



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

It's been a very full spring. Carolyn's recovery from her spinal cord injury last September continues to progress. She began driving again on Easter Sunday. She walks with a cane to Jefferson Park each evening with me and our dog Charlie. I was able to travel away from Seattle for ten days and be confident that, with only a little help from others, she could fully care for herself and Charlie. However, we are both coming to terms with the fact that she will be living with a physical disability for the foreseeable future.

Spring Sesshin the last week of March went smoothly. Sixteen people attended in person and four remotely via Zoom. Our zoom participants remarkably spanned five time zones and two continents from Brazil to Alaska. Once again, our Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook) was Rev. Gendo Testa, ably assisted by Jeremy Shojiki Neff. Elijah Seigan Zupancic was our Shika (Host – Manager) and managed our samu (work) assignments. Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares kept our time as Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) and Edward Daichi Salazar kept our beat in the Densu (Chant Leader) post. Ali Horri, assisted by Charles Porter, served us tea and snacks as our Jisha (Tea Server). Sally Zenka Metcalf, Sensei served me as my Inji (Abbot Assistant) and coordinated the Dokusan (Dharma Interview) line. Everyone working the posts did a fine job serving mindfully, and I am so grateful for their efforts. Included in this issue, you will find a transcription of my second day Teisho (formal Dharma Talk) and my sesshin closing incense poem.

It was lovely to have more people in person at our Buddha's Birthday celebration on April 8. Our in-person attendance goes up and down with the waves of COVID, which as we are all aware has now taken more than a million lives in the U.S. alone. It is said that



Close of Spring Sesshin 2022

shortly after his birth Siddhartha took three steps and said, "I alone am lord of heaven and earth," which is what every newborn says (if they could speak). Indeed, Zen practice helps us recover this early profound experience of being the Mind of the universe. In this kind of deep communion, it is impossible to be frightened of anything and we have the capacity to be with suffering without being consumed by it.

In the second week of May, Michelle Muji LeSourd, Daichi and I traveled with fellow Zen Peacemakers International participants to Alabama to bear witness to the origins of racism and white supremacy on this continent. We traveled to Birmingham, Montgomery and Selma. In Birmingham we met a fabulous community organizer who shared with us what was going on there today; she told us how much progress has been made and the great distance that has yet to be traversed. Thirty of us did zazen across from the 16th Street Baptist Church. In Montgomery we saw the new Legacy Museum, visited the central slave auction site near the State Capital, and spent an entire afternoon in a private visit to the Memorial for Peace and Justice. The most moving moment for me was

reading the hundreds of hanging slabs that documented by county the 4,000 known lynchings of Black people from reconstruction to the mid-twentieth century.



In Selma we walked across the Edmond Pettus Bridge and helped clean a nearby city park. Each day we held council to share our heart-minds. Later in this issue you will find an article that Muji wrote about this trip.

Immediately following my trip to Alabama, I traveled to Santa Fe, NM to participate in the annual meeting of Spiritual Directors International (SDI), which is headed by our own Rev. Seifu. He did a fabulous job of collecting conference speakers including Fr.

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Greg Boyle (author of *Tattoos on the Heart*), Cornel West (author of *Democracy Matters*), Pamela Ayo Yetunde (author of *Black & Buddhist*) and Mirabai Star (author of *Wild Mercy*). During the conference I was asked to lead early morning meditation. At the start of each day Pat McCabe, of the Dine (Navajo) Nation, and I opened with a water ritual and guided meditation. It was a great joy for me to get to know her better. While in Santa Fe I also was able to have a short visit with Roshi Joan Halifax at the Upaya Zen Center; we reminisced about how important Roshi Bernie Glassman was in our lives.



While at the SDI conference, on May 14, we all learned about the Buffalo supermarket shooting where ten black people were killed and three other people were injured. During the closing ceremony on May 15, I remarked that this shooting of Black people was a continuation of racial hatred and scapegoating that certainly did not conclude with the thousands of known lynchings of Black people. There is a deep sickness in this nation that is still in denial around the generational harm done by the Trail of Tears, slavery, Indian Boarding Schools, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. With teary eyes, I said something like, "When are we going to awaken? How will we move forward if we keep our heads in the sand?" I know not, and we must move with faith each day to do what can be done.

About a week after returning home, on May 24, we all learned of the Uvalde, Texas school shooting that left 19 children, two teachers and the just turned 18-year-old shooter dead. With deep grief, my heart goes out to all those who died and their families. What led the shooter to such a horrendous disconnect with his own deep nature that he could commit such heinous acts? I believe we nearly all know that we need a better mental health safety net and more robust red-flag laws. I've read that the



vast majority of our country wants stricter gun control laws, such as universal background checks, a ban on all guns that look like assault rifles, limited magazine capacity, registration of all guns held legally, and some sort of license or safety certification process. Yet, after each mass shooting, not much of anything is being done on the national level. I feel such anger and shame about this. Many other countries have made significant progress, with good effect, on these very issues. Truly, I fear for not only our lives, but our democracy.

Last night I had a dream where people were asking me to speak about Mu, but I had nothing to say. I couldn't find any words, when, as everyone knows, I have spoken about Mu nearly constantly since the mid 1980s. I think this inability to speak on a subject so close to my heart, was because I've been experiencing depression around our sorry state of national and international affairs. Nevertheless, even in my dream I could still feel the subtle, yet profound silent presence of the intimate infinite. Thank goodness for our Zen practice which provides a doorway to our deep nature.

Moving straight on with our practice, you will find in this issue announcements for our upcoming Summer Sesshin and a summer Soul-Collage workshop, an annual financial report by our Fusu (business manager), Carolyn Josen Stevens, Sensei, an essay about life and death by Ken Klettle titled: *Why Didn't I*, a couple of poems by Sonja deWit, and a few other items that I hope you find edifying.

With gassho,

Genjo



Board President Report

Dr. Eddie Daichi Salazar

Like the world around us, our Chobo-Ji community has reemerged from extended pandemic, and has slowly returned to "normal" activities. Our 2022 Annual meeting was given over to allowing members to articulate what the past few years have been, expressing joys and sorrows, and how resilience has carried us all through. And yet, we reemerge into a world rife with struggle and suffering; a brutal war in Ukraine, gun violence and the massacre of children in schools, shoppers in supermarkets and malls, all continuing unabated. How does our Zen practice help us hear and meet the suffering of the world?

Genjo, Michelle Muji LeSourd and I entered a Zen Peacemaker International plunge in Alabama to learn about and begin to understand the profound legacy of slavery, lynching, and how racism continues to plague our national collective life and history. Muji provides a reflection in this issue.



Chobo-Ji is in excellent financial position, and the Board has resumed conversations about our long-term community life. In our May meeting, the Board decided to reconstitute the Building and Grounds committee to oversee a Reserve Study planning for current and future campus renovations. A repair and repainting of the exterior is soon to be completed. The Board is in conversation about scheduling a new roof in the next few years.

We continue to welcome new folks into our sangha. The Introduction Series this Spring had twelve participants, and the regular Tuesday night intro classes have been seeing increasing numbers. Our community is vibrant and strong!

The Oak Tree in the Front Garden

The Mumonkan - Case 37

Genjo's Teisho - Second Day Spring Sesshin

Koan: A monk once asked Joshu, "What is the meaning of the Patriarch's coming from the West?" Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the front garden."

Mumon's Commentary: If you can firmly grasp the essence of Joshu's answer, for you there is no Shakyamuni in the past and no Maitreya in the future.

Mumon's Poem:

*Words do not convey actualities;
Letters do not embody the spirit of the mind.
He who attaches himself to words is lost;
She who abides with letters
will remain in ignorance.*

In this case we have the very same Joshu as Joshu's "Mu." And a very common question in ancient Zen, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?" Buddhism was already well established in China when Bodhidharma, we think already in his eighties, made a trip all the way from India to China. Quite an arduous journey to make in that time frame, back in the 5th or 6th century. Why make such a journey?

If we try to ascribe meaning to the Zen school, we're missing it. And if we ignore the importance of what the Zen school has to offer, we're missing it. I know when I had my first breakthrough during the third day of my first sesshin, I was so moved that I felt that it was likely I would end up shaving my head and going to Japan to train as a Zen priest. Why? What was my motivation, arising from that brief but significant experience? During a bout of tremendous pain, there was a breakthrough where the pain did not diminish but became inconsequential, time seemed to stop and the world felt new and multidimensional. I had such gratitude for this practice that ripped me open. What opened? My heart-mind in an instant felt so rich, expansive, loving, and peaceful. I thought if I could be a part of offering a path to this to others, this would be the greatest gift I could give

anyone. I have no doubt that this feeling was one of the reasons that motivated Bodhidharma to come from the West to the East.

I don't teach the Dharma, instead I try to share what I have found to be an effective practice. When I open my mouth, I may or may not wax eloquently or inspirationally. However, what is said can at best only be a finger pointing at the moon and does not compare to the value of putting in the time on the cushion, or kinhin, or samu, or chanting. The combination of these practices works for me, and I hope for you. There's something about doing these things together that helps our artificial barriers between self and other, even between what we think of as life and death, melt away. Usually, we think of fear and love as two different things, yet they are on the same continuum. Energy and matter are on the same continuum. Crazy and clarity are on the same continuum. Male and female are on the same continuum. I can go on and on making statements like this, but it doesn't do much of anything to cultivate the experience at the root of these statements. Our practice does help cultivate this experience.

Zen Master Rinzai, when asked about clarity said, "I have no such clarity." I have no doubt that from time to time, Rinzai did experience deep, rich clarity, but like everything else this too is impermanent. It's true that our first burst of deep clarity marks the start of deep practice. But I've learned that I can't keep this clarity, and I tell you truly, you can't keep it either. I've come to appreciate that even though I spend most of my time not in clarity, I've learned that confusion and non-clarity are pregnant clarity. Moments of clarity often require a long gestation. And then there's a new birth of clarity. But just like our lives, in this physical form, it's quite temporary.

Joshu didn't respond at all in the way that I have to the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West. Nevertheless, I think I've imparted a pretty good explanation of why Bodhidharma made an arduous trip from India to China. He was hell-bent to share something about his kind of practice. After a brief meeting with Emperor Wu, he sat and faced a wall for years at Shorin-Ji, demonstrating zazen. What did Bodhidharma see in that wall? In silence, in emptiness, in darkness, you can

find the whole universe and beyond.

In this case, Joshu answered, "The oak tree in the front garden." Here at Chobo-Ji, I would say, the maple tree in our back garden. Why didn't Joshu say "Muuuuuuuuuuuu?" That would have got the point across quite nicely. "Mu," again, means no, not, nothing, so he's not claiming any meaning to Bodhidharma's coming from the West, and yet he would be demonstrating something of Bodhidharma's heart-mind by how he vocalized the syllable mu.



Joshu must have been sitting in a place with a view of a majestic oak tree. We are very fortunate at Chobo-Ji to be sitting near our old maple tree. Looking directly at the oak tree nearby, he responded to the questioner, "The oak tree in the front garden." When we have eyes to see and ears to hear, no further explanation is needed. Often, we miss what is already out, shining from every corner. To try and explain this reality is like putting a hat on top of a hat, or a brocade of flowers on top of a brocade. The rock, the tree, the forest, the dew on the grass, the wind gently blowing, the sun shining, the moon reflecting on the water and ripples in the water are all shouting the quiet power of the intimate infinite now. Bodhidharma came to share a practice that leads to this realization, direct pointing to our heart-mind, without dependence on words, letters, explanation or ascribed meaning.

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So, what's the value, or meaning, of Zen practice? To really see the oak tree in the front garden, or to really see the maple tree in our garden. After long winter months, the green leaf buds are popping on every branch. In the autumn, the rustling leaves will change into bright colors and fall. Right now, sprouts of new branches are appearing out of nowhere. The leaves, in the process of photosynthesis, are capturing light and carbon dioxide, keeping the carbon to build the tree and releasing the oxygen for us to breathe. The maple's roots are deeply planted and blend seamlessly with the whole planet.

Our Sangha member and former Chobo-Ji resident, Koû, is sitting with us via Zoom from down in Brazil. I was reading the other day that the rain forest in Brazil creates its own weather. The trees drink water and then release it, and many times the water vapor is recycled through the rain forest before it moves on. It's a rich cooling cycle for water vapor; the forest holds carbon and releases the oxygen we need to breathe for our planet. However, to serve human needs and greed, about twenty per cent of the rain forest has already been destroyed. If we keep burning the rain forest at today's rate, in less than fifteen years the rain forest will die. The whole rain forest in Brazil will become a savannah, a grassland rather than a rain forest. This will have a worldwide negative impact on global warming, throwing tons of more carbon into the air. Currently the rain forest is a gigantic carbon sink, which will be eliminated in about fifteen years if not much more aggressively protected.

I think it's important that we see the oak tree, or in our case the maple tree – and that we are aware of the value of faraway rain forests as essential to the planet's ecosystem. Certainly, Joshu wasn't thinking of all that. He was saying: stop looking for meaning and instead really see what is right in front of you. It doesn't have to be something as beautiful as the oak tree. It can be dog poo, rotting flesh, a rock, discarded plastic, or even what we call polluted water. It's all vibrant muuuuuuuuuuuuuuu. Nothing is excluded. When we realize this at a cellular level, we can rightly say our dharma eye is open. It is a bit like waking from a black and white dream into technicolor. Mumon says: if you can thoroughly grasp this, then there's no dependence on Shakyamuni and no dependence on Maitreya, the future buddha. After this awakening, the whole idea of

Buddhism is of no importance. Much more valuable is to really see the oak tree in the front garden.

We do our best to care for our maple tree. It will be pruned a little later this month. We have a tree doctor come investigate our maple tree once every couple of years. We're doing a lot of care for the interior and exterior of our temple. Moreover, we put a lot of care into our rituals. The Tenzo (cook) puts a lot of care into our meals. The Jisha puts a lot of care into each service of tea. The Jikijitsu carefully manages our time in the zendo. The Densu puts great care into keeping the beat and ringing the bells during our chants. The Shika is very mindful when striking the han. Hopefully, we all take care doing our three *sampai* prostrations. Of course, we put a lot of care into entering and leaving the Dokusan Room. And just to look at our garden and grounds, it is clear we have put a lot of care into them. It is important not to make excuses for our shortcomings, limitations and idiosyncrasies; on the other hand, it is important to be kind and caring to ourselves and others. Given all this, the question, "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the west?" becomes rather moot. When we really see the tree or the forest, we can't help but to care for the tree and the forest.

What are we going to do if the war in Ukraine leads to World War III and we blow ourselves up? What are we going to do if we continue to deforest the planet's rain forests which will push our warming globe closer to our hellish sister planet Venus? If it gets that far, then certainly our species will not have survived its adolescence. There has been some form of life on this planet for 3.7 billion years, and if the the human species fails miserably, we could bring life on this beautiful blue planet to a very premature end. Regardless, as our sun ages it will grow hotter, until, in about a billion years, life on mother earth will be no longer sustainable. What then would be the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the west?

Everything is impermanent, the planet, the sun, the galaxy and even this universe is temporary. Fortunately, given our current understanding of physics, our universe is still very young at 13.8 billion years old. It is impossible to be awake and not be aware of the impermanence of things. Life and death, joy and sorrow are different sides of the same

coin, and when we are awake, we are fully exposed to the full range of joy and sorrow.

What can we do? We can let go, let be, and keep caring in this moment of eternity, even if it's our last meal together. I love the ending of the tragicomedy "Don't Look Up," where an asteroid is about to take out the earth, and people are sitting down and sharing a meal, conversation and good company. I hope to live life in this way, sharing this meal of practice with all of you. Perhaps, we will have a few more years together before one by one we all drop these physical forms. In order to have the heavy elements that are a part of this planet, the stardust that we're made of has already been through multiple generations of stars. Our star dust will go on being recycled, even after our sun blows us out into interstellar space about four and a half billion years from now. There will be other stars and planets that our atoms will be a part of, a few of these planets will harbor life, and the consciousness of the universe will continue waking up to itself. Though this is all a beautiful dream, let's not cling to it. At our best, we can deeply enjoy and care for what we have today and deeply grieve what we have lost.

If we can as a species better tame our primitive instincts that drive our need to have enough and then more, then we may collectively outgrow our adolescence and have many millennia to mature into a global family of caring beings. The jury's out, but frankly it doesn't look very promising. Joshu would agree it is time to stop, look and listen to the maple tree, hear the birds, smell the incense, deeply appreciate the taste of our meals. Please remember that words can never convey the actualities of the tree just being a tree. Whatever is written or said cannot embody the heart-mind. If we attach ourselves to finding meaning, or cling to words and concepts about what it's all about, we will be totally lost. We mustn't even cling to the Four Noble Truths or the Bodhisattva vows. Do not expect the Precepts to save us. Nothing's going to save us. Still, I'll be working in the here and now, and I suspect you will be too, to nurture and care for this dream we call reality. May we all learn to be as deeply rooted and nurturing as the great maple tree in our back yard.



Closing Incense Poem

Spring Sesshin 2022

*Followers of the Way,
from two continents and five time zones,
gather with daffodils
to listen to the Dharma.*

Who hears Mu wafting over Puget Sound?

Who sees the sun setting in the Olympics?

A bald eagle soars over Plum Mountain.

Summer Sesshin

June 24 - July 1

This will be an in-person sesshin for only those fully vaccinated and boosted and able to attend at least part of every day. Zoom participation is available for those who are unable to attend in person and can attend either all or most days by Zoom ([Zoom registration required](#)). Please help us get an accurate count by sending an [application](#) by June 15, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. The cost of sesshin is **\$300** (less dues for this month). If attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. Sesshin starts Friday evening, June 24, 5:30 p.m. with informal supper, introductions and orientation.

Sesshin (from Saturday to the following Thursday) runs from 5 a.m.-10 p.m. 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 11 a.m.

We offer limited partial scholarships for sesshin. For more information please email: registration@choboji.org.



Bearing Witness, Breaking Open

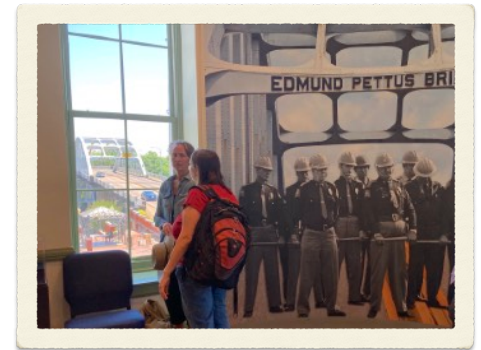
by Michelle Muji LeSourd

The [Bearing Witness to Racism in America](#) retreat was organized by Zen Peacemakers International in Birmingham, Montgomery and Selma, Alabama (May 7-11, 2022). Participants came from around the US and one came from Switzerland. From Chobo-ji were Genjo Roshi, Eddie (Daichi) Salazar and myself.

The 36 participants convened in Birmingham and heard from the remarkable local speaker, activist and trainer [T. Marie King](#), who summarized local history and current issues, named the civil rights movement a human rights movement, and challenged us to find our own place in it. At Kelly Ingram Park across the street from the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (site of the 1963 bombing and still an active congregation), life-sized sculptures memorialize the young people killed that day, as well as the [Children's Crusade](#) marches and police violence that gained worldwide attention. We sat in quiet meditation there as well as in Linn Park, site of the first documented lynching in Birmingham. As we sat, multiple church bells rang out, a mosaic of sound that called to me, "Wake up! It was just yesterday, and it is still happening!" I pictured a loving, strong community taking the man down from the tree, gently placing him on their shoulders, and leaving the park in a dignified procession as the man's soul sailed up into the sky. In both parks, we also stood to hear the names of lynching victims read aloud.

That afternoon we boarded a bus and rode in peace and comfort to Montgomery, unlike the [Freedom Riders](#) in the early 1960s. Alabama's state capital has layers of history to explore, including a [museum](#) of the 1955 bus boycott made famous by Rosa Parks. But first we took a day trip to Selma.

The renowned [Edmund Pettus Bridge](#) was busy with vehicles zooming and clanking past us as we walked two abreast on the narrow sidewalk, the green-brown Alabama river sparkling in the sun below. On the other side, where the state troopers had been waiting on Bloody Sunday, we



crossed through a small commemorative park and down below the bridge, where we sat in meditation along a gravel lane. Abundant trees and the bridge itself offered shade, just below where ordinary people demanding their right to vote confronted state violence in full daylight. The Voting Rights Act passed just months after the events of March 1965 unfolded in Selma with the whole world watching.

The park rangers at the [Selma National Historic Trail](#) interpretive site were welcoming and informative. Our work practice included assembling educational swag bags for visitors and/or maintenance work in a nearby city park. There I had a brief conversation with two city employees, African American men curious about our group. I offered a basic explanation and then found myself saying to them, "I don't just want to be a white lady floating in and out of here. I want this place to change me." By stating this aloud, was I trying to justify my presence there? Doubt arose in me. What good would it do?

ZPI's [Council](#) practice helped me process such feelings. We met in small, facilitated groups of six, and each day my group went deeper. During Council in Selma, my heart broke open, realizing that my two daughters (one of whom has experienced anti-Asian harassment) were a reason for me to be there. While meditation created space, Council made human connections. The two combined allowed me to experience more viscerally my grief, moral injury and moral outrage. I'm convinced that we (especially white folks) must make safe spaces for these feelings if we want to confront racism, begin healing, and make genuine change.

Back in Montgomery, some of us visited the Alabama state capitol complex made famous by both George Wallace ("[Segregation today...segregation forever](#)") and Martin Luther King, Jr. ("[How long, not](#)

long..."). But the structures there mainly celebrate an earlier history. We walked past a tall Confederate monument, stepped briefly into the "First White House of the Confederacy," and stopped at a marker commemorating the first time "Dixie" was played, at the presidential inauguration of Jefferson Davis in that very same spot. The nearby [Dexter Avenue Baptist Church](#) (where MLK preached 1954-1960) was a small but mighty contrasting presence.

For me, the highlight in Montgomery was the Equal Justice Initiative's [Legacy Museum](#): From Slavery to Mass Incarceration and [the National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#). EJI is a nonprofit organization founded in the 1980s by attorney [Bryan Stevenson](#), who wrote *Just Mercy* (made into a [feature film](#) in 2019). In my opinion, the design, scale and impact of the Legacy Museum and National Memorial are comparable to the US Holocaust Museum and Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

The National Memorial offered a sacred space in which we walked past and then beneath seemingly endless rows of metal columns, each representing a county in the US where lynching took place. On each column are etched names and dates, which in some cases fill it from top to bottom. The immensity of it welled up in me as we walked deep into the lowest recess of the memorial, where healing water flows over inspiring words. Later we meditated nearby and listened to more names, cradled by the earth as we breathed in trauma and breathed out peace.



The deeply immersive Legacy Museum includes sections on the slave trade, Reconstruction and its dismantling, Jim Crow, the civil rights movement, mass incarceration, an art exhibit and an amazing, high-ceilinged Reflection Room. There,

amidst hundreds of portraits of black Americans who have contributed to our country, my tears finally flowed. I let the grief, the weight of our shared history and ongoing struggles, surface and be released. Knowing this heart-state is not permanent, I must make room to return to it again and again, so that this journey can truly change me.

Engage

by Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

“I am who I am because somebody loved me, somebody cared for me,” thus spoke Dr Cornel West in response to a question about the essence of spiritual direction and



spiritual companionship in the midst of strife and turmoil at the Spiritual Directors Conference in Santa Fe New Mexico in May 2022 that Genjo Roshi and I attended.

The theme of the conference was “Engage: with our traumas and limitations, our fears, our worries and anxieties etc, so that we might grow comfortable with our discomfort, and use it as the fertilizer for our own spiritual awakening.” Sound familiar? Well yes, because Roshi speaks about it all the time!

Not coincidentally, it is the essence of what spiritual directors and companions do. And part and parcel of our vows as Zen students, which could be summarized as living into Love, with a capital “L.” To be loving to our selves, each other, the environment, the Universe, and so much more. As Dr West remarked, to be someone who becomes a catalyst to others, by supporting them with Love. No easy task, to be sure, in the face of so much opposition in general, that of others and our own. And especially difficult in the very rough terrain we have been navigating in the last few years.

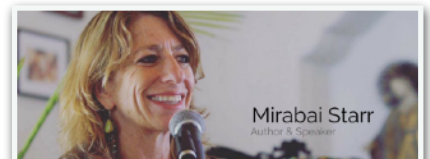
As we wrestled with this in New Mexico a few weeks back, we were guided by Valarie Kaur, and her Revolutionary Love Project, Pamela Ayo Yetunde, Yavilah McCoy, Pat McCabe and Dr West, as they all spoke of lessons learned from the pandemic of systemic racism that plagues us in this country, and so many others. And



we learned what Engaged Love means from all of them, along with Fr Greg Boyle, who leads the world's largest gang intervention initiative, and who spoke very eloquently and movingly about his experiences with death, both literal and figurative, and the rebirth of gang members into a new life, free of the violence and addictions that had previously bedeviled them.

And on the second to the last day of the conference, as if right on cue to remind us what is “out there,” the horrible, tragic and racist shooting in Buffalo occurred, with 10 people killed, and immense loss and suffering to their families and loved ones. And to all of us. And then a couple of weeks later, Uvalde, in a seemingly unending, and escalating, stream of horrors.

Mirabai Starr was on hand to lead us on a walk through the field of grief, along with Beverly Lanzetta, encouraging our contemplative tendencies as a balm for our aching hearts. We concluded with a service in honor of the Buffalo victims and their loved ones. A service it feels like we need to have every day.



So, what is ours to do? We refuse to look away, and we engage, with our tears, our empathy, our sense of loss, and through the actions, some quiet, and some loud, that define our practice. In short, we engage with as much Love as we can muster, even as we grit our teeth and bear the unbearable.

Why Didn't I?

Safe Place Writers: April 15, 2022

Prompt: Life & Death – Katie Farris
by Ken Klettke

The most intimate time I came to experience the death of another human being was when I was in my late teens. Of course, I knew about death long before that. As the youngest child in a farming family with a dearly beloved but unspayed mongrel named Patches, I was used to the puppies being ‘given away’. Sometimes, as the rumor provided by my older siblings revealed, our father would drown them in a bucket or, I think my mom told me sometime later, he would put them in a plastic bread bag and hold them over the tail pipe of our car. Although I had a mild distasteful feeling about this, it somehow seemed it was supposed to be done since my father did it.

One day while home alone, I was experimenting with my oldest brother’s pellet gun, the one he loved shooting grasshoppers. That enraged my sister, who is oldest, and therefore biggest and would sometimes punch my brother for that. In my experimenting I would aim at a robin, a bird that was surprisingly not as fleeing as all the other types. How did this bird ever survive evolution? Well, I actually hit one and felt bad as it flopped around with only one wing working, desperate to fly away. I felt I had no choice but to finish the job and was saddened at my handiwork. I never touched the pellet gun again.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the first dead human I knew first-hand, was my first cousin. Her name was Marcelle, who I think was 17 at the time, was out driving with three of her friends. I didn’t know them at all, but learned of the sad evening where they drove to the end of a pier one night, her in the back seat, drinking and having a small car party. Tragedy jumped in and the pier collapsed, and despite everyone’s efforts they could not get Marcelle out of the car and her spirit moved on.

At the funeral, with much sadness, many were crying uncontrollably, especially the young man who had driven the car that night. I felt helpless. Although I didn’t cry, I knew I wanted to help but it seemed I had no confidence to comfort. While walking in

line to the open casket, and seeing Marcelle no longer with freckles on lively white skin and a smile with bright red hair, I saw a girl with grayish skin enveloped in a tinge of green, dull red hair and freckles in the same place as before but none contrasted with living skin. I wanted desperately to reach out and hold my palm against her cheek long enough to bring life back into her. I didn’t. Why didn’t I? Why didn’t I show some sense of caring? Sure, it wasn’t part of our household habit, but I also feared it would seem freakish or creepy to those around me. I regretted it. Even a touch on the forehead to say goodbye I would have liked. I feel I failed.

A couple of decades later I learned that my mother had breast cancer. She had a surgery to help her, and in my own subsequent conversations, as well as those overheard, I soon discovered many other people had experienced breast cancer. It wasn’t a sudden epidemiological cluster; I’m sure I heard these conversations before but they had never seemed so enriched with presence as they were when it was my mother who was also experiencing breast cancer.

She did well for about four years until the cancer returned and spread relatively quickly to other parts of her body. I wanted to avoid this, as if avoiding would keep it at bay. One day, my mother, still dressed in her pajamas, asked me to sit with her on the velvety, dark blue double recliner. Her pajamas were a happy light blue with a button top, and a rounded, white hem anywhere a hem could be placed. She wanted to talk about her cancer and how it has spread. I think, in retrospect, she wanted to prepare me for her upcoming death. I’m not sure I wanted any part of that. She said it had spread to several places, and many bones, one being her breastbone and she unbuttoned the top of her pajamas to show me. This revealed an angry red and purple mound with scaling skin that looked like a large boil. She talked about it and said, “Go ahead and touch it.” This truly creeped me out and I just didn’t want to. But I had a sudden urge to just put my arms around her and say that I loved her. But I didn’t. Why didn’t I? This was definitely still not a habit in our household. The word ‘love’ seemed like it could even be from a foreign language. Instead, I felt like I inwardly cowered away.

Why didn’t I tell her I loved her? It is still hard to say that word but I have been experimenting with my present siblings, at least two of the three that I like. I still don’t like one brother. It’s too late to say anything like that now anyway, and have it received with any feeling, since this brother at 64 years of age has serious dementia.

“Why didn’t I?” is a common question I ask myself, and have for some time. Fear is usually the answer, if I was to be honest. Fear of ridicule, fear of conspicuousness, fear of presence, fear of admonishment, fear of facing a core belief that I just don’t deserve anything that feels good.

But, more recently, since my bucket list is still pretty full, and I’m getting closer to kicking it, I am trying to be less fearful and more loving, including to myself. It’s not easy at all. But it’s working, little by little. I get to write and share stories with a wonderful group of people. I get to play music and sing with another two groups of wonderful people, and I have found a Zen sangha to sit with. I have friends I didn’t know I had to help shelter me through some tough financial times. The sun is shining today.

In some moments, I feel I am doing things where I don’t have to later say ‘Why didn’t I?’ Although, I still often hesitate and say “What’s wrong with me? Why don’t I...?”, and then try to contemplate my inner obstacles rather than hibernating from myself. And as a result, I occasionally actually do some things. I can imagine these days of touching my mother’s illness and holding her and saying I love her. I hope she can hear.

As a friend of mine told me recently, “You’re not dead yet.”



Poems

by Sonja deWit

March Sesshin

*One minute before seven
the sun is already up
At the Zendo to the east of here
it rose a few seconds ago.*

*They are sitting the Spring Sesshin.
I join them in my thoughts
without even a second's delay.*

*The Olympic mountains across the Strait
are the same mountains they see
from the park near Chobo-ji.*

*There is a morning mist on the water
but the sun is on the mountain tops.*

Twinkle Twinkle

*A single star framed in my skylight
Nothing between us
but the window and a thin layer of night air.*

*A tiny pinprick
at the same time, a giant sun
seething flames and gas
many, many light years away.*

*Vast, unimaginable space between the star
and me, small oxygen-dependent speck
gazing out through a pane of glass.*

*If there were no earth, no stars
there would be no space either
nothing big, nothing small, nothing empty.*

*Reading between the lines —
yes, those important spaces between the lines
what is that about.*



Passages



Sadly my good friend and mentor Leonard Shaw passed on February 28, 2022. Most summers for many years Leonard led a one or two day spiritually-based Gestalt workshop for Chobo-Ji Sangha members and others. Pictured above Leonard also sometimes led five day Gestalt workshops into the deep shadow parts of ourselves. I feel very fortunate to have participated here at Chobo-Ji with him during his final workshop January 5-9, 2022. I've learned a lot from him, including how to face death with equanimity, living each day to the fullest.



Also, after a long battle with cancer, we lost the joyous presence of Dave Daiki Gordon on April 7, 2022. Dave was an avid mountain climber who climbed Mount Everest and often attended evening zazen at Chobo-Ji. He received Jukai from San Francisco Zen Center in October of 2011.

Summer Odayaka

August 19 - 21

Odayaka means "peaceful," and these sesshins are a little less arduous than our weeklong sesshins. You may choose to attend in person if you have been fully vaccinated. We will be offering traditional meals. On Friday and Saturday the beginning time will be either 5:30 (optional) or 7:00 a.m., and we'll close after the Closing Sutras at 8:30 p.m. On Sunday we'll begin at 5:00 a.m. and close at noon following Council. Please fill out this [application](#) if attending in person.

Registration for Zoom attendance is required for each day. The Zoom invitations and registration links are below. Requested donations are \$50 for Friday, \$50 for Saturday, and \$30 for Sunday. Please note that if you are attending all three days, you may make a single payment of \$130. You can send your donations to [PayPal](#).

Please indicate the purpose of your donation in the note/memo field.

Day 1 – Friday, Aug. 19, 7:00 a.m.

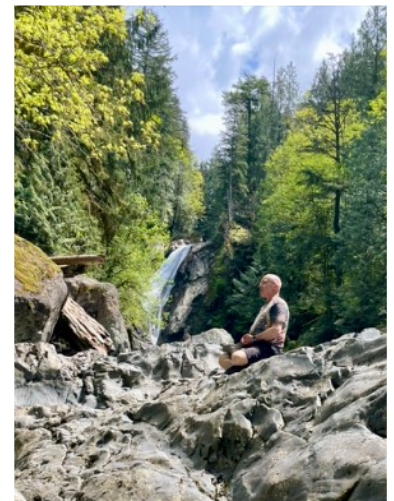
Register in advance for this meeting using [this link](#).

Day 2 – Saturday, Aug. 20, 5:30 a.m.

Register in advance for this meeting using [this link](#).

Day 3 – Sunday, Aug. 21, 5:00 a.m.

Register in advance for this meeting using [this link](#).



Chobo-Ji Restoration Project

May 9 - June 3
by Larry Palmer and Crew

No doubt everyone can agree that the exterior restoration of our building is a beautiful sight to see. In addition, we got our front sign and back fence restored, and new garden steps and railings along our entry incline.



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

Intro to zazen most Tuesdays 7:30-8:45PM

Dharma Council, most Saturdays at 8:30 AM – Dharma Dialogue, most 1st & 3rd Sundays at 7:30 PM

(See Google Calendar at <https://choboji.org/schedule/> for more detail and Zoom links.)

Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Sangha Hike (car pool from Chobo-Ji) ...

Summer Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...

Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Board Meeting ...

Sangha Hike (car pool from Chobo-Ji) ...

Sangha Community Trash Pick Up Samu ...

Soul Collage Workshop with Anne Pechovnik ...

Sangha Hike (car pool from Chobo-Ji) ...

Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Summer Odayaka (three-day Zen intensive) ...

Chobo-Ji's Annual Zen Post Workshop ...

Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...

Board Meeting ...

Autumn Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...

June 12, 5 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

June 18, 10:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

June 24 - July 1

July 10, 5 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

July 10, noon - 1:30 p.m.

July 16, 10:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

July 23, 10:30 a.m.

July 30, 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

August 6, 10:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.

August 14, 5 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

August 19 - 21

Sept. 10, 10 a.m. to noon

Sept. 11, 5 a.m. - 11:15 a.m.

Sept. 11, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Sept. 23 - 30



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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