



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

Rain is falling in Seattle, and it is needed. So far, the city is about six inches behind for this time of year. On Halloween Carolyn and I attended the 80th birthday of our close friend, Rosemary Powers. Rosemary has been a social activist her whole life. When asked what words of wisdom she had for those gathered in costume for her birthday, she said “help everyone you



encounter to feel the truth that they belong on this planet and are loved by community.” In other words, no earthling should feel that they don’t have a place on this planet to be seen, heard and welcomed. This is another way to state our Great Vow to care for all beings. It seems to me that Rosemary and Buddhism have a very “woke” perspective!

We recently concluded our weeklong Autumn Sesshin (Sept. 19 – 26). Twenty-one people attended in person and one by Zoom. Because Wazan was recovering from a serious illness and could not attend, I asked Dan Chofu Beck to step in as Shika (host/manager). This is a particularly difficult post to unexpectedly try and fill, and Chofu did his best and gave 100%. Rev. Soko Mackay was our Dai-Tenzo (Chief Cook) and prepared simple and filling Japanese temple food



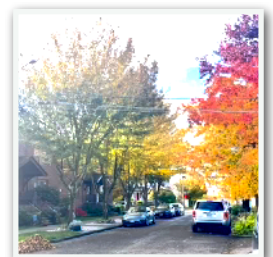
(Soko spent three years at [Ryutaku-Ji](#) in Japan). Densu (Chant Leader) duties were shared by Rev. Sendo Anne Howells and Sensei Eddie Daichi Salazar. The Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) was Jeremy Shojiki Neff, who kept us going strong. The Jisha (Tea Server) post was shared by Michelle Muji LeSourd, Matt Muboku Thompson-Aue and Hans Altwies, they kept us lubricated with tea and coffee so that we might stay awake through long periods of zazen.

My Inji (Abbot Assistant) for this sesshin was Sydney Seicho Roth who I volunteered for this position as Rev. Seifu could not attend. As usual Seicho capably stepped up and did a fine job managing the Dokusan (formal Dharma interview) line. On the third day, Gendo Testa, Osho gave an excellent Dharma Talk on “Sitting Long and Getting Tired”, transcription enclosed. Also, my Teisho from the first day on how to be awake without any sense of a separate identity is also transcribed here. And if you are interested in some further hints on how to move in this direction have a listen to my second day Teisho, [Hekiganroku – Case 99](#) on Chobo-Ji’s podcast page. On the last day of sesshin Michelle Lewis Kim did Jukai (Dharma

Precept Ceremony), more on this later in this issue.

On Sunday, October 19, I was with the [Stone Blossom Sangha](#) in Wenatchee to celebrate the installation of Rick Muken Proctor as a new lay leader or Sensei. It was a wonderful celebration and the small zendo was packed with participants. Muken shares some of his own reflections in this issue. Also, in this issue you find additional offerings from Rev. Seifu, Seigan, and close friend of mine, Tom Cashman, who penned a review of Larry Palmer’s book [Herons by the River Near Midnight](#), which is available for purchase in the Zendo. Be sure to note announcements for Rohatsu Sesshin (11/30 – 12/8), Toya (12/14), Holiday Break (12/25-31), New Year’s Day Celebration and Winter Odayaka (1/16-18/26). I hope you enjoy these offerings and more as Autumn in Seattle reaches its peak.

With gassho,
Genjo



Mumonkan

Case 1: Joshu's Mu

Autumn Sesshin Day 1, Genjo speaks
about "How to be Awake Without a
Separate Sense of Identity"

Koan: A monk once asked master Joshu, "Has a dog Buddha Nature or not?" Joshu said, "Mu."

Mumon's Commentary: In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the realization of incomparable satori, one has to cast away one's discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away the discriminating mind are all phantoms haunting trees and plants.

Now, tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this "Mu" – it is known as the barrier of Zen, and it is also known as "the gateless barrier of Zen." Those who have passed this gateless barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. In fact, you will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Don't you want to pass this barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this "Mu," with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations. It is like having a red-hot iron ball bolted in your belly. You try to vomit it but cannot.

Cast away your illusory and discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now, and keep on working harder. In the readiness of time, when your efforts come to fruition, all the oppositions (such as in and out, and life and death) will naturally be identified and seen through. You will then be like a person struck dumb, who has had a wonderful dream: one only knows it personally, within oneself. Suddenly, as you break through the barrier; you will astonish heaven and shake the earth and be astonished by heaven and earth.

It is as if you have snatched the great sword out of the hands of General Kan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him; you kill the ancient Masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death, you find yourself utterly free, and in the six realms and the four modes of

life you live, with great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.

Now, how should one proceed? With might and main work at this "Mu" and *be* "Mu." If you do not stop or waver in your efforts, then behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, darkness is at once enlightened.

Mumon's Poem:

*The dog, the Buddha nature,
the truth already manifested in full,
a moment of yes and no,
lost are your body and soul.*

.....
We've all heard this koan, perhaps it seems like innumerable times. Yet truly, every time I read this koan and the commentary, I'm inspired once more.

First, what is this "Mu"? It's simply the syllable we know as the *kanji* for this Chinese character. In Chinese this character, is pronounced "Wu." But what is this syllable pointing at? Here are some phrases that have often worked for me, but remember they are phrases that point at something inconceivable and ineffable. Mu points at "the black before black," "the heavenly silence," "the pregnant nothing," "the intimate infinite," "the beyond the beyond," "the vast, boundless, alive, emptiness." Remember all these phrases are not it and they all point at it. If we consider that each one of us is a little like a leaf on a tree, the leaf connected to the stem, the stem connected to the branch, the branch connected to the trunk, the trunk connected to the root, then these phrases point at the deep dark soil that the tree is planted in.

The monk asked Master Joshu, does a dog have a Buddha Nature or not? Dr. Glenn Webb, Sensei, who was the founder of Seattle Zen Center, which preceded the foundation of Chobo-Ji, put it this way: the monk is asking about a mortally wounded, near death, beloved dog. The monk was asking is this suffering also Buddha nature, and Joshua answered, "Muuuu."

When and only when, we have surrendered, let loose, transcended, and dissolved our personal identity, can we truly realize that everything is already Buddha Nature. Another way to say it is that we must die on the cushion to fully realize our Buddha Nature. When we have released all

attachment to this life and our identity then there is no one to perceive suffering. Perceiving no suffering is the condition sometimes referred to as Nirvana. Releasing our identity on the cushion, or even on our death bed, is easier said than done! If in our fleeting lifetime our fragile identity has not been sufficiently held or loved, it is particularly hard, even terrifying to surrender our identity. On the other hand, if we have been met, had a sense of being held, loved, embraced and accepted, surrendering our identity is easier, though still difficult.

There are lots of ordinary ways that we surrender our identity. Every time we go to sleep and we enter a deep sleep beyond dreams, we have no identity. Therefore, during every single night of deep sleep, we have no identity and no suffering. Of course, deep sleep is quite restorative. If we regularly don't get that kind of deep sleep along with dream sleep, we will begin to hallucinate during the day and perhaps have a psychotic episode. In other words, we all need a regular break from actively holding on to our identity. So, surrendering our identity is not so difficult as we might think. However, surrendering our identity while we're awake is a whole other ball game.

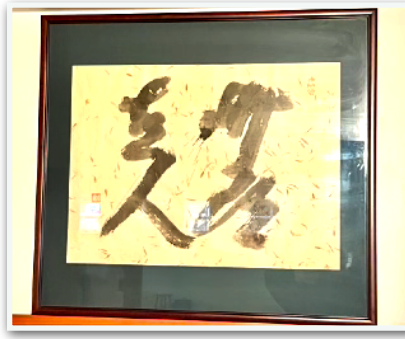
You know, anyone who has had a general anesthetic has to get to the place where they're surrendering their identity. In fact, before you go under, the doctors will make you sign something that says there is small chance you might not wake up! Therefore, everyone who has signed such a document, has readied themselves to consciously surrender their identity. And because we need some important procedure like surgery, we are ready to take the risk. They usually ask you while the general anesthetic is being administered, to count backwards from 100, and in a few moments, boom, no identity! Of course, at such times we are usually not aware of anything, but on occasion people under general anesthetic have had "out of body experiences" and can calmly and accurately talk about seeing their body and the surgery after the fact. When coming to sesshin, we are asking everyone to surrender attachment to their sense of a separate identity. If you are not ready to make this effort, don't come to sesshin.

Besides sesshin there are some other ways to surrender identity while remaining awake and aware. The molecule, DMT, which is found in ayahuasca, or a heroic dose of LSD

or psilocybin, can forcefully cause you to surrender your identity, while a part of your brain that is not attached to your individual identity remains aware. It's brief, but with the catalyst of a shamanic medicine, there is an opportunity to release your identity while remaining awake. By the way, if you haven't in this life sufficiently been held or loved, I don't recommend it. When you're not ready to surrender your identity, a heroic dose of a shamanic medicine can lead to a horrific bad trip.

When we sit on the cushion, we are exhorted to cast away our illusionary discriminating knowledge and consciousness accumulated up to now. In other words, we are working to surrender our identity while awake. If we succeed, there is no one to suffer, no one to be afraid, there is no one to worry about the future, the past or even the present. No one. Therefore, who is going to be worried, frustrated or fearful? And as the commentary says, in that moment of surrender, you feel like a person struck dumb, like you're in the midst of a wonderful dream and there is nothing to say. We are astonished by heaven and earth and heaven and earth are astonished by us, here is a person that's awake without attachment to identity. In such a condition, we are completely capable of speaking truth to power without fear. We find that we are willing to lay down our life because we've already surrendered all attachment to our false sense of a separate identity. Therefore, when needed, we are ready to snatch the sword right out of the hands of General Kan.

We are told to kill the Buddha and the ancient masters if you meet them because any attachment to them is the same as attachment to a separate self. The ancient masters, by definition, have surrendered all attachment to identity. In other words, there is no need to kill them, they're already gone. Once aware without attachment to self, we realize more fully that we are always on the brink of life and death. From the moment we have surrendered attachment to a separate identity, we find we have great joy and complete freedom to do what needs doing. So, who's left to feel this? The calligraphy hanging behind me, with the green border, by our founding Abbott, Genki Takabayashi, is a saying of Zen Master Rinzai, that reads "the true person beyond rank and post." That's who's left, if we surrender identity while awake; what's left is the true person with no



attachment to rank, post, position or attachment to self. With no attachment to self, we feel confidence; with no fear of authority we feel utterly free and astonished by each moment. Rinzai also referred to this condition as that of "that one shining alone."

If you were to ask Master Hyakujo, what is it like to be aware without attachment to identity, he might respond, "sitting alone, atop a sublime peak." In the Zen Ox pictures, this condition is represented by the seventh picture, sitting alone in a hermitage, ox forgotten, one with the world.



When sitting on the cushion, most often I'm in one of three states. In many sits, I feel kind of lost in the craziness of my responsibilities, duties, fears, joys, sorrows, et cetera, a lot like a leaf fluttering in the wind. However, more often than not, I feel like I'm floating calmly atop the sea of the intimate infinite. Occasionally, I feel myself sink into this bottomless sea, where my personal identity dissolves. And after my personal identity is released, there's absolutely no fear, because there is no one to fear, there's no one to suffer, there's no one to worry or fret. This experience is a

complete reboot of our collective caring heart-mind.

At such a time, someone might come up and shake me, demanding a demonstration of the true person of no rank and no post. And at such an inquiry, I might shout: MUUUUUUUUUuuuuuu!

Now, here's a kicker that's not in Mumon's commentary: if one stays too long in that no-self condition, it becomes spiritual bypassing! Yet, almost everybody says, "Oh, I want to be aware without the burdensome attachment to personal identity." However, as soon as one tries to hold onto this condition, or even skillfully stay in it, it becomes caustic and even poisonous. Our Dharma great-grandfather, Gempo Roshi, was fond of saying our real work begins once we come down from the mountain top. When we return from the non-dual, no-self experience, we find that we have new strength, vigor and groundedness to do the work of combusting our personal and collective karma, or you could say trauma.

In that purely non-dual, awake, no-self, mountain top experience, there is no karma, so there's nothing to be combusted, but from anywhere other than that pure state there is endless karma to combust. As soon as we slip back into identity, we have the real work to do, and new strength to do it. The more we combust our karmic baggage, the more our actions become consistently kind, helpful, and strong. And so we sit, pointing ourselves gently and consistently, with our 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making our whole body one great inquiry into the depth of Mu. With practice we become like a sponge able to soak up and dissolve into the intimate infinite. In the readiness of time, we glimpse again and again that powerful, clear, free place of being awake with no attachment to identity, advancement, authority, rank or position. And then coming down from the mountain top, we march on clearing our personal and collective karma, serving the world, more able to care for all beings, great and small, animate and inanimate.



Hekiganroku ~ Case 17

“Sitting Long and Getting Tired”

Rev. Gendo's 3rd Day Dharma Talk

Engo's Introduction: Cutting through nails and breaking steel, for the first time one can be called master of the first principle. If you keep away from arrows and evade swords, you'll be a failure in zen. As for the subtle point where no probe can be inserted, that may be set aside for a while; but when the foaming waves wash the sky, what do you do with yourself then? See the following.

Main Subject: A monk asked Kyorin, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?” Kyorin said, “Sitting long and getting tired.”

Setcho's Verse:

*One, two,
and tens of hundreds of thousands,
Take off the muzzle and set down the load.
If you turn left and right, following
another's lead,
I would strike you as Shiko struck
Ryutetsuma.*

Well, I must admit, I chose this one for its title. What could be more appropriate on day three of sesshin than sitting long and getting tired? I'm sure we're all very familiar with this and can relate.

I was very struck by Master Kyorin's answer to this question that comes up fairly regularly in Zen. Why did the Bodhidharma come from the West? And this answer “Sitting Long and Getting Tired” really strikes me.

I think it's very necessary for us to sit long and get tired, to dissolve the extra we're carrying, and I think we're feeling it now. We're a few days in. And our outside world is sort of dissipating, or the extra that we're carrying is starting to feel lighter. We're still tired, but yet there's some spaciousness available now. By day three, we begin to accept being here. I think that's really our practice, that's our cutting through nails and breaking steel. Coming here to do this thing that is very difficult. And those of us who have done it over and over, we know the end result is always worth it.

But there's always that internal opposition to doing it. I don't know how many of these sesshins I've done. At least thirty or so. And even this time I did not really want to leave home. My life is very peaceful right now, and so even though I have missed you all, I didn't want to leave home.

Then I got my resolve and made the necessary arrangements for sesshin. And so sitting here for the first couple of days, it's challenging, physically, mentally, spiritually. We sit and sit and meet more of our opposition, but we need to exhaust that stuff. We need to push through that. It's always worth doing.



Kyorin was one of the four outstanding disciples of Ummon. He followed Ummon for 18 years as his attendant. Every day Ummon called him and when he answered, “Yes sir!” Ummon would say, “What is this?” This continued for 18 long years. Then one day Kyorin explained, “Oh! I understand!” Ummon said, “Why don't you say it in a transcending manner?” Kyorin was a great master, but slow to mature. I can certainly relate to that. Kyorin taught disciples for 40 years, and when he was dying, he said, “For 40 years I was constantly in one piece.” That's why we're here. To become one piece, to reside in one place, to reside in our bodies.

To me, Zen training is body awakening training, learning to reside in our body, which seems simple, but not so simple now that, well, I guess we're so-called adults and we've got worldly concerns and we've learned lots of things. Over time we start to forget about our body. So coming to sesshin is coming home to yourself, reuniting with yourself, sitting with yourself, with your body.

I also have strong feelings about how only our bodies can be in the here and now. Our mind can never be in the here and now unless it stops. Only then. If you're lucky, you might have a nice stretch of being present without your analytical mind, your preferences. Hopefully everyone gets a little dose of that while we're here. This residing in the body is something I believe we had as children. We talk a lot about *hara*. The root of your being in your lower abdomen and belly, your connection to your breath. I'm sure everyone's breath is now far more open than when we started three days ago. We're starting to breathe like children. Your belly is your truth detector. Your belly is where your intuitive insight resides. The longer I've trained, the more I trust my belly rather than my mind. It goes in order of belly, heart, mind. I do not trust my mind. It is always trying to be helpful. It wants to be first with the answer, but it very rarely has the best answer. And over time I've gotten more skillful at listening to my belly and my heart, even when it's in direct conflict with my mind. All this training, all this sitting, has now given me a more comfortable place to reside in the here and now. I now see my mind itself as sort of like a child that's in elementary school. That's always, Ooh! I got the answer. Ooh! I know! I know it! My mind is now like, oh, wait hold on, maybe I should just let someone else answer. I have games that I play with my mind and my latest one is it's sort of like a game show.

It's time for Now! or Not Now! Everybody's favorite game show Now! or Not Now! And my mind plays the game. So when I'm washing dishes or walking my dog, or when my wife finally ends her workday and emerges from her home office and is speaking to me, I am there. My mind might go, remember that later you... and it catches itself. It's now, and that's not now. So much of what we do with our mind is not now. We're here investigating this not now. Mostly what we're dealing with is not now. You came to sesshin. But I bet you the bulk of what you're processing is not now. I often apologize to my body for having to endure such hardship so that I could acquire this meager amount of peacefulness and equanimity in my life.

It's not my intent to sound negative, I am certain this training is actually making us stronger, physically stronger, this sitting upright. We develop very strong cores. We develop very strong wills. You have to be strong willed and determined to do this.

Whenever anyone asks me about sesshin I say very little, because they may think that, I don't know, perhaps that it's a spiritual vacation. I just go, oh, thank you. Yes, it's going to be wonderful.

Those of us in the club know the end result is wonderful! But we're not at the end yet. Therefore, our efforts now are to bolster our *kiai* (Zen energy)! So that we can make the most of this time. We've left home. All of us have left home and have loved ones who are filling in for our absence. Think about all the things we left behind. Simple, ordinary routines that we didn't realize till we got here provided us with a lot of comfort. That walk in the morning with your dog or perhaps making your spouse a cup of coffee before they wake up. All these little things we give up become much more precious now.

This residing in the body is significant. I remember a time while training with my bodywork Sensei Everett Ogawa. Sensei had a voracious appetite. He loved to eat and he had a favorite Thai restaurant. This is in Chicago and we're near the window and all these people are walking by while he's eating. He said, "Hey, let me know when you see anyone who's in their body." Chicago is a big city and the sidewalk was filled with people walking by. Finally after a considerable amount of time a young man walks by spine erect, clear, walking forward with focus and intent. I point him out to Sensei and he says "Oh thank goodness! Sometimes I think I live in a city full of zombies."

This was quite a long time ago, so this might be pre-cellphone. That's another thing. Our technology is designed to steal your here and now. If I gave you a bunch of tokens each day that were your daily allotment of here and now, would you spend them on social media? Would you compulsively go to the news? Would you reinvest in a past narrative that suits your ego? Would you use the tokens to uphold a belief that no longer holds any truth? Would you find yourself out of tokens before noon?

We ordinary human beings only have a finite amount each day of being present. Our bodies need attention. Without residing in our body, our mind won't be grounded. Earlier I mentioned *hara* and intuitive insight. When we're children, we have intuitive insight. I have very clear memories of walking home from school, walking up

the front steps of our home and onto the porch, and having a direct knowing that mom's in a bad mood even before I get to the door. How do you know that? Where did I feel it in my body? I felt it in my belly. And as we continue to mature, we move away from relying on that guidance system. We become teenagers and then all hell breaks loose. In a wonderful way. We become independent. We become young adults. We start to have our first relationships. And we move away from that intuitive knowing. It might come online here and there, but it's not guiding us like it did when we were children.

So this is our way of regaining that intuitive insight. I encourage you to use your belly as a truth detector. Is this what I should be doing? Is this of my highest good? Is this going to benefit others? Belly and heart are connected, but belly is more certain. When we tend to, and take care of this intuitive insight and start to nurture it, our mind is relieved.

For many years our mind has been trying to provide us with intuitive insight and this makes it become frazzled. It's not designed to do that. It's not natural for the mind to do that. So we do this sitting on the cushion and residing in our bodies, settling into our bodies. Over time this helps the mind realize that it's too busy, it seems to always be trying to do more than one thing at a time. Why can't our minds just do one thing at a time? So we come to sesshin and we practice residing in our bodies, trying to take in the here and now.

Coming to sesshin in a way is developing the strength of determination. There are times in our life when we are called upon to have great determination on behalf of others. An example would be a very close friend of mine who slowly died of cancer. To be there for her while she faced her annihilation. This training was essential. I wouldn't have been able to meet such a circumstance skillfully if I hadn't had this experience. Which to some degree is suffering. Willingly coming to suffer. To sit and suffer. It's not all suffering but you're definitely going to brush up against it.

A monk asked Master Kyorin. "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West?" It's not an unreasonable question. I believe that the Bodhidharma arrived in

China after Buddhism had been there for almost 500 years. This fellow shows up and says, "emptiness, no holiness," and proceeds to stare at a wall for nine years. His primary practice was his being a living example. Stare at this wall, get it? No? Sit and stare at the wall every day. The point is, or the thing that occurs to me is, an image of staring at this empty wall, staring into emptiness day after day.



Staring at the wall. What do you see? Or another way of looking at it would be to imagine I took you to an empty movie theater in the middle of the night. Let's say three in the morning, dead quiet, and the screen is illuminated. That screen is the emptiness illuminated.

What are you projecting onto the emptiness?

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.

Continued on next page ...

On the final day of Autumn Sesshin, Sept. 26, 2025, Michelle Lewis Kim did Jukai. Here are some excerpts from her Jukai letter:

Marsha Linehan, creator of Dialectical Behavior Therapy, led me to Zen and to Chobo-Ji. I read her memoir, and at the first description of her discovery of Zen, I had this experience of opening: one of, THIS! YES! It then occurred to me that tidy little building that I sometimes walked by with a stroller about a mile from my home, that was a Zen center. I only learned quite a bit later that our dear Abbot was actually the

Sangha which has embraced me, and teaches me, and whom I love and cherish.

The ribbon that flows through Buddhism: The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; the Precepts, the Four Noble Truths, the Four Great Vows; all of these are a ribbon that flows through me. My Sangha and my Roshi bring life and power to the teachings, for me, right now. Every time I read Norman Fischer's study on the precepts, a new teaching comes to me, sometimes popping out from a subtle nuance of a precept I have taken more on the surface before. None of these precepts are easy for me. I have so much work to do on some level on all of them. The one that struck me right away and has influenced me the most at this point is The Fourth Grave Precept – not to lie but to be truthful. In studying this precept, I have come to understand that not facing things head on - being evasive, omission - lacks truth and therefore causes suffering.

A purpose for this process of maturing is being able to express the awakening I experience to the world in a way that reveals the freedom of existence in every moment. In every moment, there are countless realities that can

happen based on my way of being in that moment. This is the power of awakening. We shape each moment, and all together, we shape the direction of human existence.

This is about everyday life. Everyday life is where I nudge the direction of human existence. It is in the moment I am able to be present, and patient, with my sons. It is in the moment I stop time by acknowledging connection – connection with everyone and everything: In the forest as I am walking with my dog Carrot (who I first met as I came out of Zazen one lovely August evening in 2022), in passing someone who is and is not a stranger and making eye contact to show my humanness and open up an opportunity for them to do the same, in being present and contributing with my Sangha, and with the Other People in my life. And it is in meditation, being alone, connecting with the universe through being quiet.



Zen master in Marsha's memoir who came to teach her graduate students. What a thrill! I have found a home in Chobo-Ji, and a family. My Journey with Zen started almost four years ago, when I did the introduction classes online in the fall of 2021, just coming out of the pandemic. I came for my first official in-person sit in December, right before Rohatsu and the Zendo closed for the rest of the year. I couldn't wait to come back for the New Year.

So, Zen is where I am. Chobo-Ji is where my Sangha exists, which then opens out from here to the whole universe. Zen is nothing more and nothing less than the milieu in which I am maturing. I marvel at the ribbon of enlightenment that flows through all religions and spiritual practices, that connects them all. And here is where I am, in a miraculous little neighborhood in south Seattle that happens to have a Zen center named Chobo-Ji. Chobo-Ji has a

I vow to be responsible and generous with this great gift of awakening. Jukai is for me an expression of this vow. I see Jukai as an action I can take to communicate my vow to my Sangha.

Given Michelle's commitment to bringing her practice into everyday life and encounters, I gave her the Dharma Name: JoNin "Jo" = Ordinary (常) – "Nin" = Duty (任) as in the responsibility to do what now needs doing.

Closing Incense Poem

Autumn Sesshin 2025

*Who hears the rustling maple leaves?
Soon they will fall. Where will they go?
Without purpose or meaning,
Ordinary, everyday heart-mind activity,
Doing what needs doing.
Go straight on.*

Things as They Are

Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

One of the great gifts of Zen practice is the ability to see things "as they are" rather than as we would "want them to be."

To illustrate this, I'll invoke one of the basic tenets of classical Buddhism; along with some comments specific to Zen schools in general; and a short exploration specific to Rinzai Zen.

Let's start with classical, orthodox Buddhism. Seeing the world as it truly is means that we realize, deeply and intimately, that "things arise, and they fall away," which of course is mirrored in its supposed opposite, that "things fall away, and they arise." This is called the law of impermanence, *Anitya* in the original Sanskrit, which is the only truly permanent feature of the universe, and subject to *pratityasamutpada*, or dependent origination. It's the law that constantly reminds us that everything in our temporal lives comes up and dissipates, be it work, profession, talent, achievements,

possessions, titles, our very bodies and lives, and the like. Basically, all of the things that we value, and are determined to hold on to, are destined to fall away. And we should see them as such. This is “things as they are.”

Things as we would “want them to be” encompass the illusion of control, the fierceness of our will, our steely and always implacable and intractable independence, and our supposed ability to overcome any obstacle through sheer willpower (of our egos). And through that committed determination we aim to have all things in our lives remain steady and stable. Of course, in time, and with practice, we come to realize that these are all illusions! Nothing lasts, and the only thing that truly lasts is indeed “nothing.”

How does our practice enable us to achieve this? We all belong to the Zen school. The word “Zen” literally means “meditation” (through successive transliterations of the original Sanskrit “Dhyana,” into the Chinese “Ch’an,” and then the Japanese pronunciation of that term as “Zen”). Meditation, in its myriad forms from sitting to walking, to working, to many others, is the core practice of all sects of Zen Buddhism. For a reason! Because over time, meditation helps us strip the veneer of illusion in all aspects of our lives, encompassing what we call this “Great Matter,” beyond the reach of so-called death itself. It allows us to see that we are all floating, dancing and aligning with each other and the Universe as a whole in succeeding waves of impermanent interdependence. By practicing assiduously, over extended periods of time, we are able to see our True Nature, and its inherent impermanence, with increasing clarity. A quick note that this process works (and may actually work better) when we think it’s not working. Which is why we continue with our resolute efforts at practice to strip away everything, so that we might see and live into things as they are, regardless of the ease or difficulty of circumstances in our lives.

Finally, and unique to Rinzai Zen, we have our great Koan system. One that encourages us to constantly flip from perspective to perspective. “You think you’ve got it? No. Flip! And then flip again! And every time



we think we’ve got it, reverse!” Until the jostle brings us to a clear and undeniable experience that is truly and authentically just beyond the realm of our capacity for reason and logical articulation. So that we might realize that the real poem is underneath all of the words, as a wise man once said. We might also ponder that achieving fluidity with perspectives, none of them holding for too long, allows us a deftness of spirit that can harmonize with increasing ease and sharpness with any circumstance that comes before us. Upaya or “skillful means” that is. So that in the end, yes, “everything is a matter of perspective” points the way to things as they truly are, which is to say, as they truly are not.

Sensei Ceremony at Stone Blossom Sangha

On October 19th, I left early that Sunday morning to travel to Wenatchee, in order to advance Rick Muken Proctor, who has been practicing Zen for more than 15 years, to Sensei (lay Zen teacher). This does not constitute *Inka* (Dharma Transmission), but does mean Muken can hold the practice form and present inquiry for sangha investigation. I originally translated Mu-Ken (無見) as No Seeing, implying seeing beyond sight, but I think a better translation is No Opinion, meaning seeing beyond opinions. We all hold opinions about almost everything, but we must remember that an opinion is simply one perspective on a slice of reality.

Wenatchee’s [Stone Blossom Sangha](#) has a blended

practice that includes silent meditation, Tibetan, and Zen. About six times a year they have a Sunday practice that typically incorporates all three practice styles, followed by a potluck or semi-formal Zen

style meal. On this day they had a full house (22) at the Zendo. We all did a few chants, three periods of zazen, and I gave a talk, followed by discussion, on the *Song of Zazen*. After Muken renewed his commitment to the precepts and Bodhisattva Vows, I presented him with a brown Sensei Rakusu. What follows is Muken’s recollection of his words of gratitude to the Sangha.

.....
Welcome to Stone Blossom Sangha, I am so happy to see you all here. Special welcome to our three guests from the Ellensburg Sangha. I want to thank two of our founders Sharon Meho and Todd Diako Petit for their years of service. Also, thanks to the Sangha and the board for the honor of serving as president for the last six years and appointing me to the role of Zen facilitator (host) as described in our bylaws. Finally, thanks to Genjo for the time and effort coming to Wenatchee to practice with us.

About seventeen years ago I read three books that began the change in my life: *The Heart of Buddha’s Teaching* by Thich Nhat Han, *What The Buddha Taught* by Walpola Rahula, and *The Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau. Shortly after this Julie, my wife, invited me to the Center for Spiritual Living to hear a talk by Genjo. I was impressed and learned he was also a psychotherapist. I was involved in a difficult business dissolution at the time and went to see him in that capacity. He told me that he could be my therapist, or my Zen teacher, but not both. Easy choice, since it is way easier to find a therapist than a Zen teacher.



Genjo is not just a therapist and Zen teacher he is also a successful entrepreneur, pilot, and a amateur astronomer. I remember one day he invited me to go flying. He had to renew his

license and needed dead weight to practice stalls for his flight test. I love to fly in small planes and have no problem being dead

Continued on next page ...

weight. We would fly up till the plane stalled, no more lift from the wings, then nose over, gain air speed and do it again. I do not recommend this if you get airsick easily.

I must tell a couple small stories about my relationship with Genjo. We do not normally talk about dokusan, our private interview with the Roshi, but in this case I will. It was my first dokusan and after the appropriate bows I hitched up in front of Genjo and asked, "Who is the teacher and who is the student?" Genjo replied, "Let's get on with it." At the time, and still today, I could not think of a better response. And so, we did.

When Chobo-Ji moved to its current location there was a lot of work to do. Having some skills in carpentry and electrical I was very busy on a variety of projects. Genjo mentioned that the gas meter needed some support. I had some bricks at home so brought them to do the job. We were getting ready for afternoon s a m u (work period). The zendo was full with folks down both tans. Everyone was sitting, waiting for the shika to give the work assignments. As usual (being busy with projects) I was the last one entering the zendo. With a brick, firmly between my palms in gassho, I solemnly marched down the full length of the zendo and with a bow presented the brick to Genjo. Laughing and smiling, he exclaimed, "Oh that is just the brick I was looking for!" Later he came up to me and quietly asked, "Did that have any other meaning?" A question he is still pondering!

When Genjo gave me my dharma name, Muken (No Seeing), he explained that he got the inspiration from my petition letter to do jukai, accepting the vows. I said in that letter, "You don't have to see Mu, have to feel it." As you know it also directly comes out of the Heart Sutra "No seeing, no tasting... etc." During the sensei ceremony he explained that he had changed the nuance of my name. Dharma names both indicate a characteristic of the recipient and an aspiration for them. After research he found that Ken can also mean "opinion" or

"view." So now my brown rakusu is inscribed with Muken "No Opinion." On the top it says "Unchained To Preferences." This is interesting. Mu is often translated as No. Sometimes it is translated as Nothing or No-thing. Kaz Tanahashi translates it as "Beyond." Beyond seeing, beyond opinions, beyond preferences, this is my aspiration and to the limits of my ability a characteristic. Not without views or preferences but unchained from them. Since, as the final inscription on my rakusu says, "Life is But a Dream."

I had just turned 60 when I did jukai and received my dharma name. I told Genjo I did not know how to wear my new face. It felt like there was a new person emerging. I just recently turned 74 and I feel the same. In Zen, I have heard it said, that taking the vows, wearing a rakusu or robes is called the Iron Yoke. It is a yoke of responsibility, that we gladly accept, but do not really know how to wear. Hopefully we grow into it. Genjo emphasized during the ceremony that there is nothing to teach. All we can do is facilitate others to experience our practice. Being sensei is not a promotion or elevation; it is accepting a responsibility.

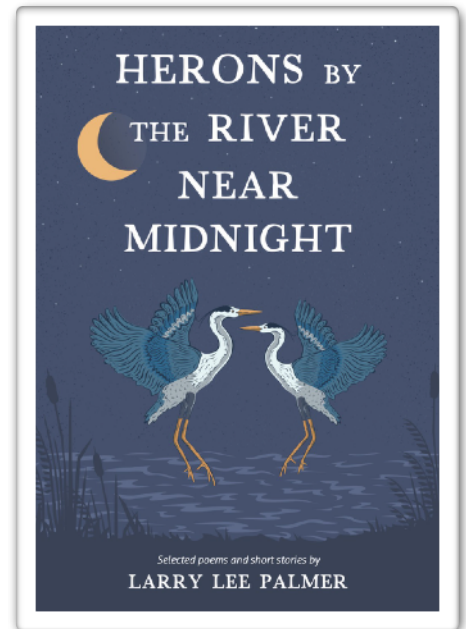


As Stone Blossom's Zen host and Sensei, I want you to know that I will do my best. When I fail or have room for improvement please tell me. I want to hear it. I am more than happy to talk to anyone about our practice and my role in it. The sangha is in a very healthy place right now and my hope is that we can grow our offering and presence in Wenatchee. I want to help in any way I am able. Thank you for your trust and honoring me with this new role.

Finally, a note to all my old and new friends at Chobo-Ji. The time I have spent practicing with you has been transformative in my life. Thank you for tolerating my sometimes unique and possibly annoying way. I am indebted to the Sangha, and to each of you I have had the privilege of getting to know. If you find yourselves in Wenatchee please visit us. We have twice daily sits most days. I host a Zen book study on Wednesday 5:30 to 6:45 on

Zoom, and in person when weather permits. Please check our [website](#) for our schedule.

Herons by the River Near Midnight



[Plum Mountain Press](#)
Review by Tom Cashman

Larry's book is a wonderful composite of his passions for writing, fishing, and horse races. Fasten your seat belt as his narrative makes rapid shifts, slaloming through many life pursuits. Follow his spiritual tracks through early life Christianity to his ultimate Buddhist community (Chobo-Ji), where he still finds stillness wordless connection. Might he still be a square peg trying his best to fit into all these round holes? Perhaps. But enjoy the view as he hurtles through life, allowing his gifts to impact all those fortunate enough to know him, or at least, to catch up by reading his words.

Larry's book can be purchased in the Zendo for \$15, or mailed to your location for \$20.



Rohatsu Sesshin

Nov. 30 - Dec. 8

We welcome both in-person and Zoom participation in our eight-day Rohatsu Sesshin. If you would like to come please fill out an [application](#) preferably by Nov. 20. Full-time participation is expected ([tentative schedule](#)). If you are not able to attend in person or for all eight days you may attend via Zoom for any portion that meets your schedule, but some participation each day is required. Zoom participation requires [Zoom Registration](#). You may also register on Zoom, at no cost, for those who wish to attend morning (5:00 – 6:30 a.m.) and/or evening (7:30 – 8:30 p.m.) zazen Monday through Sunday.

The cost of the sesshin is \$400, minus a month's dues for dues-paying members. Add a contribution of \$10 – \$20 per day if you are staying on campus. If attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. You can use [PayPal](#) or leave a check in the bowl at the entrance to the zendo. (Using PayPal please make your donation to zen@choboji.org and note that your payment is for Rohatsu Sesshin.)

We begin at 5:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 30, and conclude around 11:00 a.m. the Monday, Dec. 8.

Participants taking any form of public transportation to Seattle, are asked to please test yourselves before travel. We may ask that some or all of us take COVID tests during sesshin. We will serve shared meals. Anyone experiencing flu or cold-like symptoms should not attend in person.

Toya

Year End Party and Talent Show

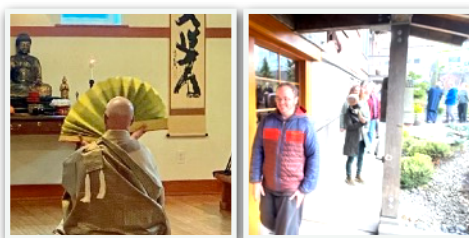
Toya is a traditional Zen temple party, usually held on the Winter Solstice. On the shortest day of the year, it is okay to break all the temple rules and turn the traditional temple hierarchy on its head. Here at Chobo-Ji, Toya has become our post-Rohatsu potluck and party where we may sing songs, hear poetry, and watch funny skits. Everyone is invited including sangha family members. This year Toya will



be held on Sunday, December 14, from 11 to 1:30 pm.

New Year's Day Celebration

Every year on New Year's Day, we have a great celebration, where all are welcome. Please feel free to bring family and friends. We start promptly at 10 AM, chant the Heart Sutra 12 times, ring the outdoor *kansho* bell 108 times, a Japanese Buddhist tradition called *Joya no Kane*, performed to symbolically cleanse away the 108 categories of delusions and distractions. The ritual marks the transition from the old year to the new with a fresh start. We follow this with a potluck of delicious food (vegetarian) and deserts.

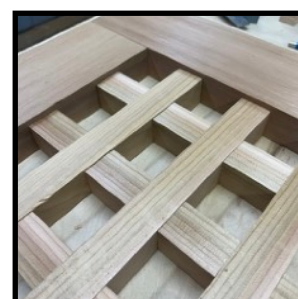
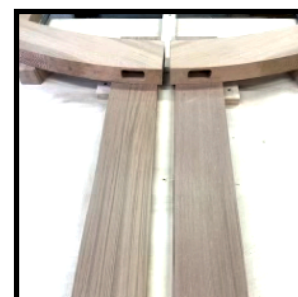
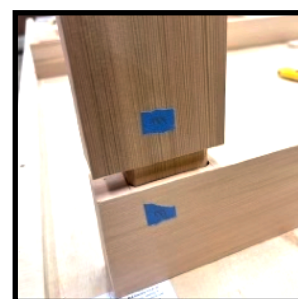


Temple Gate Update

by Sam Berger

Building the temple gate has been a labor of love. As such it would've been impossible to do without the support and patience I've received from Genjo and the temple community. I'm grateful for the freedom to do this project as my life's circumstances and exacting temperament have allowed. The results will hopefully speak for themselves. Thanks to you all.

The estimated completion date is February 2026. Please see below for some in construction pictures ...



Capping Phrase

“The roof leaks. The child cries. The firewood is all gone. I sigh, hanging my head, still unable to rest”

Explained by Elijah Seigan Zupanic

This capping phrase (phrases traditionally used to conclude the investigation of a Zen koan) paints a stark image: a leaky roof, an empty woodpile, a crying child, and an exhausted parent unable to rest. It is surprising to find such a domestic scene among Zen capping verses, traditionally used by celibate monks. Yet here it is, simple and intimate; a glimpse into ordinary human suffering.

One can easily imagine it: in a decaying hut, water drips from the rafters, with no fuel left for warmth. A hungry child sobs. A parent sits in exhaustion, head bowed, sighing. This scene may feel far from the stillness of the meditation hall, yet it is as much a part of the human experience as any moment on the cushion. Frustration and fatigue are not obstacles to Zen, they are its raw material.

We suffer when our needs are unmet. And for parents, the cry of a child is not just noise – it's an echo in their own hearts, where love and responsibility overlap. The ego stretches to include the child, and the drive to care becomes almost instinctive, often at great personal cost. This is the path of countless unseen bodhisattvas who spend their time endlessly tending, repairing, feeding – without fanfare or rest.

In Buddhist texts, the term *dainin* (大人) means both “great person” and, in modern Japanese, “adult.” This dual meaning conveys the nuance that an actual adult is mature, steady, and concerned with others’ well-being. Bodhisattvas are not distant figures cloaked in myth. They live in our neighborhoods and households, in compact apartments and flood-prone basements. They care for aging parents, mow lawns, soothe children, and sit silently through sleepless nights. Bodhisattvas are not statues. They are mothers, fathers, childless, bosses, or homeless. Their face is the face of humanity, and your face is among them.

There was a time when my wife had come down with COVID-19, and my daughter was still small. We had an epic rainstorm,

and a drain in front of our house stopped draining, causing water to pool. As I looked at it, I started to feel the COVID-19 symptoms hit me. Eventually, something needed to be done, and no one else could do it. I went out in the soaking rain, laid down in the pool of water, raised my head to breathe, and shoved my arm into the drain. Metal inside the drain cut into my hand as I scooped out debris, little by little. Eventually, the obstruction was cleared from the drain, and I returned to the house, soaking wet. This activity was the ordinary action of a father caring for his household.

This type of work – caring for the world around us – is endless. There is always something to be done, and the work will never be completed. Ultimately, it may seem futile because you, those you care for, and even the earth will eventually disintegrate, so what is the point? Why fix the roof? Why gather firewood? Why comfort a crying child? There is no objective answer. We do these things because they feel right at a fundamental level.

When we care for the world around us, we feel like we are a harmonious part of the world, and maybe even the universe. A feeling of peace emerges over time as we form a connection to something more profound than our small self, which is so often filled with discomfort, frustration, and anxiety. This feeling of peace does not remove the disturbing feelings. Still, it provides a foundation where such feelings no longer overwhelm us, and over time, we become more skilled at accepting discomfort and maturely attending to our needs. As this peace settles and maturity grows, eventually, the people in our orbit start to feel it as well.

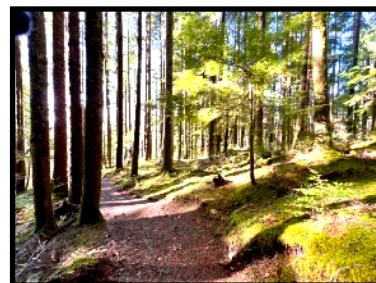
Now, some say we should liberate ourselves before helping others. That may be so, but in my experience, we can never separate awakening from the care of others. In fact, I see them as expressions of the same underlying reality. Often, when meditation failed to soften my self-centeredness, scrubbing the floor, sitting with a sick loved one, or hugging a crying child did. In serving others, something in us softens, unlocks, wakes up. It is a special type of medicine that works really well when combined with sitting practice.

Suffering in an ordinary way, in the service of compassion, is one of the most remarkable vehicles for individual

transformation. It is a type of purifying fire that helps us burn away our attachments. The difficulty is that we are so prone to suffer in self-martyrdom that we may deny that even oneself is a being in need of compassion. Deep transformation occurs by simply taking on the suffering that arises when manifesting a heart of caring in the world. When we do that, we do it with a heart brimming with love, even though we may still be weary, in pain, sighing with our heads hanging, still unable to rest.

Nov. Sangha Hike

The final hike of 2025



Winter Odayaka

Jan. 16 - 18, 2026

Odayaka means “peaceful,” and these sesshins are a little less arduous with more dialogue than our weeklong sesshins. We will be offering traditional meals for those attending in person. 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 around noon, following Council. Please fill out this [application](#) if attending in person.

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 using [PayPal](#).

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

Registration for Zoom only attendance is required for each day. The Zoom invitations and registration links are below.

Day 1 – Friday, Jan. 16, 7:00 am
Zoom only registration use this [link](#).

Day 2 – Saturday, Jan. 17, 5:30 am
Zoom only registration use this [link](#).

Day 3 – Sunday, Jan. 18, 5:00 am
Zoom only registration use this [link](#)

Two NVC Workshops

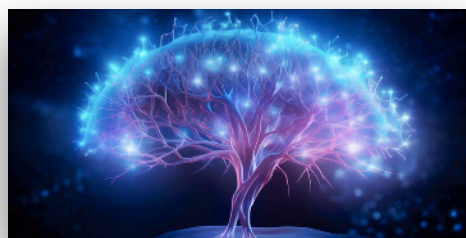
Power Within

Clarity, Courage, Compassion &
Communication

This winter, Chobo-Ji will host two Nonviolent Communication Workshops, facilitated by Janice Eng from A [Center for Restorative Solutions](#) in Seattle.

Workshop 1: Foundations of Nonviolent Communication

Saturday, January 31, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
Participants will learn and practice essential NVC skills for clarity, connection, and choice. We’ll develop the consciousness of



nonviolence, build trust, and address power dynamics in relationships. Skills we’ll build are listening and speaking with compassion. Expressing oneself with authenticity, presence, and care. Enhancing connection and community. Deepening self-awareness and self-compassion through self-empathy.

Workshop 2: Deepening Nonviolent Communication Skills

Saturday, February 21, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM
Participants will explore power dynamics and create a safe container for dialogue. We’ll build resilience: expanding the capacity to listen, stay present, and speak authentically and compassionately during conflict. We’ll strengthen empathy and learn to lovingly grieve the gap between what we long for and what is.

The second workshop builds directly on the first. The weeks between workshops allow for integration.

To participate in the second workshop people must have either taken the first, or have prior NVC training.

These workshops are based on the work of Marshall B. Rosenberg and led by Janice Eng who has been teaching Nonviolent Communication for over 20 years, including a decade of work in prisons through the Freedom Project. She has more than 30 years of experience as a holistic health practitioner in several healing modalities, has experience as a drug and alcohol counselor, restorative circle facilitator, and leads race and social justice work discussions. She is also a certified InterPlay facilitator, supporting people to access their body’s wisdom through creative practices.

Preregistration is required (email registration@choboji.org)

Cost: a donation that fits your budget

Questions: email Zenka at metcalf.sally@gmail.com

Dahlias & Chrysanthemums

grown by Randal Daigetsu Tanabe

Oh My!

Our Chobo-Ji Zen resident and master gardener and leaf master has been entering and winning some flower contests!



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; Woman's Circle: Sundays 2:00-3:00 PM in 2026

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.)

100 Sandwiches prep ...

Rohatsu Sesshin (eight-day Zen intensive) ...

100 Sandwiches prep ...

Toya (Day to break all rules party) ...

Zendo Closed for the holidays ...

New Year's Day Chanting, bell ringing, potluck ...

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

Board Meeting

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

100 Sandwiches prep ...

NVC Workshop 1 ...

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

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

NVC Workshop 2...

100 Sandwiches prep ...

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

Nov. 15, 9:30 - 11 am

Nov. 30 - Dec. 8

Dec. 13, 9:30 - 11 am

Dec. 14, Potluck 11 am, fun noon

Dec. 24 (evening) - Jan. 1

Jan. 1, 10 am to noon

Jan. 11, 5 am - 11:15 am

Jan. 11, noon - 1:30 pm

Jan. 16 - 18

Jan. 24, 9:30 - 11 am

Jan. 31, 10 am - 4 pm

Feb. 7, 10 am - 4:00 pm

Feb. 8, 5 am - 11:15 am

Feb. 21, 10 am - 4 pm

Feb. 28, 9:30 - 11 am

March. 8, 5 am - 11:15 am



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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

