



# Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

Today light rain is falling, the air is cool, but not cold, and spring flowers abound in the garden. We must remember that we are earthlings, children of mother earth and the Dharma that gives rise to this universe. We are all so fortunate to live on this spectacular planet full of diverse life,



oceans, rivers, mountains, valleys and plains. We have no purpose but to care for all beings, great and small, animate and inanimate. How is it that we collectively are doing such a poor job of it? How is it that we have collectively forgotten that we are all a part of one body and one mind? These are the most important koans of our time. Of course, it is my hope that our practice at Chobo-Ji helps us remember who we really are.

We had a full Spring Sesshin 2025, with 23 participants. Our Shika (host/manager) for this sesshin was Rev. Seifu Anil Singh-Molares; he made sure everyone could find their place on and off the cushion. Once more, Felix Wazan Pekar was our Dai Tenzo (chief cook) and his primary assistant was Rev. Soko Gavin Mackay. Together they planned and fed all of us three delicious vegetarian meals a day. Michelle Muji LeSourd was our principal Jikijitsu (time keeper) and made sure all the sits ran smoothly. Our Densu (chant leader) was Elijah Seigan Zupancic, who worked to keep the beat. Our Jisha (tea servers) were Aaron Haas and Brooks Donohue. They made sure we had plenty of tea, coffee and snacks to keep us going throughout our seven days together. On the last day of sesshin, Brooks and Johnathan Norman did Jukai (precept ceremony) together. More on the Jukai ceremony later in this issue. My Inji



*Spring Sesshin 2025*

(abbot assistant) for this sesshin was George Kyoki Gibbs who kept the dokusan line (for Dharma dialogue) flowing evenly. From this sesshin you will find a transcription of Rev. Sendo Anne Howells' middle day Dharma Talk and my fifth-day Teisho and closing incense poem. Also included in this issue are two additional poems by two attending Sangha members.

I hope you enjoy all the offerings you will find here, including a memorial minute for Kate Marchevskova, a report on the Zen Peacemakers Bearing Witness retreat in Alabama, the last report from our outgoing Board president about our recent Annual Meeting, an article by Rev. Soko Gavin Mackay concerning the messy path back to our deep nature, and announcements for our upcoming activities, including Summer Sesshin, June 20 – 27.

I hope to see all of you in the Zendo either in person or virtually very soon.

With gassho,  
Genjo

## Linji Meets the Old Woman Driving the Ox

China, Ninth Century

*The Hidden Lamp*

*Sendo Osho's Middle Day Dharma Talk*

**Case:** Master Linji Yixuan went to see Master Bingdian An. On the way he met an old woman driving an ox in a field. Linji asked her, "Which way is the road to Bingdian?" The woman hit the ox with her stick and said, "This animal. It walks all over the place without even recognizing the road." He repeated, "I asked you, which way is the road to Bingdian?" The woman said, "This beast! It's five years old and still can't be put to use."

Linji said to himself, "If you want to learn something from the person in front of you, first observe what the person does." And he had the feeling his sticking point had been removed.

Then when he reached Master An, An asked

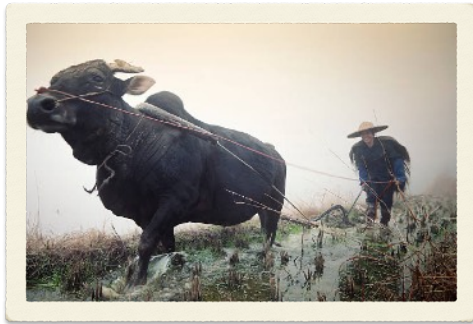
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him, "Have you seen my sister-in-law?" Linji said, "Yes, I've already been taken in tow."

**Study Questions:** Is it possible to train the wayward mind to stay on the Dharma path? When you meet a stranger, how do you know whether she is your teacher?

To begin, let's look at some details of this story. We know Linji by the Japanese transliteration of his name, Rinzai Gigen. Dharma heir of Obaku, who was Dharma heir of Hyakujo, Rinzai was the founder of our sect of Zen – Rinzai Zen. Very soon, Genjo will finish the Hekiganroku and begin giving teishos on the Rinzai Roku. We're going to become very familiar with Rinzai.

The ox here is a pretty odd creature, isn't he? In the traditional Chinese countryside it would have been normal to encounter farmers at their work. Someone seeing an old woman driving her ox would have



expected the ox to be towing a plow, the two of them together plowing the field. But that's not what they're doing.

For Zen students this ox will call to mind the Ten Zen Ox Pictures, a traditional and quite moving Zen map of the spiritual journey. Genjo Roshi has an excellent discussion of these pictures in his book, *Reflections on Awakening and Maturity*. If you haven't read that, I strongly recommend that you do so. As Genjo informs us, we don't know who first drew the pictures. Perhaps it was an 11th century Chinese Zen master; and the verses and commentary which accompany them are thought to be written by a 12th century master. Therefore at least in the form in which they survived, the pictures post-date Rinzai, who belongs to the 9th century.

Genjo understands the ox of the Ten Pictures as "a metaphor for our deep sage nature . . . which Linji said is the true person, beyond rank and post, going in and out of our faces all the time." (p. 67) In the first picture we see a person, the ox-herder, who has lost her ox. It's out of the picture, off somewhere, wandering. But it's not the ox who is lost, it's the person. She is looking for her true nature and can't find it. She's looking far away, not near at hand. Then, in the next picture, the person sees traces of the ox, and in the third, she sees the ox, but only partially. These stages of the spiritual journey feel familiar to all of us. Later pictures give different representations of awakening. One is a mountaintop experience - the ox forgotten, the person alone. Then comes an experience of emptiness, of Mu, both self and ox forgotten. The picture for this stage is the circle, the Enso, up there on the calligraphy next to our altar and on the bowing mat in front of the altar. The ninth picture, "returning to the source," is a third version of awakening, a nature scene, the person retired to a hut, invisible, embedded in the transcendence of nature. The final picture has the person visible again, back in the marketplace, in ordinary life.

It's important to realize that this mapping of a spiritual journey, which feels linear, is not linear: one goes back and forth among these stages. You might be really lucky and have a breakthrough awakening experience early on, but soon enough, believe me, you'll find yourself looking for that ox far away and not seeing it anywhere, really in a mess.

In this koan, the ox isn't lost at all, it's right there. The woman "driving" the ox is just standing there next to it. She hits it with her stick and complains about it. "This animal, it walks all over the place without even recognizing the road." And then when Linji, evidently feeling impatient, asks her again, I just want to know where to go, she says, "This beast! It's five years old and still can't be put to use." The relationship between the old woman and the ox is not the usual countryside one. Something else is going on here, and Linji finally recognizes this. When for the second time she refuses to answer him, something happens to him. He speaks to himself, a piece of advice: "If you want to learn something from the person in front of you, first observe what the person does."

What has happened? Clearly Linji's inner sage has kicked in. The story tells us he has the feeling his sticking point has been

removed. We're not told what that sticking point was, but we get a partial clue when Linji reaches the master he has been on his way to visit and learns that the old woman is that master's sister-in-law – and Linji says, "well, she has me in tow." It's strongly implied that one of the shifts he's made is a shift away from not seeing the person in front of him because she's an old woman. An old woman, he must have thought, can't be expected to know anything particularly deep but probably she has lived there for a long time and will know which way to go at a crossroads.

Another thing to notice is how the old woman talks about the ox: she complains about it. This makes me remember all the koans in which a commentator complains about the master at the center of the koan, and what the complaints really point to is that the opposite is the case. This is someone astonishing, we're seeing an astonishing human being at work.

The initial reason why I chose this story for this talk is that during the past few months I'd been mulling over the word "path" and the phrase "follower of the way." I'd been feeling really confused about it. What was this path? I sort of thought I knew what it was, but I was feeling as though I had no clue. Was it an actual path, one others were following but I was just pretending to follow, pretending to be a follower of the way? I didn't feel like I knew what to follow anyway. I was having these self-denigrating thoughts in relation to "path" and "follower of the way."

So, when Genjo suggested that I give this Dharma Talk at Spring Sesshin, I looked for a koan having something to do with "path." And since I thought I'd like to give the talk on Tuesday, Middle Day, I looked at *The Hidden Lamp*, which Genjo customarily turns to on Middle Day, and this story about the old woman, the ox, and Linji stood out.

I have recently had two different but related experiences of navigation. I spent large parts of November and December, and then late February and the early part of March in the region just north of New York City where my sister has lived for more than 40 years. In October, my sister was hospitalized for three weeks and then released to a nursing home. This nursing home was 20 miles north of her house, where I was staying.

In the course of my visits, the most

important thing I had to do was to discern whether she was going to be able to leave the nursing home. She was saying in the fall, get me out of here. I said, well, I'll try to find you something better. It may be another nursing home, I just don't know yet. I came to think, from what she reported about herself during the winter, that she was becoming ready for assisted living. So the week I returned there in February I set out to find an assisted living residence for her. The one I found, and she agreed to, is 20 miles in a different direction from her house.

So I did a hell of a lot of driving. I was driving all over several counties on winding, twisting two lane roads, uphill and downhill, worrying at times about ice because it was a cold winter there. I was driving 20 miles north to the nursing home and 20 miles southwest to the assisted living, which was near the Hudson River. And I was heavily dependent on GPS. Thank God for Google Maps. Google Maps kept telling me where to go and it was pretty good. It didn't make any mistakes. I made mistakes myself a couple of times when the GPS didn't mention that actually I had two choices of where to turn, and didn't tell me which one was correct. I had to turn around, but it knows how to get you back on the path. So here I was following this voice and getting more and more skilled with it.

I got a sense of what it meant when it said, "Stay on this road for six miles." I could relax for a while, sort of. I knew better when it said half a mile, and then when it said a thousand feet, and then when it said a quarter of a mile, I knew we were just about to the turn and it would tell me when I got there and I'd be fine.

If you're from the West, you're used to being able to tell roughly where you are by looking for the mountains on the horizon. That's very much our experience in Seattle. It was my experience in Walla Walla where I grew up with the Blue Mountains just east of there. It was true in L.A., where I worked for decades. But in the part of the country where my sister lives, there are no mountains. They think they have some, called the Adirondacks, and there are many hills, but you can't look at the horizon and tell which direction is which.

The two lane roads you travel on much of the time are really narrow, and so in fact, even with GPS, driving is something of a challenge. Initially, in November, I was wanting to go quite slowly on the roads, and of course other drivers were not happy with me, so I learned to pick up my speed. And fortunately, the speed limit on the narrow roads was only 55. By the time I left earlier this month, I was happy going 55 and had to make myself slow down when the signs said to. So I was getting to feel quite confident, and my navigation experience became one of having this reliable voice in my ear that I had to keep listening for. I couldn't forget to listen, but there were also all sorts of other things I had to pay attention to. I had to be mindful of the road, of other traffic, of potholes, of potential ice. And then I wanted to be mindful of the landscape. It's a lovely winter landscape there of deciduous forests with their bare limbs, and also lots of lakes. The lakes are the water system for New



York City, designed in an amazing feat of engineering in the late 19th century: a system of reservoirs constructed in accordance with gravity, so they flow into each other and then into the pipes of Manhattan.

I wanted to pay attention to the landscape, and I enjoyed paying attention to the landscape. So this was in the end a perfectly balanced experience of navigation. I had dependable help, and I was challenged to be mindful and in the present, and I enjoyed that.

My other experience of navigation was more challenging. This was my sister's situation, my own situation, the situation experienced by the two of us together. For one thing, I was trying to figure out how to meet her need for a reality check. It was

clear from the beginning that she wouldn't be able to go back home where she had lived for so long, and she had been clinging to that home to the point of refusing even to begin to plan for a time when she might have to leave. I had been trying to talk with her about this for years; now I had to find the right words to chime with her awareness of her changed capacities.

Happily, she got stronger at the nursing home and more able to be an agent in her own life. She threw herself into physical therapy. She got good at going around in a wheelchair, then with a walker. She always, when she's feeling better, makes friends with people who help her, and when I arrived in February she was addressing all the staff by name and smiling at them, and they were of course smiling back. She made friends with a very difficult roommate and with another woman down the hall. I admired what she was able to do and could acknowledge it and support her. And I could proceed with finding her a semi-affordable assisted living apartment and taking her there hoping she would agree to it.

I also had all sorts of tasks to do in her house, among them sifting through the long-accumulated mess of many drawers and cupboards to throw away the papers that needed to be thrown away so I could make sure bills were paid and tax materials organized, and also had clearly in front of me the documents I needed to plan a move. I had to activate a power of attorney so I could take charge of my sister's finances and make new arrangements with her financial institutions. I had to hire a realtor, and then, on the realtor's recommendation, hire a company called Caring Transitions to pack things and dispose of them. This was a little two-person company, Alan and Sam (a woman). They would do their best not just to dump things but find ways to recycle them. They've already done their first job, moving some of my sister's furniture to her new assisted living apartment.

So far this difficult experience of navigation – and I've mentioned only some of the problems – has turned out to be manageable. I haven't had a handy mechanical GPS for it but I have had my Zen practice and training, and that has been

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helping sustain me since last fall, when things were really hard. The combination of accepting impermanence and knowing groundedness has been working in me – isn't it wonderful that we can draw on both of these at the same time? No knowing has been hugely useful; I lean into it. I mostly have managed not to be anxious about my inability to know very far into the future. And in place of the GPS, at times I've had access to my inner sage. Primarily the inner sage has been saying "One step at a time." When you can focus on one step at a time, what has felt overwhelming often becomes possible. You break things down into small, doable steps. I have made many, many to-do lists, and most of them don't go very far into the future.

Also kicking in from Zen practice and training have been the Precepts Classes, which I taught twice during this period, both in November and again, early this month. For me, one of the most helpful things Norman Fischer says in his chapter about the precepts (in *Taking Our Places*) is that there are two powerfully useful flashlights for practicing the precepts – really for living your life – kindness and humility. If you can come from kindness and humility, taking one step at a time, you have a much better chance of being on the way. So in fact, during this winter when I found myself thinking I had lost the Way, it was right there. I was experiencing it. I was encountering kindness and humility on the part of others. I was much less panicky than I would have been some years earlier.

Now, back to the old woman and her ox. It walks all over the place without even recognizing the road. It's five years old and can't even be put to use. Is she saying these things in part to mock Linji? In some important sense he isn't seeming to recognize the road. And perhaps he's the equivalent of five ox years old, pretty mature in ox terms, but he has a way to go. She's instructing Linji.

What do we really have here? Is the old woman really driving the ox? Or – are she and the ox one? One?

The ox, to return to Genjo's language about it, is a metaphor for our deep sage nature, which Linji – sometime after this episode – said is the true person beyond rank and post going in and out of our faces all the time.

At the beginning of Sesshin, Saturday morning when we chanted Atta Dipa for the

first time, I thought, aha, you are the light. The Dharma is the light. The Ox is the light. But then I also want to add, you are the darkness. The Dharma is the darkness. The Ox is the darkness.

Zen does offer these maps and guides, such as the ox pictures, the precepts, our vows, our practice structure. It also offers koans, which are a very odd sort of guide, aren't they? Because they're always tripping us up and reminding us that uh-oh, we missed it. We just missed it. Maybe we'll alight on the momentarily satisfying response for this one, but then there's the next one; what will it throw us?

Fundamentally, we are feeling our way in dark. Genjo has talked about this in his teishos, in the Mu teisho and the one which got into openness and vulnerability. Radical openness is what we're called on for in our practice. It has to be improvisatory. Our conduct of our life, one step at a time, has to be improvisatory. We have to be willing to try things out and make mistakes and not get too discouraged and try again. This Dharma is always unique, it has never happened before. The story doesn't tell us what Linji was realizing when he shifted from his stuck place, but my speculation is that he was realizing something like what I've just said about the old woman, the ox, the Dharma, and the path.

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## Hekiganroku ~ Case 86

### Ummon's "Everybody Has his Own Light."

Genjo's 5th Day Teisho

**Engo's Introduction:** Controlling the world, he allows not the least speck of dust to escape. He cuts off the diluted stream of thought, leaving not a drop behind. If you open your mouth, you're mistaken. If you doubt for a moment, you have missed the way. Tell me, what is the eye that has pierced the barriers? See the following.

**Main Subject:** Ummon spoke to his assembly and said, "Everybody has his own light. If he tries to see it, everything is darkness. What is everybody's light?" Later, in place of the disciples, he said, "The halls and the gate." And again, he said, "Blessing things cannot be better than nothing."

## Setcho's Verse:

*It illuminates itself,  
Absolutely bright.  
He gives a clue to the secret.  
Flowers have fallen, trees give no shade;  
Who does not see, if he looks?  
Seeing is non-seeing, non-seeing is seeing.  
Facing backward on the ox,  
He rides into the Buddha Hall.*

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Ummon's saying "Everybody has his own light" is the same as Hakuin's, beginning of *The Song Zazen*, "Sentient beings are primarily all Buddhas." Since everybody has his own light, and sentient beings are primarily all Buddha, the very least the majority or the favored, privileged section of a culture or caste can do is make efforts for diversity, equity and inclusion. And any administration of any country that isn't doing this, is falling short. Moreover, in the case of a country that was trying to do some of that, and then takes backwards steps, it's outright shameful.

I feel sorry for the companies and the law firms and universities that are capitulating to the Trump administration. I understand, but I would hope that if I found myself in a leadership position in such an institution, I could be more courageous.

You know, systemic racism of some sort is a part of every culture. It always has been and probably always will be. There's nothing new about this. However, when a society begins to recognize its own systemic racism, that really is a step forward, and a culture that doesn't recognize it or denies it is like a flower that has not opened or perhaps closed for the night. One hopes that when day comes, the flower of compassion opens or reopens more widely.

Everybody has their own light and we are all blossoming Buddhas, whether we realize it or not. I found myself saying to someone in dokusan this morning that even physics tells us in Einstein's formula  $E=MC^2$  that matter and energy are interchangeable. In other words, all of matter is just compressed light, compressed energy. Human beings are such compressed light that we've become like diamonds, every one of us, which is why Hakuin correctly says we are all primarily Buddhas. On the fifth day of a sesshin, it's easy to look around the room and only see diamonds! You know when I look in the mirror or I look at anyone far

outside of sesshin it's difficult to see sometimes, and it becomes so easy to see our diamond nature in the middle of sesshin.

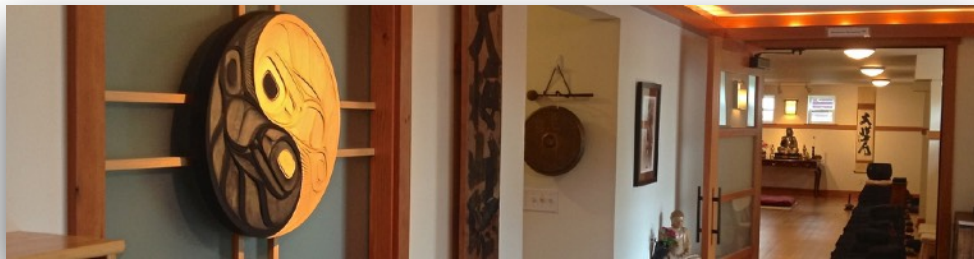
What is everybody's light? In the middle of a weeklong sesshin, I hope it is easy for you to look in a mirror and see what your light is. How does your diamond nature manifest in this lifetime?

When I look in the mirror, I see a leaf of compressed light hanging on the tree of Heart-Mind. Looking more closely I see and delight in my hungry ghost toddler, who was severely abused when very young. I see how much he wants my attention and wants to be safe. He wants my support and permission to play in all the ways that he couldn't as a small child. Every sesshin he tells me how much he hurts and longs for

birth, no death.

Of course, the 70-year-old knows that this impermanent existence is temporary and may conclude at any moment. This compressed human diamond, known as Genjo, will soon enough dissolve; it has never been before and will never be again, and yet, I get glimpses of being part of a presence that has no beginning and no end. The death of this physical form and personality will be no more or less than a leaf falling from a tree or a wave collapsing into the ocean. I am more or less ready for that release. And what a release it will be for all of us.

After posing this koan, "What is everybody's light?" Ummon later said in place of the disciples, "the halls and the gate." I might say, "the foyer and the



loving attention. He is very much like my dog Charlie, always wanting belly rubs.

I also see myself as a loving father to my daughter Adrienne, and I see the bereft loving partner who's become a caretaker for his disabled spouse, Carolyn. I see how much he misses what we once had together, and so desires to assist Carolyn to recover as much as she can within the limits of her disability. I know I do this out of my love for her, and out of a selfish desire to be more fully with her.

I see the man who wants to be a better piano player, in this lifetime, and wants to have the time to practice. I see the guy who knows that physics is starting to catch up with Buddhism and wants to be a part of that integration. I see the Abbott of Chobo-Ji who hopes the practice here continues for generations. I see the 70-year-old who knows that time is short, and though it may be some time off, is getting ready to die.

I'm so grateful to the fifth day of sesshin to see with confidence that our greatest delusion is our false sense of separateness. We are all a part of one body and one heart-mind, and truly from this lens, there is no

fountain," or "the maple tree, and the rain falling in the sunlight." Or how about, "the crow squawking on the maple branch." As Setcho says, "it illuminates itself absolutely bright."

When seeing in this way, Setcho says, "Flowers have fallen, trees give no shade; who does not see, if he looks?" We can glimpse what we have been and always will be when we die on the cushion, that is to say, let go of all attachment to this life.

You know, the fundamental instruction of Zen is simple, sit, breath and listen with all channels of perception to the symphony of now; in other words, fully witness this moment of eternity. That's it. No further instruction is needed.

When you think you're seeing, you're not seeing the deep nature of reality. And when you're not seeing, you don't need any words, but perhaps for a while we can rest riding backwards on an ox, playing our flute, letting the Dharma take us it where it will.

Please enjoy this day in the Buddha Hall.

## Jukai Ceremony

Jukai (受戒 – Precept Receiver) candidates need to petition in writing to the Abbot at least one month prior to the ceremony. Jukai candidates usually have attended regular zazen at Chobo-Ji, or an affiliated temple, for a minimum of six months (including at least two weeklong sesshins), taken our precept classes or completed a course of equivalent study, must be regular financial supporters of the temple, and feel ready to give themselves to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma & Sangha), working to live our Great Vow to care for all beings great and small, animate and inanimate. At the ceremony, candidates take the [Precepts and Four Bodhisattva Vows](#), and receive a rakusu and a dharma name.

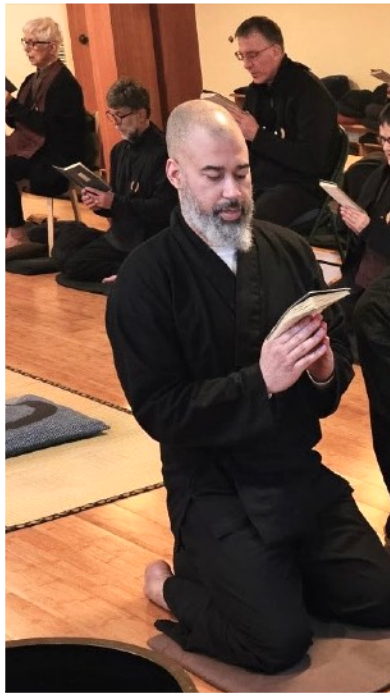
On the final day of Spring Sesshin, March 28, 2025, two people did Jukai. The first was Johnathan Norman. Here are some excerpts from Johnathan's Jukai letter:

*My journey with Zen started a rather long time ago. I started meditation at the Houston Zen Center, a Soto school, mostly to help lower my blood pressure. I quickly found out that it helped me unblock certain challenges related to work. Zen became a productivity tool and remained that for quite some time. Over the years, however, the lessons of Zen, such as the importance of direct non-conceptual experience, really caught my interest. In my profession, testing software security or hacking, we have a similar line of reasoning. The overlap between both is quite surprising and caused me to dig more deeply into Zen. After over a decade of studying alone and occasionally sitting at a few Soto Zen places, I decided to join a Rinza school (Zenways) which offered online Dokusan with Roshi Daizan Skinner.*

*Having a teacher really deepened my understanding and I credit that to working with koans. Daizan suggested I could progress further by joining a local Sangha and, as a long-time listener to the Chobo-Ji podcast, I decided to visit and later join the Sangha. It quickly became my home and a place of peace for me. It's hard to explain the importance of this peace. In my professional life, I make decisions that impact millions of people and deal with a*

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lot of conflict. These things weigh on me constantly. My regular time at Chobo-Ji allows me to carry that weight with grace.



had some measure of success not comparing my life to others' and valuing my own life, but there are times when I have weak moments. As time progresses, things get better and I get better. One day, I'm sure it'll be something else, because this is the way of things.

"I will remember that silence is precious: I will not gossip or speak ill of others" is certainly the easiest precept for me. I am a quiet person who values isolation and silence. I can work alone on a project for weeks, never speak to anyone, and be quite happy. This can be negative, however, because sometimes people may perceive that I don't want to see them. The reality is I'm often just bouncing from project to project and fail to reach out. When I do find time to speak with others, I value substantive conversations. Things such as gossip and chatter about others simply do not interest me.

Given Johnathan's steady persistence in pursuing the Way, I gave him the Dharma Name: OnKou "On" = Calm (穩) – "Kou" = Persistence (恆).

The second Jukai presentation was for Brooks Donohue, and here are some excerpts from his Jukai letter:

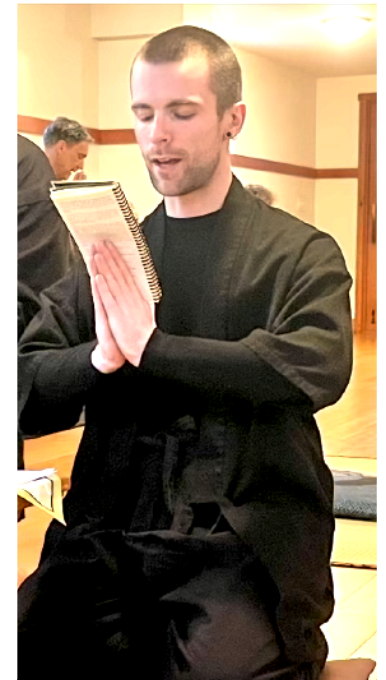
I've always surrounded myself with stimulus, with novelty. ... I'm frequently thinking of what's coming next rather than living in and appreciating the moment at hand. It's gone from a habit to a craving to a lifestyle for me, and I know that it would be more healthy for me to take more time for myself.

I've also given myself over to many physical attachments ... I accrue things, needs, like barnacles on the hull of the ship - they make me heavy and slow me down, and I cannot let them go.

Zen, then, with its total minimalism and strict adherence to rules and routine, seems an odd fit for me. ... How could this be for me?

I first attended a service at Chobo-Ji in 2009, in my sophomore year of high school. Daiki, now Genzen, taught me about meditation, breathing, and the power of mu. I was hooked. The more I learned about zen, the more it challenged me; the more it challenged me, the more I wanted to learn. The rigor and precision were stark

contrasts to the good-enough mentality I'd had; the constant instruction and correction frustrated me and made me think I'd never meet Zen's exacting standards. But I kept coming back to CBJ over the next decade and a half (sometimes consistently, sometimes less so) because I wanted that sense of peace and ease that I got from everyone in the sangha. Whatever it was, I didn't have it yet, and I resolved that I would find it in my own way.



So why now after roughly two decades of Zen practice do Jukai? Well, there are three reasons. First is that throughout the years, Zen has helped me get through some very difficult life situations. I never committed to Zen, but it made my life better in so many ways. In a way, I feel the need to return the commitment it has made to me. The second reason is, if I am to commit to something, I want to feel that I've earned it. I found that Jukai at Chobo-Ji requires more work than other schools I've attended. After years of half-hearted commitment to Zen, it feels important to me to "earn" Jukai. Finally, I want to take the precepts in front of people I love, and I've grown to love the Sangha. Everyone is kind in the way that I aspire to be.

In regards to the precepts, "I will be grateful for my life; I will not covet or be directed by envy or jealousy," is certainly the precept I've struggled with the most. My life has been rather challenging. I've been homeless, dealt with various legal troubles, I have a child who was born with a life-altering rare disorder, and more. It is difficult to be surrounded by people who simply went to college, got married and have a neurotypical child. Over time, I've

Joining the group of Jisha last spring and attending fall's sesshin were what really changed things for me. The service and mindfulness, the idea of doing without needing to think in the background, put teachings into context. I listened to myself breathe while I ground baito at six in the morning. I felt the warm water on my fingers as I scrubbed dishes. I watched the knife neatly divide an apple when I prepared snacks. Being mindful of simple work and fully investing myself in what I was doing made me better appreciate that I was taking part in the sangha's wellbeing; in mindfully caring for all, I was free of craving for myself. And if I could be mindful while working, I could do it while sitting - or anywhere.

Sesshin may have been the hardest thing I've ever done. My body ached, my mind cried out in hunger, and I broke out in hives.

*But every sit, every chant, every koan was one step closer to knowing I was capable of this. I would enter these immeasurable gates to truth, no matter what. Eventually, as if by lightning strike, the pain and boredom were penetrated and I experienced some sort of ego death during a sit. Brooks the hungry ghost fell away and whatever remained simply was, for about twenty beautiful minutes. Those minutes were all I needed to know that Zen was right for me; that it's true, that it works if you trust both it & yourself. I only got somewhere when I released that attachment and trusted myself. No hindrance, therefore no fear. I walked out on the last day feeling more in touch with myself & the sangha.*

*I have wanted to do jukai for years, but I hope to do it now because I feel as though I finally understand why I should do it. Having a rakusu and a dharma name won't make me any more of a Buddhist or a sangha member. But having that commitment, that vow to serve oneself and others both literally and figuratively, is far more important to me. I have seen the changes that come with consistent practice and understanding of zen, both inwardly and outwardly, and I have come to understand that even hungry ghosts have a place in this sangha, not in spite of differences, but because of them. And as I consider the prospect of stepping away (however temporarily) from Chobo-Ji and moving to Montreal, I know that doing jukai with my home sangha will be what I need to feel right about forging out on my own. ...*

*By far, the most difficult vow is the eighth, that of non-covetousness, of ending my attachments and desires. I ascribe a great deal of significance and sentiment to a lot of things in my life – places, items, relationships, people. I'm striving to understand that all of these things are transitory, and that I don't need any of them to be happy and satisfied, but my pre-existing habits (not to mention my choice of vocation) make things pretty difficult.*

*Zen has shown me the beauty of detaching - from my need to know the right answer or*

*meet imaginary benchmarks for my own performance. I am beginning to trust my own feelings and hear my own voice. ... Wherever I am, or will be, I know that I will have what (and be who) I need. Thank you, Chobo-Ji.*

Given Brooks' concern about transcending performance benchmarks, I gave him the Dharma Name: MuBen "Mu" = No (as in unencumbered) (無) – "Ben" = Effort (勉).



## Closing Incense Poem Spring Sesshin 2024

*With calm persistence,  
Followers of the Way  
Plant themselves, with no effort,  
In the ground of being.  
Who hears the thunder?  
Daffodils dance in the rain.*

## The Four Great Vows by Dee Seishun Sensei

*Day after day, I chanted the vows  
like a child pledging allegiance.  
No clue about what to do with them  
But trusting the flag in front of me.  
Twenty-five years of walking through fine mist,  
My robes are finally soaked  
And I see the vows  
in pouring a cup of tea,*

*waking from a dream,  
bowing in the four directions and  
dancing with the flow.  
Simple  
Ordinary  
Miraculous*

## Memorial Minute for Kate Marchevskova

Throughout Kate Metz Marchevskova's life, important threads shaped her life and brought loved ones together. Kate was passionate about her friends, she loved her work in caring for others, cherished her co-workers, and she was deeply rooted in her spiritual path as a Zen student and Dharma teacher.

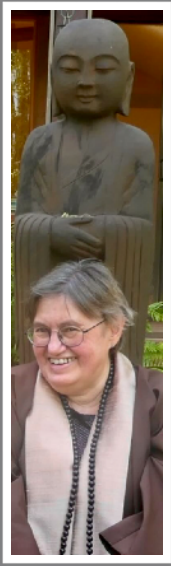
Kate was born and raised in Indiana where she lived in a leafy suburb of old growth oak trees with her parents and older brother. She attended Indiana University; after receiving her BA in Spanish, Kate traveled to Nicaragua during a revolutionary government takeover. In a hospital with no beds, she shared food, a gentle ear, and an arm with overwhelmed staff. This experience deeply moved her, inspiring her to help others.

Returning to Indiana, Kate decided to become a nurse and went back to school. She graduated in the 80s during the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic and signed up as a county nurse, entering the lives of those suffering from the unknown epidemic.

In the early 90s, Kate moved to Seattle and began working at Bailey-Boushay, the first dedicated AIDS hospice in the country. The years of holding unending suffering took a toll, but she realized she needed a way to continue her work and explore the heart of suffering. In the early 90s, Kate found a spiritual home in Buddhist meditation and mindfulness, following the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. She began sitting meditation and attending retreats with the Seattle sangha, eventually joining the Order of Interbeing in Plum Village, France. Kate practiced with her teacher, Eileen, at Mountain Lamp Community and within the Mindfulness Community of Puget Sound.

In the early 2000s, she moved to Mexico

*Continued on next page ...*



City to teach English and started the first mindfulness Sangha in Mexico. After ten years, Kate returned to Seattle and resumed her career as a hospice nurse. Kate received recognition as a Dharma Teacher in the Mountain Lamp tradition and led her Sangha, Wandering Mountains.

When Kate's teacher, Eileen, retired she began studying with Genjo at Chobo-Ji, where she recently attended Rohatsu Sesshin last December. Her practice boosted her and others at

the Evergreen Hospice Care Center in Kirkland.

Kate's friends remembered her courage, kindness, and gratitude. She inspired everyone around her. She was a treasure and will be deeply missed. Kate died peacefully at the Hospice Care Center on April 11th at 8 pm, surrounded by her co-workers and visited by friends, family, and loved ones. A remembrance was held at the Evergreen Health Hospice Care Center on April 30th, where Genjo led the silent meditation portion of the service. On May 30th, her ashes will be spread in the Salish Sea.

## Bearing Witness Reports

April 24 - 28, Michelle Muji LeSourd, Rev. Kristina Yuen Hocku (from No-Rank Zendo) and I (Genjo) attended this year's [Zen Peace Makers Bearing Witness to Racism in America](#) retreat in Alabama. This was my third time to do this plunge. During this retreat it was particularly moving to share time with the mayor of Selma, Alabama, Rev. James Perkins. During questions, I asked him about what it is like to live with the Trump administration, after admitting that even as a privileged white male, I feel frightened, angry and embarrassed by the current direction of our country. He paused and said that really there is nothing new going on, racism has always been a part of this country, adding, much progress has been

made, and much more progress needs to be made. This matter of fact attitude of Mayor Perkins was inspiring.

After three years of visiting the [Legacy Museum](#) in Montgomery, which features first-person historical accounts, interactive



content and world-class presentations and art, I feel I've begun to be able to viscerally let in the long history of racism in this nation. I wish every high school student in the country had to visit this museum at least once, either in person or virtually, before graduation. But sadly, it seems many states, especially in the South, are choosing to ignore history rather than learn from it. That's really disappointing, to say the least.

Here is Muji's offering ...

**Bearing Witness to Racism Retreat – A Powerful Second Experience:** Her name was Florence and she was born in 1863, according to the modest headstone. Her date of death was obscured by the red-brown Alabama earth into which the stone had settled. Her place of repose was also marked by a smaller foot-stone. After bowing and greeting Florence, I settled into gently pulling out the small weeds growing on and around the grave. The quiet of the warm spring day was punctuated only by birdsong and the hushed voices of my companions clearing other plots and the wooded pathways between them. The Negro Burial Ground in Old Cahawba had only 11 marked graves and untold hundreds of unmarked ones, which we were told to

spot as depressions in the earth, both in the treed area and an open field. Though the town's population had long vanished by then, the last burial took place in 1957, a sign of the strong ties to this place about 15 miles from Selma, now an archaeological park cared for by staff and volunteers.

My second Bearing Witness to Racism retreat in Alabama consisted of both new activities like the above and powerful repeat experiences in Selma and Montgomery. Some participants, including Genjo Roshi, were on their third or fourth trips. This time we stayed in Selma's historic St. James Hotel for three nights, offering a chance for early morning walks along the Alabama river and through the town. On these solo excursions I found the historic Old Live Oak cemetery (where some graves were decorated with small Confederate flags), the First Baptist and Brown Chapel churches that played pivotal roles in the 1965 movement for voting rights, and homes with yard signs from the most recent mayoral race sporting slogans like "together, we can fix this." Friendly residents up early responded to my "good morning" greetings.

Fortified by optional morning zazen led by Genjo Roshi, we enjoyed breakfast at



Selma's Reflections Café and had the chance to hear directly from Mayor James Perkins, Jr., also pastor of the Ebenezer Missionary Baptist Church. On his invitation, we attended Sunday services at the church, receiving a warm welcome. We crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge kinhin style, after interacting at the foot of the bridge with Columbus, a resident with deep roots in Selma who shared its history and offered T-shirts featuring John Lewis and the slogan "Get in good trouble, necessary trouble." We engaged in more zazen and kinhin at the nearby site of Tent City, where sharecropper families had lived for a time in the 1960s after losing their homes and livelihoods as retribution for participating in



the voting rights movement.

Critical to the Bearing Witness experience, the Council sessions held each afternoon offered the opportunity to listen and share deeply about our experiences. I found that Council allowed space to access my feelings on a level that visiting the sites alone did not. It helped me to form a real connection not only to my companions on the journey, but also to the people, places and history around us.

In Montgomery, a second visit to the world-class Legacy Museum and [National Memorial for Peace and Justice](#) allowed for taking in more details and pausing for an emotional response to the enormity of the systems of slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration. This time, walking past the columns in the Memorial dedicated to victims of lynchings across the US, I breathed in fear and pain, and breathed out peace and equanimity. Montgomery also



offered a powerful group walking experience from the dock at the Alabama River up the street past the slave warehouses and to the fountain plaza where human beings were auctioned to the highest

bidder. I tried to imagine myself one of them. Walks around the city offered a chance to see where Rosa Parks boarded the



famous bus in 1955, the Greyhound bus station, now a museum to the Freedom Riders of the early 1960s, and the Southern Poverty Law Center's Civil Rights Memorial to those who lost their lives for the cause, nestled right in the shadow of the Alabama state capitol, which still sports a number of Confederate monuments.



This second time around, I felt enveloped in the camaraderie and care of our three Zen Peacemakers organizers and 25 fellow travelers, who became dear to me in a short time. Connecting with such a community offered a balm for my spirit in these challenging times.

Here is what Rev. Yuen had to say ...

Being in Alabama made the realities of racism in our nation's history and present much more palpable. The truth of centuries of torture and dehumanization of millions of people is truly beyond comprehension. More than once I experienced a sense of overwhelm, feeling that I was unable to absorb any more. The thought came, "That's actually the truth." The cruelty endured by people who were abducted from their homes, separated from loved ones, chained, beaten, raped, whipped, terrorized, demeaned, hung, shot, burned, and deprived of basic rights is more than anyone can truly take in, because it is so immense. I allowed the devastation of racism to permeate each breath, each step. I allowed tears of grief to flow freely carrying me deeper and deeper into the immensity of it all.



Alongside the immensity of grief, I also experienced the immensity of this 'something' that somehow still rises up amidst the horror. There is something that is even bigger and more vast and more powerful than the agony of racism. It is what carried a tortured people onward. It is what rises in churches, through spiritual or religious practices, bringing with it a strength and a knowing and a being that cannot be contained nor denied. It is what drove determined and courageous people to walk across a bridge in Selma, facing law enforcement and hostile neighbors on horseback wielding cattle prods, clubs, and tear gas. It is what stirs in the hearts of every activist, advocate, and change agent who is unrelenting in the pursuit of a world that honors and cares for all beings. It is the True Nature of this life and of all of us. It rises no matter what. It compels us to stand within this truth and act with its bravery and compassion and persistence in the face of injustice and hate. It, too, is incomprehensible and immense!

# Nothing Holy About It: Zen and the Messy Path Back to Yourself

by Rev. Soko Gavin Mackay

## Rediscovering the Sacred in the Everyday

What comes to mind when you think of religion or the spiritual world? Maybe it's stained-glass cathedrals, the solemn hush of prayer, or choirs echoing through candlelit sanctuaries. This holy realm feels set apart – secluded in sacred spaces of worship and ritual. Elevated, pristine, pure. Untouched by the messiness of ordinary life, and certainly not something we imagine existing within ourselves. It belongs to saints, scriptures, sacred objects. It's something to be revered from a distance – not necessarily lived in the raw, repetitive rhythms of our daily routines.

Zen turns this whole idea on its head. For a practitioner of Zen, the sacred can be found in a blooming flower, a dew drop, or a loved one's eyes. It's not confined to ritual or hidden in the heavens. It permeates the entire universe and is silently shouting at us each moment. The trouble is, most of us fail to notice it.

So what exactly is this sacred reality that's subtly screaming at us from right under our noses?

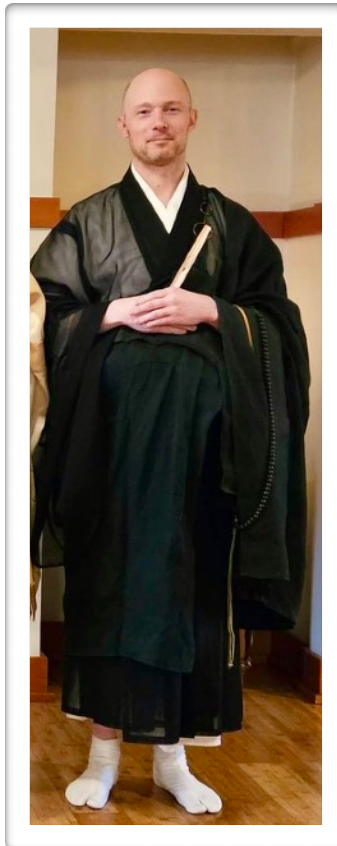
## Everyday Life Is Zen

In Case 19 of the *Mumonkan*, Joshu asks Nansen, "What is Tao (the Way)?" Nansen replies, "Ordinary mind is Tao." Herein lies the key. But what is an ordinary mind?

Think back to when you were a child – or maybe to the way your own children move through the world. Isn't their experience full of wonder and flow? Aren't they quite naturally absorbed in the awesomeness of their surroundings, or completely submerged in the depths of joy or sorrow? Can you remember the feeling of a cool breeze on a hot summer day? How a few minutes of play could feel like an eternity?

There are no thoughts of work expectations or chores that need doing. You are utterly free to be either enthralled or devastated by

each moment. This is an ordinary mind. But as we grow, we learn how to be members of society – and the responsibilities that come with it. We learn how to fit in with our family, at school, at work. We collect masks, roles, identities, and opinions. These things are all instrumental to our survival and our success. But somewhere along the way, our precious, bright, and free original mind gets covered up – and eventually forgotten.



Our lives can begin to feel dull, flat, and uninspired. Despite our best efforts, we can't seem to be able to reclaim that aliveness through any means of accomplishment or accumulation. We so desperately want to reconnect to our original mind yet we have completely forgotten it even exists.

## No Mud, No Lotus

If you've ever moved houses, you've probably been shocked by just how much stuff you've accumulated. It didn't seem like that much – until you had to handle, organize, and box each item. The volume becomes overwhelming. Do you really need all this stuff? And what about the dust – behind the sofa, on the shelves?

One of the preliminary steps on the journey back to our original mind is a kind of emotional and mental cleaning. We take stock of the habits, identities, and attachments we've collected throughout life. We let go of what no longer serves us, polish the ones we still use, and sweep out the old stories that have been hiding in the corners of our consciousness.

When I was training in the monastery, I once asked the Zen master, "What is Zen?" He paused, looked at me with a glimmer in his eye and the faintest smile, and said, "Zen is the cleaning of the heart."

How many wounds, regrets, fears, or embarrassments do we carry every day – some of them decades old? How are they affecting our relationships, our communication, and how we interact with ourselves and the world?

You wouldn't go years without brushing your teeth. So why allow your heart to be coated with years of emotional buildup?

The good news is, this very mess is the path. The cleaning is the practice. All we need to do is show up and do the work. We were all taught how to floss, brush our teeth, and take a bath – but how exactly do we clean and care for the heart?

## I Was Lost, But Now I See

The word Zen translates directly to "meditation." So when the Zen master said that Zen is the cleaning of the heart, he was saying: "Meditation is the cleaning of the heart."

What is meditation? Simply put: honest, naked awareness. If we can set aside our judgments – likes and dislikes, ideas of right and wrong, this and that, self and other – and observe this reality with naked, unfiltered honesty, then we begin to feel the magic in the cool summer breeze, see the whole universe in a loved one's eyes, and sense that a moment spent smelling a flower can stretch into eternity.

Wherever we go, it's shining at us. You don't need a sacred sanctuary, incense, or candles – all you need is your awareness. Start now. Practice anywhere, anytime – breath by breath. Dissolve what no longer serves you, and return to your original mind.

## President's Corner

by Dr. Eddie Daichi Salazar

Good sangha, as you may know, the board meets every other month and is tasked with overseeing the overall health of our community. In our turbulent times, the board discerns how best to attend to all in our sangha, and indeed the wounded world. In our March gathering we decided to reconstitute the Social Action committee, which last functioned many years ago. This committee has now met several times and is pursuing action items that would support immigrants in our local community. Watch for more to come from this committee. Also, the board has been discerning how to best steward the apartment unit 8 for maximum utilization. The board has weighed whether to rent the unit, or keep it open for sesshin stays with AirBnB on the remaining open dates. More discernment in the works about this.

The board also authorized the zendo to be rented to Seattle Soto for two days, one each in March and May. In April, the board hosted the annual all-sangha meeting beginning with potluck and then, with a quorum of many current sangha members present, all current board members were voted into their ongoing tenures for another year, with none going off or coming on.

After the vote, the meeting shifted to council with the topic: "In these times, how do we feel safe and support each other in the sangha?" Much sharing and discussion ensued. Know that this column will be the last with me as board president. I pass the baton to the capable hands of new president Anil Seifu Singh-Molares. These are very troubling times, and yet our sangha continues to be a compassionate place of refuge for all!



to be a



Come and join us on the Saturdays, (once a month, starting at 9:30 AM), that we make 100 Sandwiches for people who are hungry in our neighborhood. Please see below for our monthly dates. Our turkey & cheese, and our classic PB&J are delivered in person to those in need by Marko, a former Chobo-Ji resident, with a warm smile, and good wishes.

Sandwiches are delivered to our unhoused neighbors in Beacon Hill on Tuesdays, and Marko also shares them in the 12th and Jackson area on Sunday mornings.

Would you like to help fund 100 Sandwiches' transformation? For one-time donations see below. Or adopt a baker's dozen PB&Js with a monthly gift of \$20. You can write a check to Chobo-Ji and leave the check in the bowl at the Zendo entrance, or mail it (to Chobo-Ji, 1733 S. Horton St., Apt. 7, Seattle WA 98144), or use [PayPal](#).

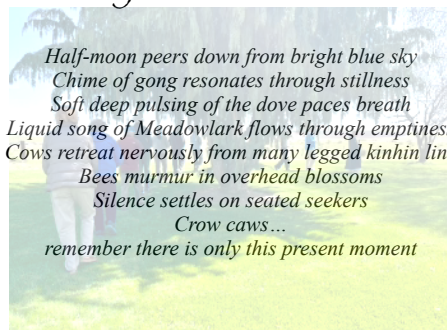
**If you choose PayPal, please make your donation to [zen@choboji.org](mailto:zen@choboji.org). Whichever payment method you use, please note that your donation is for 100 Sandwiches.** And accept our heartfelt thanks! Questions? Ask Sally at Saturday morning coffee, or email her at [Metcalf.sally@gmail.com](mailto:Metcalf.sally@gmail.com).

9:30 - 11:00 on the following dates...

**June 14, July 19, August 2**

## Half-Moon Sit Walla Walla April Zazenkai by Chris Howard

*Half-moon peers down from bright blue sky  
Chime of gong resonates through stillness  
Soft deep pulsing of the dove paces breath  
Liquid song of Meadowlark flows through emptiness  
Cows retreat nervously from many legged kinhin line  
Bees murmur in overhead blossoms  
Silence settles on seated seekers  
Crow caws...  
remember there is only this present moment*



## Summer Sesshin

June 20 - 27

We welcome both in-person and Zoom participation in our week-long Spring Sesshin. For in-person participation please fill out an [application](#), full attendance is expected; please speak to [Genjo](#) if this is not possible. For on-line participation, you may attend by Zoom ([Zoom registration required](#)) for any portion that fits your schedule, but some attendance each day is expected. 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 \$360 (minus dues for this month for dues-paying members); if attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. You can use [Pay/Pal](#) or leave a check in the bowl at the entrance to the zendo. (Using Pay/Pal please note that your payment is for Spring Sesshin.) We provide sleeping accommodations to 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.

Sesshin starts Friday evening, June 20, at 5:30 p.m. with introductions, orientation and informal supper. From Saturday to the following Thursday, Sesshin runs from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. The final Friday begins at 5 a.m. and concludes around 11 a.m.

We offer limited partial scholarships for sesshin. For more information please email: [registration@choboji.org](mailto:registration@choboji.org).

Participants in the zendo may be asked test themselves for COVID 72 hours after sesshin begins. Participants taking any form of public transportation to Seattle, please test yourselves before travel. We will serve shared meals. Anyone experiencing flu or cold-like symptoms should not attend in person.



## 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 7:30-8:45 PM; Women's Circle: Sundays 2:00-3:00 PM

Dharma Council, most Saturdays at 8:30 AM – Dharma Dialogue, some Sundays at 7:30 PM

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

**Listening to Inner Sage with Sally Zenka Sensei ...**

**Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...**

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

**100 Sandwiches Prep (June 14, July 19, August 2) ...**

**BIPOC Sitting Group ...**

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

**Neighborhood Samu (trash pickup) ...**

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

**Board Meeting ...**

**BIPOC Sitting Group ...**

**Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...**

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

**Summer Odayaka Sesshin ...**

**BIPOC Sitting Group ...**

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

**Board Meeting ...**

**May 31, 10:30 am - 2:00 pm**

**June 7, 10 am - 4:30 pm**

**June 8, 5 - 11:15 am**

**9:30 - 11 am**

**June 15, 9-10 am**

**June 20 - 27**

**July 12, 10:30 am - noon**

**July 13, 5 - 11:15 am**

**July 13, noon - 1:30 pm**

**July 20, 9-10 am**

**July 26, 10 am - 4:30 pm**

**Aug. 10, 5 - 11:15 am**

**Aug. 15 - 17**

**Aug. 24, 9 - 10 am**

**Sept. 14, 5 - 11:15 am**

**Sept. 14, noon - 1:30 pm**



*Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji*

Plum Mountain News  
1733 S. Horton St., unit 7  
Seattle, WA 98144

