tradition, and it's not for everyone. Many people need more than, "look, look!" The Tibetan tradition and many other lineages of Buddhism seem to have a lot to teach. Even the historical Buddha had the Four Noble Truths. Yet, in the Zen tradition, the core sutra that we chant over and over again, the Heart Sutra, negates the Four Noble Truths! You can find it in our English translation, "No suffering, no craving, no extinction, no path." Because we have nothing to teach, our tradition beckons us to STOP looking outside of ourselves or to others for the Dharma. Stop looking for the Buddha, stop following a guru. Don't depend on the sutras, commentaries or precepts! Go face a wall or floor and look for yourself. This is the essence of our tradition.

I'm not saying that a teacher, the sutras, commentaries, koans and precepts aren't helpful. They all may provide a finger pointing to the moon; in other words, a map, but a map is never the actual territory. You can read all the koan books and they may indeed help stir up your mind to investigate what they may be pointing at. However, in the midst of our own trials and tribulations and ego centeredness, it is only by doing zazen that we can learn all we need to know about being a caring follower of the Way. This is why coming to sesshin and doing a marathon of zazen is our most important teacher! And of course, Rohatsu sesshin is the marathon of marathons, which is why it's the pinnacle of our practice year. As a Zen teacher, the greatest gift I can give

this and future generations is to transmit this form of our core practice. When I ordain an unsui, it is my hope that they may one day lead sesshins.

I find it interesting that not only does Zen not have anything to teach; it points you to a wall or floor where you won't find any answers! Nevertheless, sit long enough facing the unknowable and you will undoubtedly have insights about how to live this life with more mindfulness, empathy, openheartedness and loving action. This is an experimental practice. We may be asking ourselves: What is this? Why are we here? Who's asking? If you think you have arrived at some answers, you have missed it. However, through our investigation, we will undoubtedly have some insights on how to proceed with more mindfulness and a loving heart. Then, the real test is, can we actualize those insights out in our ordinary lives. That is the real test of our practice. The zendo is merely the laboratory.

I deeply appreciate this case about Zen Master Roso. Whenever he saw a monk coming, someone who is going to ask him questions, looking for his knowledge, expertise, instruction, wisdom, or caring heart, Roso seemed to do this massively foolish thing of sitting down, facing a wall and not responding in any other way. But of course he was saying, "Look for yourself and this is how you do it. Let me show you." He took a zazen posture and demonstrated by example how to plant your tailbone and erect your spine. Then he began to take slow, even breaths, gently and attentively listening on all channels of perception. Of course he didn't say any of this, he just did it.

Zen Master Nansen heard about how Roso had only one response to anyone who came to him for instruction, and remarked, "I always tell others to receive directly even before the empty kalpa, to realize themselves even before the Buddha came into the world." In other words, realize your deep nature before the Buddha and Four Noble Truths arise. In fact he was telling us to receive directly before universe the existed (this is the empty kalpa – the time before any manifestation appears). You might be thinking, "Wait a minute, I'm part of the universe. How do I have a realization before the universe appears?" Well, for certain you mustn't be attached to what you

find in a book or what comes out of a guru's mouth. Indeed, don't be attached to anything you find outside of yourself.

Nansen went on to say, "I haven't found half a man, let alone a whole person who can really realize it fully, continually." Each one of us is just a bag of stardust or we could say a lump of clay, but our atoms are arranged in such a complex way that here we are listening to the Dharma! We are all very complex and easily entangled. We are all miraculous, wondrous and ingenious, but easily confused and conflicted. At our best, we manifest the voice of the Dharma with a caring heart. Arising from our complexity, we realize we are the universe becoming aware of itself. This same complexity also means that we're easily caught by our hungry ghosts, egocentric sensitivities, and past hurts and traumas, causing us to stumble time and again.

Nansen said that he had never met such a person who didn't get caught and easily entangled, and this is just as true for the Buddha or Christ as it is for you or me. We all have access to a sage beyond our years, and some with training and skill manifest it better than others. But never think that anyone you meet or hear of is free from their primitive, hungry, easily conflicted base instincts. The further back in time we go, the more idealized a sage becomes, setting up a standard that's impossible, yet shows us where we want to be heading.

We are all aware that the Buddha had to be convinced to let women into the sangha. And we know of Jesus and how he lost his temper with the money changers, or how nailed on the cross, he complained, "Why have you forsaken me?" We have these little hints that Siddhartha and Jesus were actually human beings. This is why Nansen said, "I still haven't found one!" A human manifestation that doesn't get caught doesn't exist. Such a one will never exist.

Nansen continued, "If he is thus, he will be stuck in the year of the donkey." Those familiar with the Chinese calendar know there is no Year of the Donkey! Which is another way of saying it is impossible to find somebody who is continually openhearted and never caught by complications. I think Nansen was also saying, anyone who thinks they are always

awake and continually compassionate is an ass.

"Plain water has flavor." When we find drinkable spring water, far enough away from civilization where we won't get giardia or another bug, we discover that really fresh spring water is both rather tasteless, yet subtly delicious. This is like the Dharma. There's actually not much to it, but it's so refreshing, nurturing and ubiquitous.

When we face a wall or a floor doing zazen our view starts out rather two-dimensional. There is not a lot of information immediately apparent. You're never going to earn a Ph.D. doing just zazen. However, when we look behind or beyond the blankness of the floor or the wall, we eventually become aware of a nurturing, fresh, subtle, clean spring of energy that imbues the floor, the wall, the universe and beyond.

I don't know about you, but last night I was having something of a rough patch. It was already past the midpoint of sesshin, over the hump, but still more days to come. I was feeling pretty raw, vulnerable and grumpy. A lot of things hurt, and I was troubled by the presence of significant mental disquiet. Nevertheless, in the midst of this disquiet I continued to try to look beyond the floor to the inconceivable. I just keep looking and looking, hoping to encounter the beyond-the-beyond or the within-the-within. At that time, all I felt was a kind of dry two-dimensional emptiness, there was not much there that I was aware of.

I used to hate it when I was at Dai Bosatsu (DBZ) during the long, still, quiet late nights of sesshin. DBZ is deep in the forest. During the day there are lots of sounds, but some nights it would be so damn quiet and dark it was like you were sitting in an isolation tank. Often this level of input was dang boring! It's so much easier to do zazen when you can hear the rain, wind or animals, or see during kinhin (walking meditation) the deer, the mist on the lake, the mountains or fog. In many ways zazen is lot easier when our senses are gently filled by the sounds of nature. But deep in the night staring at this ugly grey carpet, with all these other grumpy lumps of clay, yuck! I wish somebody would teach something!

We have the instruction from Hakuin: just breathe, one whole breath at a time, one sit at time, one day at a time; Rohatsu is one very long day. Why not try counting them? That will give you something to do! Great instruction. Love it. Often I wish there was more to do!

But even when I'm tired and bored beyond belief, and all I'm seeing is two-dimensional blankness, I've done enough zazen to know that within the blankness there's an intimate infinity. Even if I'm not feeling it, I have faith that THIS is always alive and present. Of course, I keep breathing and looking into the two-dimensional emptiness knowing that if I am gentle and patient there will eventually be another breakthrough into the silence that speaks. In that multi-dimensional presence, my grumpiness melts and all ego attachments fall away, leaving my worries and concerns dwarfed in the midst of an infinite void, where all that remains is a loving heart embracing the universe.

"Plenty of bracing air purely burnishes autumn's swelter. Far away a single tranquil cloud divides sky and water." May we continue to sit, breath and listen to the quiet power all around and through us.

With gassho,

Genjo

Closing Incense Poem

Rohatsu Sesshin 2018

Who hears the falling rain?

Followers of the Way must have a daring spirit willing to endure great hardship.

*There are many paths up the mountain of awakening –
Zen training makes a direct ascent.*

Who sees Mt. Rainier across the lake through the pink fog of many dawns?

A flock of geese noisily lifts off the still waters leaving no trace.

Spring Sesshin

March 22nd - 29th

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a **deposit (\$75)** and **application** by **March 15**, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. Please drop it by or mail it.

The cost of sesshin is \$250 (less dues for this month). Sesshin starts Friday evening, 3/22, 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 begins at 5am and concludes around 10am.

NVC Corner

Sally Zenka Metcalf Sensei



Our Zen practice is mostly silent sitting—an oasis amidst fast-paced life. There is also our Bodhisattva vow to live Loving Presence. These being said, when sangha members work together: making decisions, facing challenges, learning new posts, feelings might get hot and hurt, especially during sesshin. Zazen stirs up the murk in all of us. That's its job. We might assume our silent tradition means it's not OK to speak up when this happens. Not true! Please let's find a way to talk with people rather than let feelings fester. If we can't do that on our own, let's ask for help.

The Chobo-Ji Board of Trustees in our January board meeting voted to create an Advocacy Council to support healthy

communication and loving connection in our sangha. Guidelines for the Council are being thoughtfully shaped now. A nominating committee is gathering Council members. Guest members can be called in to help with special situations. We hope the Council is fully fledged by April.

To help us live our vow to become Loving Presence, Nonviolent Communication is a core practice at Chobo-Ji. We offer NVC trainings facilitated by professionals and have an Ongoing NVC Practice Group to which everyone is welcome. A little experience with NVC helps but isn't a requirement. We've been studying for about two years and everyone has grown, especially around the very human trait of seeing others through judgments and assumptions instead of asking what's going on with them.

In her recent NVC workshop with us, Kathleen Macferran shared how to approach each other when communication gets tough. "All you need is to be lazy, ignorant and curious." She explained: Lazy = There is nothing to do; we're not trying to change anyone. Ignorant = Stay in not knowing. After all, are you 100% certain what you're making up about someone is true? Curious = If we're open minded and curious, we may discover empathy and even love beneath upset.



Here is an example. I have a dear friend who always cleans as she goes, emotionally. When she feels something awkward between herself and another, she immediately checks it out. When I was her assistant tenzo, she said, "Sally, sometimes I feel tension between us when we cook together; and I worry you don't enjoy cooking with me. I'd love to know what's going on with you?"

Tension in me often means I'm afraid, so her kind, non-judgmental language helped me stay present to her question. I answered, "I love cooking with you! I do get tense, especially with a more people around. I'm a closet introvert and feel anxious when a lot is happening." My friend responded, "I'm so glad to hear you like cooking with me! If

there's anything I can do to help you feel more comfortable, please let me know." She and I were way more at ease after that. I'm deeply grateful to my friend for always assuming the best about me and for open-heartedly checking things out with me when things feel sticky.

These are some of the skills we're learning in our Ongoing NVC Practice Group. Everyone is welcome. We meet on the following Saturdays from 9:30 to 11:30am in the zen lounge. Dates are: Feb 16, Mar 16, Apr 13, May 11, and June 8. Also, Kathleen Mcferran is returning for more workshops on April 27 & 28. Subject matter for those workshops is being discussed now. Please join us.

Board President Letter

Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez

Happy New Year Chobo-Ji members! 2018 was a good year, but not without challenges.



This past year many of us have been training in Nonviolent Communication (NVC). As Zen practitioners, we spend a lot of time sitting in silence and realized we needed training in communication! We have an ongoing NVC practice group, along with workshops led by professional NVC facilitators, Marcia Christen and Kathleen Macferren (an internationally known NVC trainer). Chobo-Ji is committed to NVC practice with the goals of becoming an empathetic, listening, community that handles conflict with an open, caring heart. On April 27 and 28th Chobo-Ji will again host a weekend NVC workshop, *Transforming Conflict in ways that Strengthen and Activate our Community*, with Kathleen Macferren. We would love to have all Chobo-Ji members be skilled at

NVC. If you haven't taken any of the workshops or attended any of the practice sessions, you can start at any level. Please consider attending either this workshop or any of our on-going practice sessions. Watch for dates in Temple Happenings or on Chobo-Ji's website calendar.

Combusting Delusions Book Group will be wrapping up in May. This book group is open to all, but especially is for members who do not identify as a person of color, to explore white privilege. We have had some spirited conversations and awakenings. All the books that have been read are available in the Chobo-Ji library. If you haven't been able to attend, you may check out the books and read them on your own (see list following). To access the library, just talk to or send Genjo or Carolyn an email to coordinate a time to pick up the book. We are committed to being a community where all practitioners are welcome, free from prejudicial exclusions of any kind. We will be continuing this work in 2019.

Chobo-Ji *Introduction to Zen* sessions continue to be held on Tuesday evenings. This class prepares individuals to attend a regular sit by teaching Zendo etiquette, posture and meditation, and answers any questions students might have about starting a meditation practice and Rinzai Zen. Twice a year we offer an 8-week series that continues to be popular. Each session is taught by a different Sangha member so that students get a taste of our community. Please recommend either the individual or the 8-week series to any of your "Zen curious" family members or friends.

I personally invite you to our **Annual Meeting on April 14th at 11:30 am**, as the board reflects on what and where we have come in 2018 and what opportunities await us in 2019. If you are interested in volunteering on any of our committees, this is the time to learn about each committee's work. The annual meeting is followed by a potluck. Bring a dish to share, vote, share your ideas and visit with your sangha community.

We've lost 3 active members and residents this year, Gavin Ozan MacKay, who moved to Japan, Rev. Robert Tendo Kilpatrick, who is now head monk at Tahoma Zen Monastery on Whidbey Island and Rev. Jay Seiho Morris, who is moving to Ohio. There is always sadness when someone leaves, but

endings are also beginnings, and Chobo-Ji is privileged to have been an important part of these members' path. We are an extended family, spanning the globe. I am grateful to be part of a community that allows us to grow, make mistakes and regain our balance. As one board member recently put it "Where else can we do this kind work?"



I want to thank each of you for your individual contributions to build the strength of our Zen community. I invite you to share any suggestions for improving your experience at Chobo-Ji with the board, lhernz@gmail.com. I also want to thank Genjo Osho for helping each of us to become *Masters of Our Own Practice*. I hope your practice prospers in 2019.

Small Great Things by Jodi Picoult, 2016
So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijioma Oluo, 2018

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin, 1963; and *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* by Michael Eric Dyson, 2017.

Waking Up White and Finding Myself in the Story of Race, by Debby Irving (2014).

Looking Like the Enemy, by Mary Matsuda Gruenewald, 2005.

Two articles, both available online – "[*Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*](#)," by Peggy McIntosh, 1989 (first published in Peace and Freedom but widely available on the internet), and "[*The Case for Reparations*](#)," by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic June 2014.

Wenatchee Corner

Sharon Meho Petit Sensei

Stone Blossom Sangha is a little different. This is because we are geographically about 150 miles from Chobo-ji and part of a smaller and more conservative city here in Wenatchee. Our members come from all over North Central Washington. From Leavenworth to Chelan on the west side of the Columbia River and from East Wenatchee to Badger Mountain and as far as Orondo on the east side. We have grown as a smaller, less regimented Buddhist group and now refer to ourselves as 'Mama Zen.' So we welcome all to a sangha that has been blended from Zen and Tibetan with a dash of Mindfulness practitioners and even one or two members who identify themselves as Hindu.

It has been with delight that I and my husband, Daiko, have watched as our Zen group ranks have swelled over the last few years. We have even had two students take Jukai at Chobo-Ji with Genjo Marinello Roshi. With this increased support we decided we wanted more retreats, and longer ones as well. For many years we have had quarterly half-day sits with Genjo Roshi, and with Genko Kathy Blackman Ni-Osho who have been supportive of our efforts here in the hinterlands of Buddhism. So, we have committed to sponsoring four three-day zen sesshins each year.

Our most recent sesshin was Friday, January 18, through Sunday, January 20. This coincided with the Wenatchee Women's March on Saturday, January 19. One of our members, Laurie Rippon, is active in the local Resistance and Democratic party that was sponsoring the Women's March and she saw an opportunity to have Genjo give a blessing to the marchers, Mother Earth and all the hurts that the march was addressing. The local organizers also saw a chance to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. by being inclusive and offered the last speaking spot to Genjo Roshi.

It is from our Tibetan members' teacher, Khenrül Lodro Thaye Rinpoche, that we first acquired our "Compassion in Action" practice. A few years ago, Rinpoche came forward with an urgent priority to care for the Earth and all its inhabitants not only on

the cushion but through 'compassionate action' by raising money for disasters, standing up for the environment and social justice. This fit perfectly with Genjo Marinello Roshi's activism through the Zen Peacemakers, Faith in Action, as well as Chobo-Ji's efforts to feed the homeless and Sangha in the Streets efforts.

My husband, Todd (Daiko), and I took this concept and led our small band of Buddhists with our Compassion in Action sign to social actions. On Rinpoche's last visit I and a Tibetan nun accompanied by Daiko and others stood with immigration rights groups as we protested the removal of children from their parents at our southern border.

We left our sesshin on Saturday, just before 11:00 am, and lined up to do kinhin to Memorial Park, just a few blocks from where we were holding our Zen retreat. My



expectation was that we would follow Genjo Roshi in our black Zen robes and impress the locals. To my surprise Genjo insisted that I lead the group and he followed me because, as he said, "It seems right since this is a women's march and you are a woman."

We walked in our black Zen robes down Washington Street from the First United Methodist Church to the park. We stopped at the Chelan County Courthouse steps where the marchers had gathered to hear speakers including the Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson. Genjo

would be the last speaker. As I lead Genjo up to the organizers table where the speakers were to check in Genjo had another surprise for me.

"I'm not going to speak, you are going to take my place." He said. "As a woman and as sensei for Stone Blossom Sangha it would be more appropriate."



Having nothing prepared I was grateful to have been in sesshin for the last two days and therefore had a bit of equanimity. Fortunately, Genjo gave me a poem by Mary Oliver that he had chosen:

"What will you do with
Your One Wild
And Wondrous life?"

As I led Genjo and Laurie along with a few other sangha members, we joined the marchers until the time came for us to return to sesshin. Daiko and Rick Muken Proctor, our dai-tenzo, had held the space for Yaza practice for the participants who did not go to the march or returned early.

Our grand finale for the retreat was Genjo's participating in the United Methodist's two Sunday Services. We held meditation to support him in our regular practice space in the Beige House and joined him for the later service. After the service we returned to conclude our three days together.

All are welcome to sit with us at our next three-day sesshin, Friday, March 8, thru Sunday, March 10. Genjo Roshi will join us for Saturday.

Winter Odayaka

Rinzan Pechovnik Osho

We had a wonderful January Odayaka Sesshin, where I was pleased to serve in the role of Osho and quite excited to have members of both Chobo-Ji and No-Rank Zendo in about equal attendance. We also had several people for whom this was their first ever Zen retreat. As always, Odayaka has a lighter schedule than the Dai-Sesshin, but I've added additional optional yet structured sitting each morning and night for those who want to expand their sesshin experience. Also, as I've been working to build a culture of sesshin at No-Rank Zendo, we have made the two Odayaka sesshin I lead at Chobo-Ji part of the No-Rank sesshin calendar. (We will have our own Portland based long sesshin in May and late October.) This means that No-Rank members, when able, fill the sesshin training posts.



Special thanks to Daigen Vaerini for serving as Inji, Onsetsu Cordes and Claudia Nunez as Jisha, Bokudo Brown as Densu and Keizan Shaffer and Kyoshin Hagedstedt as Tenzos. All stepped into an environment largely unknown to them and did an excellent job landing on their feet and going straight on. Special mention goes to Miles White who served as Jiki. Miles had never filled a post before but he filled his first with the relatively complicated Odayaka schedule. He had the courage to dive in and go deep and held the post as if he was born to it. Also of important notice is Daichi Salazar who served as Shika and was a great anchor for the out-of-towners as we collectively learned our way around.

If you are interested in the Dharma talks I gave during the retreat, please go to <http://norankzendo.libsyn.com>

Temple Posts

beginning March 4, 2019

Rev. Sendo Howells
Shika (Host - Manager)

Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez
George Kyoki Gibbs
Tenzo (Cook)

Rev. Gendo Testa
Eddie Daichi Salazar
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

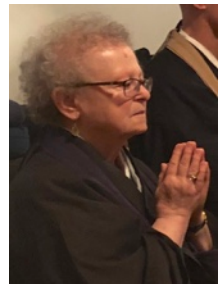
Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares
Peter Shinke Ilgenfritz
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Eric Seiku Dee
Trevor Heishin Youngquist
Parisa Monirzad
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Sally Zenka Metcalf Sensei
Inji (Abbot Assistant)

Carolyn Josen Stevens Sensei:
Fusu (Accountant)

Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez, Eddie Daichi Salazar, George Kyoki Gibbs, Trevor Heishin Youngquist
Intro Instruction



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. *All unsui are strongly encouraged to participate fully.*

Chobo-Ji's Spring Intensive will start March 10, with mini-sesshin, and conclude on June 28. 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 Chobo-Ji's [Zen Bibliography page](#) (or consult with Genjo about an 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 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) Be of service to this sangha or the wider community through some direct manifestation of our Great Vow.

Introduction to Zen

Eight week exploration
starting April 2, 7:30 pm

Please come and join us for an 8-week exploration of Rinzai Zen practice. Tuesdays - 7:30 to 9:00 pm, beginning April 2nd and concluding May 21st.

A \$50 donation is suggested for the series, but any amount you care to give is accepted. No one will be turned away because of lack of funds.

Each class can be taken as a stand-alone. No prior experience with meditation practice is required and old-timers are also welcome to attend and share their thoughts and questions.

As a bonus with the full fee, you may attend either the April or May Zazenkai (half-day sit) at no additional cost.

April 2nd will concentrate on *zazen* (seated meditation) instruction.

April 9th will explore *mindfulness practices*, such as chanting, walking, bowing and tea.

April 16th will explore the *expanding circles of meditation* practice that bring us more fully into our daily lives.

April 23rd will dive into the use of *koans* (Zen parables) as a way to explore our own deep nature and how to juggle and harmonize the relative, absolute and transcendent.

April 30th will explore the *Four Noble Truths*.

May 7th will explore the *Noble Eightfold Path*.

May 14th will explore the *Four Great Vows*.

May 21st will explore the *Ten Precepts*.

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: 2/17, 3/3, 3/10, 3/17, 3/31, 4/7, 4/21, 4/28, 5/5, 5/12, 5/19, 5/26, 6/2, 6/16
Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30-8:45pm (except 3/26)

Zen Post Workshop (all are welcome) ...

Zazenkai - 1/2 day sit with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Board Meeting ...

Precept Class (part 1, required for Jukai consideration) ...

Spring Sesshin (weeklong Zen intensive) ...

Eight Week [Zen Intro Series](#) begins on Tuesday nights ...

Precept Class (part 2, required for Jukai consideration) ...

SU Zazenkai (whole day sit) ...

Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) & Buddha's Birthday ...

Annual Meeting (everyone encouraged to attend) ...

NVC as a Spiritual Practice Workshop ...

NVC as a Spiritual Practice Workshop ...

Zazenkai - 1/2 day sit with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Zazenkai - 1/2 day sit with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Summer Sesshin (weeklong Zen intensive) ...

March 2, 9:30am - noon

March 10, 5 - 11:15am

March 10, 11:30am - 1:30pm

March 14, 7:30 - 9pm

March 22 (5:30pm) - 29 (10am)

April 2, 7:30 - 9pm

April 4, 7:30 - 9pm

April 6, 7am - 8pm

April 14, 5 - 11:15am

April 14, 11:45am - 2:00pm

April 27, 9:30am - 4:30pm

April 28 9:30am - 4:30pm

May 19, 5 - 11:15am

Jun 9, 5 - 11:15am

June 21 (5:30pm) - 28 (10am)

To subscribe to Plum Mountain News or our weekly Temple Happenings email bulletin write: subscribe@choboji.org

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



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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