



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

This opening message comes to you from Sendo Anne Howells, Osho – I’ve assumed responsibility for drafting it in order to lighten Genjo Roshi’s workload. He’s looking over my shoulder, however! And Chobo-Ji thrives, keeping us rooted and resilient in our capacity to respond to the ongoing distress of our world. The thriving includes our garden, this spring bringing the festivity of our two young flowering trees, a white-blossomed Italian plum by the fence and a pink ornamental cherry by the temple entrance. These blossoms have now been replaced by leaves but our show of summer flowers is already well underway.

In March a strong group (20 in person plus 3 on Zoom) attended Spring Sesshin, our first of 2026. Shika (Host/Manager) Felix Pekar again managed work assignments and monitored our general well-being with quiet smoothness. With Elijah Seigan Zupancic as Jikijitsu (Timekeeper) we were almost always where and when we should be. Rev. Soko Mackay, Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook), put together timely and nourishing meals. Aaron Haas carried off his first full sesshin as Densu (Chant Leader) with the aplomb of the trained musician he is, quickly absorbing the many finer points of this post. Matt Muboku Thompson-Aue and Matt Stebbins teamed up as Jisha and Jisha Assistant to keep coffee and tea water flowing, the lounge well supplied with healthy snacks as well as sweet treats, and nourishing nibbles after samu. Samu periods produced a shining Zendo and a spring-ready garden, with efforts directed by Sally Zenka Metcalf and Randall Daigetsu Tanabe (who also contributed sweet treats to the lounge). Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares (Inji, Abbot Assistant) ably managed the dokusan process and assisted Roshi as needed. Rev. Seifu also gave a powerful fifth-day Dharma Talk, transcribed for this issue. Genjo Roshi’s



string of inspiring Teishos have now joined the trove of podcasts available on our website, and his sixth day Teisho appears in this issue. On the final day, two of our post-holders, Aaron Haas and Matt Stebbins, made their vows and received their new Dharma names in a moving Jukai ceremony; details come later in this issue.

Our April Zazenkai was followed by a potluck and our Annual Meeting. After a brief business session to elect board members, we quieted down to share our responses to the question, “How can I manifest peace day by day?” The collective wisdom which emerged strengthened our resolve as we continue to find ways to take our practice into the world.

Also in April, Genjo Roshi travelled to Walla Walla in April for a weekend with the Walla Walla Sangha. He led a Saturday Zazenkai in the midst of fields bordering the Snake River, and gave a Sunday morning Dharma Talk at Whitman College. Back in Seattle, our spring calendar has been full, with an Introduction to Zen series, Precepts classes, sangha hikes, sangha samu

picking up neighborhood trash, and the 100 Meals group making sandwiches for unhoused neighbors. Our book group has been reading and practicing exercises on nonviolent communication from *The Onko Book 2.0: Everyday Nonviolence*. The Social Action Committee has been quietly drawing attention with late-afternoon meditation vigils for peace and social justice in front of the Beacon Hill light rail station. And taking our practice into the world was the theme of a powerful talk May 2 by Rev. Claude Anshin Thomas, “Bringing Meditation to Life – Applied Zen.”

Finally, we’ve undertaken some significant building projects. The biggest is a new roof, already in place. Constructing it required removal and reinstallation of our solar panels. Additional repairs, some of them still in process, include chimney work and repair of water damage on the south side of the building as



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well as on the south fence. All this has of course been expensive! Thus we're initiating a major fund-raising campaign to help with the repair costs and additional upgrades, plus other significantly increasing expenses. We made a head start on fundraising with a highly successful plant sale in April, and we formally launch the major portion of our campaign with Board President Seifu Osho's announcement of it later in this issue. This issue also includes an article by Sally Zenka Metcalf on the Four Great Vows and announcements of coming events, including Summer Sesshin, June 19 - 26.

With gassho,
Sendo

Hekiganroku ~ Case 2

"The Real Way Is Not Difficult" and Genjo's Commentary

Engo's Introduction: The universe is too narrow; the sun, moon, and stars are all at once darkened. Even if blows from the stick fall like raindrops and the *Katsu!* shouts sound like thunder, you will still be far short of the truth of Buddhism. Even the Buddhas of the three worlds can only nod to themselves, and the ancestors of all ages do not exhaustively demonstrate its profundity. The whole treasury of sutras is inadequate to expound its deep meaning. Even the clearest-eyed monks fail to save themselves. At this point, how do you conduct yourself? Mentioning the name of the Buddha is like trudging through the mire. To utter the word "Zen" is to cover your face with shame. Not only those who have long practiced Zen but beginners, too, should exert themselves to realize directly the secret.

Main Subject: Joshu spoke to the assembly and said, "The real way is not difficult. It only abhors choice and attachment. With but a single word there may arise choice and attachment, or there may arise clarity. This old monk does not have that clarity. Do you appreciate the meaning of this or not?" Then a monk asked, "If you do not have the clarity, what do you appreciate?" Joshu said, "I do not know that either." The monk said, "If you do not know, how can you say you do not have that clarity?" Joshu said, "Asking the question is good enough. Now make your bows and retire."

Setcho's Verse:

*The real way is not difficult.
Direct word direct speech!*

One with many phases, Two, with one.

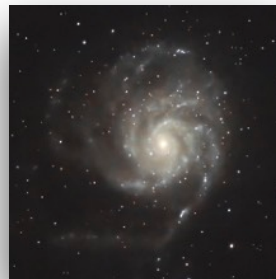
*Far away in the heavens, the sun rises, the
moon sets; Beyond the hills, the high
mountains, the cold waters.*

*The skull has no consciousness, no delight;
The dead tree sings in the wind,
not yet rotten.*

*Difficult, difficult! Attachment and clarity;
watch, and penetrate the secret!*

Zen Master Joshu Jushin (Zhaozho Congshen 趙州從諗), was born in China in 778 CE, and lived to well over a hundred. He was one of the most famous Zen masters of all time. Joshu was very fond of this quote, "The real way is not Difficult," which is from the first line of "Verses on The Faith Mind" by Sosan Ganchi (Jianzhi Sengcan 鑑智僧璨) Zenji, the third Chinese Zen Ancestor who died in the year 606 CE. Chobo-Ji's Sutra book translation of this line reads, "The Great Way is not difficult for those unchained to their preferences."

This case has lots of great material in it. First in Zen Master Engo's (Yuanwu Keqin) introduction to this case he says, "The universe is too narrow." How can the universe be too narrow? The visible universe has a radius of 45 billion light years and each light year is nearly 5.9 trillion miles long. This incarnation of the universe has only been around for about 13.8 billion years. It has been expanding all that time and now is expanding at an ever-faster pace. We don't know how big the universe is, all we know is how far we can observe. Within the observable universe the James Webb Telescope allows us a view of around two trillion or so galaxies, each with more than 100 billion stars. Because distant galaxies are receding from us faster than light,



they will eventually become invisible to us because their light will no longer be able to reach us. Regardless, the observable universe is humongous, so how can Engo say the universe is too narrow when it may indeed be infinitely large?

Engo goes on in his introduction to say, "The sun and moon and stars are all at once darkened." Yet, the sun shines brightly today. The moon this morning was also very bright. The stars are like little pinpricks in our sky but most are as big or bigger than our sun, all shining brightly. Engo goes on to say that even if we were to receive blows from the *keisaku* (waking stick) like raindrops and be able to shout or receive shouts like thunder, we would still be far from the deep truth that is being pointed at by Buddhism. Buddhism and all the great faith traditions cannot get close to deep truth because deep truth is fundamentally inconceivable. Even the fully awakened beings on all worlds can only nod to themselves that they cannot exhaustively demonstrate reality's profundity. The whole treasury of the Sutras (Buddhist canon) and the canons of all other religions, philosophies and sciences are inadequate to expound deep truth. Therefore, even the clearest-eyed practitioners fail to save themselves because deep reality is not knowable! The best we can do is make inadequate models of reality. This is why Engo says it is all too narrow and darkened. Our ignorance is much more fundamental than any sense of knowing.

Even when we've had a great breakthrough and we feel like we can embrace the whole planet or the whole universe in a timeless way, still we are not saved. For one thing, all such experiences are temporary. Secondly, what is being embraced and who is doing the embracing? No knowing! Here's something that's important in terms of Zen practice: mentioning the name of the Buddha is like trudging through the mire. To utter the word of Zen is to cover your face with shame. In fact, to quote anything of the ancients or the sutras or the canon of any tradition is to miss it.

The best we can do is share our direct experience, not as a knowing, but as a feeling of what it is like to occasionally see beyond our narrow egoistic perspective. Of course, a feeling is only that, and in the midst of this feeling, we nod to ourselves, knowing no words, no concepts will really adequately convey the feeling. The first

Chinese Zen Ancestor, Bodhidharma (an Indian sage who traveled to China and founded our lineage), said, “no attachment to words and letters, only direct pointing to heart-mind.” In silence, those who have experienced the truth of this nod to themselves.

My wife, Carolyn, and I were once staying at a friend’s cabin on the Olympic Peninsula and someone had given us each a tab of LSD. We are adventurous, and for a few hours we walked along the western shores of Puget Sound. At some point, we sat down near the beach and looked at the trees, the birds and the rippling water, and we said absolutely nothing. We just looked at each other and nodded. We couldn’t stop looking and nodding for what seemed like hours. She might point to something or I might point to something and then we would nod to each other. Likewise, there are times in sesshin or walking out in the woods, without any assistance of any psychedelic, where all I can do is nod internally to the intimacy of experience. No dependence on words and letters. Direct pointing to deep heart-mind. Uh oh – I’ve quoted Bodhidharma, I should just nod.

Not only those who have practiced zazen for a long time, but beginners too should exert themselves to directly realize this secret. Of course, the experience is no secret. However, it seems like a secret because the experience can’t be said, only felt. The best we can do with the feeling when we’re feeling it is to soak it up, while making no effort to grasp or retain it.

Okay, now we have examined the introduction. Can you see why I think this koan is so rich?

Joshu quotes the third Chinese Zen ancestor, “The real way is not difficult. It only abhors choice and attachment.” Our temple’s translation of the same verse says, “The great way is not difficult for those unchained to their preferences.” Joshu goes on to quote the second line, “With but a single word, there may arise choice and attachment, or there may arise clarity.” The temple’s translation reads, “When idealization and vilification are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised.” Our translation implies that when we’re beyond idealization and vilification, when we’re beyond attachment to words and letters, when we’re beyond attachment to our preferences, then deep clarity has room to arise.

Joshu goes on to say, “This old monk does not have that clarity.” Oh, aren’t we crushed? We want Zen masters to have such clarity. This would give us hope that you and I could have such clarity. But Joshu says, I have no such clarity. Are we able to appreciate his meaning or not?

A monk then asked, “If you don’t have that clarity, what do you appreciate?” In other words, how can you appreciate the Great Way without clarity? You must have some sort of deep appreciation for the Way, otherwise, what am I coming to you for? Joshu says, “I don’t have that either.”



If we’re all being honest, it’s rather rare if at all that we’re at that place where all we can do is nod. Sure, I remember nodding and the memory will never leave me. For example, I remember the tears that fell on the third day of my first sesshin, during kinhin (walking meditation), while seeing fog mixed with tree and dew and grass. I’ll never, ever forget it. No LSD was involved. Do I have such clarity now? Right now, do I fully appreciate this moment of eternity? No, but I do have a wonderful memory.

It’s impossible to walk around with such clarity or appreciation for very long! This is not what we want to hear! Enlightenment is not that hard to come by, but this expanded view will likely not last for more than a few hours or days; however, the memory will last a lifetime.

For complex human beings, it is rare to

encounter such depth for long. Our instincts for survival and our strong sense of self will soon enough dominate and narrow our view. On the other hand, I’ll tell you this truthfully, every period of zazen helps me remember and taste this appreciation once more. Moreover, when we chant, or go on hikes, or fold the laundry, or mindfully prepare a meal for someone who is hungry, there are more chances to hear the symphony of now and glimpse a deep appreciation for this moment of eternity. There’s a taste of this appreciation when picking up garbage in the neighborhood, or working in the garden, or walking the dog or making love. A taste and memory of clarity is all that is needed to go straight on.

The questioning monk said, well, if you don’t have that level of deep appreciation, how can you say that you do not have that clarity. In other words, if you can’t even say if you have it or not, maybe you do have it. The monk is not only longing for such appreciation and clarity, he is especially longing for Zen masters to have it. Joshu said, “Asking the question is good enough. Make your bows and retire.” Enough already!

Much of our time on the cushion is spent in what is sometimes referred to as “monkey-mind,” where thoughts and feeling and sensations are flying all over the place, with little or no sense of grounding in our deep nature. As we are all aware, some periods of zazen are dominated by day-dreaming or dealing with fatigue or pain. Learning how to face monkey-mind, pain, fatigue, and fantasies without becoming extensively discouraged or overwhelmed are valuable lessons! We learn that all this is normal and to be expected, and we learn that it is okay to go straight on sitting.

Part of Zen practice is spent seeing our ego states more clearly. This means we gain insight into our dilemmas, shortcomings and generational karmic baggage. These insights help us release, process or combust this material which is how we gain further maturity. According to my Dharma great-grandfather, Gempo Roshi, combusting our karmic baggage is the most important work on the cushion. We say enlightenment is easy, which gives us the space to see and process our karmic baggage.

Occasionally, our sitting practice allows us to sink beneath all our discomfort and

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craziness, or on quiet occasions all our surface cloudiness settles like silt in a lake. During these times, there will be moments of clarity, seeing deep into the waters of your own mind and the universe. When the waters of the mind are still and clear we will see reflections of reality where the moon, tree, stars, a drop of dew and the fog, and even the sound of the jets, the barking dog or the traffic are exquisite. At these times, you might nod with another who is feeling the same way.

The real way is not difficult. It's all out; all the levels I've just mentioned and more are all out. Nothing's hidden, and there is no secret. The great way is not difficult for those unchained to their preferences. The great way is not difficult, it only abhors choice and attachment. We must learn to allow these many phases of zazen, and not cling to the ones we like and reject the ones we dislike. We might summarize these various phases as belonging to two categories of experience, differentiation and non-differentiation. Setcho's (Yuanwu Keqin) verse implies these two categories represent the full spectrum of zazen experience. Setcho then breaks into poetic speech, which is one of the things that we must learn if we continue to practice and do koan study – is how to speak plainly and poetically. It's not easy. It's so much easier to attach to the words of Dogen, Joshu, Rinzai or the Buddha. It's much easier to attach to these words whether they came from the ancients or you find them in the sutras. But one of the big tasks of doing koan work is to find our own way to speak plainly and poetically about our own direct experience.

Setcho demonstrates his talent for speaking plainly and poetically about his experience when he says, "Far away in the heavens, the sun rises, the moon sets; Beyond the hills, the high mountains, the cold waters." From



our perspective here on Earth, the sun rises, the moon sets, the moon goes through its phases, night and day follow each other, the sun's path and in the sky goes from summer solstice to

winter solstice and back again. Beyond the hills, in the high mountains, is the source of clear cold water. At the height of our zazen experience we too find the source of true insight.

Setcho continues, "The skull has no consciousness, no delight; The dead tree sings in the wind, not yet rotten." Don't forget the skull! This life of compressed star dust, which can listen to the dharma and speak the dharma is so brief! Yet even a dead tree can sing in the wind. I love standing in the forest and listening to a wind come up rustling the branches and leaves. It's a wondrous sound, but even in a patch of dead trees, trees can still sing. For example, we are still here listening to the songs of long dead Joshu and Setcho.

Your skull after you are long dead has its own preciousness. When my Dharma father, Eido Shimano, died I went to the funeral service at Dai Bosatsu monastery in New York. His body had been cremated and his ashes were being buried in the Sangha meadow on the monastery grounds, a short walk from the Zendo. As one of his dharma heirs, I was asked to throw some of the ash into the burial plot. In the handful of ash that I grabbed was a small piece of his skull, and I placed it in the ground. Of course, the skull itself had no consciousness. I had not seen him for several years, and yet in the piece of dead skull I could somehow feel his presence. I can't really put it into words, difficult, difficult to speak plainly or poetically. Moreover, as soon as we cling to words, we've missed it, perhaps the best we can do is just sit and nod together.

Setcho's verse concludes, "Attachment and clarity; watch, and penetrate the secret!" As we sit together, we slowly learn to be more skillful at releasing both attachment and clarity. If we sit long enough, we will undoubtedly penetrate all secrets, concluding that there were never any secrets to begin with. And so, we go straight on.



President's Corner

by Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

Master Rinzai taught us that host and guest are not fixed roles but a fluid dance of meeting, in which each illuminates the other with no separation. When we discern host and guest clearly, all that remains is the unity of the awakened heart. Here, our temple stands as host, and every supporter becomes a co-host in this shared house of practice.

Chobo-Ji, our century-old building containing eight resident apartments and our dharma hall on Great Plum Mountain in Seattle, has long sheltered zazen, teishos, and quiet turnings within. Now it calls us to care for it with compassionate action, just as we would tend our own bodies. Therefore, as you may already be aware, this spring we have begun a **Capital Campaign** to support our practice home.

We rejoice that the first phase of our campaign, the plant sale, has raised \$4,150 through your generous support. **Through the dana of an anonymous donor, the next phase brings a matching gift: every dollar you contribute will be doubled, up to \$30,000.**

We seek **\$100,000** to support the upkeep of our home: we have just installed a new roof, we are in the process of repairing leaky windows and floors, we have upgraded pipes, put in a new boiler, and are making other essential fixes. We can also use help in meeting increases in programming expenses, so that Chobo-Ji may remain a warm, stable refuge for practice for generations to come, continuing to sustain all beings who practice within its walls.

In the true spirit of host and guest, your gift becomes part of this living koan. Whether large or small, it is received with deep bows. Help sustain our common home with open hearts and skillful means.

Checks may be placed in the Dana bowl at the zendo entrance, or you may contribute via PayPal, Venmo or with a debit or credit card through this link: <https://choboji.org/dues-and-donations/> Please notate "Chobo-Ji Capital Campaign" on checks and PayPal; if possible, please save us credit fees by using direct debit options.

The Four Great Vows

SHI GU SEI GAN MON

by Sally Zenka Metcalf, Sensei

About ten years ago, the late Kathy Genko Blackman, Osho, who was a student of our founding abbot, Genki Roshi, gave a remarkable talk on the Four Great Vows, and I recorded it. Her translation was illuminating. This article relies primarily on her translation with some commentary from me. The Four Great Vows are in our sutra book on page 22.

History of the Four Great Vows (from Genko Osho):

Upon Buddha's death in around 483 BCE he told his students he would not appoint a successor, so they should continue practicing and teaching each other. They held a council of elders and decided to write down everything they could remember the Buddha taught. Over time, people had insights and experiences, and new interpretations of the teachings arose, causing conflicts. Around the first century BCE another council was held resulting in the sangha splitting into two branches: Foundational Buddhism – often called Theravada, though this is just one branch – followed the original Pali teachings. The second was Mahayana, of which Zen is one branch. Theravada is still practiced primarily in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma. Mahayana is predominant in Tibet, China, Korea, and to some extent Viet Nam. A somewhat simple explanation of the differences between the two is Theravada Buddhism focused on individual liberation, i.e., Nirvana – awakening into freedom from the cycle of reincarnation. Mahayana Buddhism emphasized awakening into full Buddhahood to help all sentient beings do the same. Individual Nirvana is forgone until all beings awaken – leaving no one behind. This is the ideal of the Bodhisattva.

The Four Great Vows are part of the Mahayana tradition. We first find them in the records of our 6th Zen ancestor Huineng (638-713 CE) who used this chant in a jukai ceremony—which we still do in our own temple. These vows must be older than the seventh century, but this is the first record of its use we know of. Presently, we chant our Great Vows daily, and in week-long retreats we chant them half a dozen times a

day. That's how important they are to us. Committing these vows to memory and carrying them in our hearts throughout the day is life-changing.

Our Four Great Vows

The first vow is the most important. The three vows that follow are everything we master in order to live the first.

SHU JO MU HEN SEI GAN DO

However innumerable all beings are, we vow to care for them all.

Genki Roshi's skill with English was limited, so his charming version of this vow was. "Care for all beings, everywhere, always." I love his shorthand reminder of how to meet any situation in life. Genjo Roshi refers to all beings as "beings both animate and inanimate."

Genko Osho's translation is this: SHU JO means all beings without exception. MU HEN means no limits, no edges. Can you imagine what it might be like to live life with no edges! SEI GAN means to pray and to vow together. It's repeated in all four lines throughout the chant. It means we're through thinking about this and are now committed to act. DO means we will act to the extent of all beings, no exceptions, because we're all in this together.

This is the Bodhisattva ideal. We're not becoming enlightened just for ourselves, but so that we can bring all beings along with us. Some translations say we vow to save all beings. Genjo Roshi chose the words to care for all beings. As Genko Osho interprets these lines, it's intriguing that neither the characters for "to care" nor "to save," appear in the original Chinese. Her translation is "we're all in this together."

BO NO MU JIN SEI GAN DAN

However inexhaustible delusions are we vow to relinquish them all.

BO NO refers to whatever is in the way of seeing clearly: BO is troublesome, NO is obscurations. Troublesome obscurations are what we get stuck on: emotions, opinions, thoughts, prejudices, attachments, etc. MU JIN means our obscurations are not exhaustible, but instead keep arising and being discovered within us to combust and to heal. SEI GAN means we vow to... DAN means to relinquish all. This means, firstly we have to know what it is we've got hold of – obscurations, delusions – and secondly, we commit to let them all go. Again, and again we must face them and relinquish them.

HO MON MU RYO SEI GAN GAKU

However immeasurable gates to truth are, we vow to enter them all.

Regarding HO MON, HO means Dharma. MON refers to a challenging barrier. Think of a tricky border crossing that might seem impassable until we know what we're doing. Our Zen teachings, especially koans, can feel this way, too. MU RYO means everything that arises in our lives is a teaching: feelings, events, thoughts, personality traits, the conduct of others and ourselves. So, Dharma gates are infinite. We live in a sea of teachings that help us mature and heal. Anything, anyone can be our teacher. SEI GAN means we commit to... GAKU means persevering in our devotion to learning, experiencing, and maturing until we awaken. Whatever that takes.

BUTSU DO MU JO SEI GAN JO

However endless the Buddha's way is, we vow to follow it.

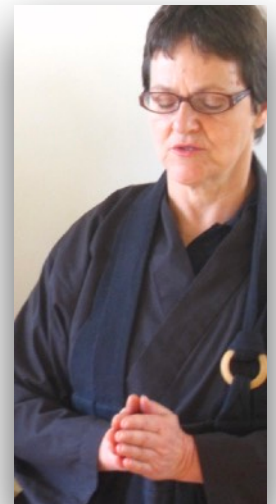
BUTSU DO is translated: as for the Buddha's path. MU JO means there is nothing beyond this path. (Nothing beyond awakening from separation into Oneness. And there's nothing beyond Oneness.) SEI GAN is we vow to... JO means realize this Way – awakening to the truth of this Way. And we are always just beginning our journey on this endless path of awakening.

Sally Zenka's reflections on our Great Vow:

Some years ago, when I was speaking on these vows for an Introductory series, an interesting older gentleman attended. When he heard the first vow, he was outraged. "WHAT!" he shouted. "I can't be expected to care for all beings! Nobody can! It's impossible!" He didn't come back. Actually, he was right. It is an impossible vow.

Many of our teachings are. Our Precept to not kill or cause harm of any kind is an example – as anyone who uproots weeds from a vibrant garden can tell you – thousands of creatures displaced or killed with each root.

So, how do we live this impossible vow?



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The Buddha taught us that our greatest delusion is the belief in separation. If separation is an illusion, then we are all One, all in this together – entangled in our great quantum root ball. We are edgeless and endless. And time, rather than clock time, emerges from our entanglement, moment by moment, afresh. Each moment is everywhere, always, foaming into existence, then dissolving. An experiment in quantum physics split a single particle, putting each half on opposite edges of the Universe. Then one half of the particle was set in motion while the other particle was observed. Remarkably, the very instant the one particle moved, the other moved in tandem – they moved as one across the Universe! Consider what this means for our practice of caring for all beings, everywhere, always. Does it seem more possible? In Zen, we cultivate presence, being here for this present as it arises and subsides. In this very moment, this One IS, arising within us, as us. It is our edgeless entanglement – our All to care for and be cared for by.

For me a most powerful insight in Genko Osho's translation of the Four Great Vows was MU HE: no edges. I thought, What would it be like to live my daily life with no edges? To love without limits or barriers! This is perhaps the deepest challenge of our practice. Do I care for the crazy, filthy guy shouting on the corner? Do I care for Trump? ICE? That unbearable relative? It's easy to care for those we love. But in our Great Vow we're asked to care for ALL beings, everywhere, always. To be able to do this, we must address our own healing. Genko Roshi says Zen is not about eliminating anything or anyone. It's about embracing everyone, everything, and cultivating ever-bigger hearts. Excluding no one. Moving through life with no edges. No barriers. To do this, we cultivate skill through practice and we strengthen our resolve to live our devotion to care, and our vow to love.



The Book of Rinzai

Teaching the Assembly, Chapter III
Fifth Day Spring Sesshin
by Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

Ascending the high seat, the Master said, "From your lump of red flesh there is a True Person without Rank who is always going out and coming in through the face. If you have not yet testified to this, look! Look!"

Then a monk came forward and asked, "What about the True Person without Rank?" The Master got down from his seat, grabbed him, and said, "Speak! Speak!" The monk was going to say something, whereupon the Master pushed him away, and said, "The True Person without Rank! What a piece of shit!" Then the Master returned to his quarters.

I won't be talking today about Rinzai's pedagogy. I'll leave that to Genjo, but I will say that Rinzai, or Lin-chi, is a barbarian with the heart of a poet, which is an interesting combination.

I want to speak today about form and formlessness. As some of you know, along with being a Zen priest, my primary other incarnation is as a spiritual companion. Spiritually curious people come to me, and together we figure out their relationship with the Beyond, the Universe, God, or however they might label the Ground of All Being.

In those conversations, form and formlessness tends to arise almost immediately because they are such broad, vast, and encompassing categories. You can classify the dichotomy as that which is structured versus unstructured; bound versus free; controlled versus flowing; or in various other ways that really speak to the architecture of the universe.

By way of historical example, let's briefly consider that when Buddhism arrives in China from India with the Indian monks and Bodhidharma, it very much manifests as "form," with precise and elaborate analytical concepts that constitute the Indian Buddhist thought of that time, together with more ephemeral concepts like Nirvana and Sunyata. Once in China, the translators of Buddhism wrestle with these elaborate

Sanskrit concepts and how to render them into classical Chinese, attempting to bridge the gap into a language that the Chinese can understand. So, they start playing around with Taoist notions and concepts, far more "formless" language: "This Nirvana concept kind of sounds like the Tao. Why don't we use that terminology? Why don't we use those concepts to translate the Buddhist sutras into something that the Chinese can understand?" And by doing that, they were not just translating, they were interpreting.

And as soon as they interpreted, they started to create a new form, a marriage of Indian Buddhist very formal thinking, with the very non-formal Taoist perspective. So much so that you can say Taoism married Buddhism and produced this beautiful baby that we call Ch'an in China (later "Zen" in Japan), which I think is a truly beautiful offspring. This is a good example of form and formlessness harmonizing.

Having said that, one of the things that I encountered during my sessions as a spiritual companion when talking through these ideas is that people would come back and ask, "So are form and formlessness equal, and is it just a question of balancing them?" And actually, they're not equal at all. Formlessness wins this contest easily every day! Because the only permanent thing in the universe is impermanence. And since that is undeniably true, the only real question is how much form do we need to support us navigating through the vast formlessness of the universe?

Here in the Zendo we have sometimes spoken about being like little boats, rowing and navigating across the universe. And yet, our practice is full of form, rituals, zafus and zabutons, time management, different activities, dharma talks, and all sorts of things going on that are extremely structured.

But the reality is all of our practice boils down to sitting on a cushion and marinating in the eternal, which is another way of saying marinating in the formless. All the forms that we practice are in service to allowing us to enter in with formlessness more generously, and invitingly. Zazen is a perfect instrument for this endeavor. We students of Zen playing with our own emerging spiritualities, whatever they may be, are looking to be good instruments, so that the universe can play through us and render pleasing, warm tones for us, and for the people who listen to us.

Our practice, therefore, is about being a clean instrument. And that's what we're doing here where we sit on the cushion. We're cleaning ourselves as instruments. The deep cleaning that we do in Sesshins. The entire instrument from the bottom to the top as clean as we can make it, so that the universe exits us as cleanly as it entered us, even cleaner on occasion. How? Rinse and repeat, again and again. Practice, practice! So that formlessness can permeate and soak us, and the true being that Rinzai describes can flow in and out of our faces constantly.



In terms of the beyond, then, we have it backwards. We talk about form and formlessness, and we assume that these temporary vessels that are manifesting here are the form, and the vastness of the universe is the formless. But really, the opposite is true. The true form of the universe is formlessness itself! Again, because only impermanence is authentically permanent.

Moreover, the “form” that we consider more structured, which is us, dissolves in an instant with very minimal pressure. So, what’s formless and what’s form?

The heart sutra talks about form is formlessness and formlessness is form. Form is exactly formlessness, formlessness exactly form. Feeling, thought and consciousness, and everything else, are likewise like this. These are not mere words!

There is a reason we chant this sutra countless times every day. It is full of

insight, precisely because it is constantly demonstrating that what we think is one way, is actually way, and *singvice versa*. We're constantly going back and forth, and this is what “Prajna Paramita with no hindrance in the mind” means. We marinate in form and formlessness, until we no longer know which one is up, and which one is down, because they're so well, and so inseparably, harmonized.

In terms of our Great Matter in Zen, I remember when I first started as Eido Shimano's student in New York City on East 67th Street, in the early eighties, I went to a Zazenkaï, and Eido was in the house (though he was more often based at Dai Bosatsu in the Catskills even back then). He came down and gave a teisho, and he was talking about this Great Matter, and “so-called life,” and “so-called death.” And I had never really heard anyone describe life and death as “so-called.” At age 21 I took it as a given that there was a thing called life, and that death would end it, and that’s all there was to it.

So, what was this “so-called” he was speaking of? It relates to form and formlessness. That is, if formlessness is the real form of the universe, then it's always there, and “before, during, and after” cannot touch it. Our essence, therefore, very much cannot be born, and cannot die. It endures. We flow in and out of these various states of consciousness, some more, some less, in ways far beyond our rational understanding. Why are we so desperately worried then? About so-called “death?” About so-called “black before black?”

The formless universe and flow are our eternal home. And everything is constantly moving through this universe, with these vessels just little pit stops along the way. That’s the essence of our practice, to remind ourselves of that which we constantly and deeply experience: flow, movement, and alignment.

We are Eternal Being, not as in personhood, but being as in “beingness.” Eternal Beingness before, during, and after every transient form and manifestation. And it is this Eternal Beingness that Rinzai says is constantly flowing in and out of our faces.

When we are playing music, the best sounds come through us, clean and unprompted. We are no longer playing anything; rather everything is playing us. Because we have remembered to revert into facilitating, not

impeding. We no longer get in our own way. This is the point of our practice: to flow unhindered, to convey resonant and liberating music to benefit all sentient beings, leading with our hearts, and with love and kindness in growing measure.

We truly are beingness of no rank, which is to say, the entire universe beyond label. In this, there is no suffering, no craving, no extinction, no path, and no wisdom. And more than that. We are: the wind, the rain, the sun, the cosmos, and each other. Forever.

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 27, 2026, two people did Jukai. The first was Matt Stebbins. Here are some excerpts from Matt’s Jukai letter:

My journey to Zen practice kicked off during a serious mental health crisis in 2013: I've suffered with anxiety my whole life, but a bout with serious anxiety and insomnia left me scrambling to find anything that could relieve it. This was part of a long standing pattern of an endless pursuit for success and validation to fill some deep-seated childhood wounds.

A mindfulness group therapy course at the University Health Center opened my eyes to how much my thoughts were driving my pain and suffering. I began researching academic studies on happiness using Buddhist scholars as models. As an

Continued on next page ...

emerging scientist myself, I was immediately drawn to an evidence-based approach to “solving” my problems. I began a search to join a Buddhist community and ultimately started attending the Madison Zen Center in Madison, WI, in 2016.

I remember during those years just how hard it was to turn my brain off, to sit still, and feeling a deep desire to sit long enough to finally solve my mental health issues. Looking back on those times, I am so grateful for the community of steady practitioners who taught me how to sit, how to breathe, and to stop searching for a goal or a solution to my problems. While I didn't understand how others could sit with such ease and focus, I kept attending to focus on my breaths. As I continued to practice, I noticed my thoughts softening, my awareness of myself and others opening in daily life, and the beginnings of shifting my focus from my own suffering to a greater awareness of the sufferings around me and a desire to help where I could.

I have kept this practice for over ten years daily, often without a community, especially following a cross country move and isolating global pandemic. I have observed how it has softened my boundaries that differentiate me from others and made me more attuned to the sufferings others face and to be there to help others. Practice has made me more present to my team members as a manager, more empathetic to my emotionally volatile father, a better brother for my sister, and more open and expansive friend to others. Practice has also made me aware of the suffering I cause in this world.

I felt the call to return to a Sangha and found Chobo-Ji in early 2025. This Dharma community over the past year has been life changing. I am grateful to the steadfast practice of those around me and the community of like-minded people that remind me that there is genuine good in this difficult and crazy world. My first sesshin was immensely profound – especially the realization we are seamlessly and universally interconnected with each other. This realization has made it much more apparent how much we must all do to take care of each other and help each other awaken to our deeper nature. It has propelled me to help those around me where I can and to be a kinder and gentler person when possible.

Words can't really do justice to how much Zen practice has moved me from a person selfishly focused on my own suffering to finding a deeper, more compassionate, and outward perspective on the world, but for that I'm grateful. I feel more called than ever to commit to my Zen practice by renewing the precept vows I took in Madison with a sense of greater maturity and responsibility to those in my life through the precept and Bodhisattva vows.

As someone who came to the practice initially with the goal to end my suffering, I appreciate Fisher's perspective on vows. “Vows are energies. Vows are aspirations...goals can be met. Vows can be practiced but never exactly completed, for they are essentially unifiable, and it is their very inexhaustibility that propels us forward, opens us up, shapes our desires and actions.” I humbly request to take the precepts and four Bodhisattva vows for this

exact reason – to continue to propel myself forward, to shape my desires and actions for the betterment of those around me. As a recovering perfectionist and ambitious overachiever, the fact that I can never achieve these vows, that I will continue to make mistakes and course correct to live more closely to these vows, and their inexhaustible pursuit motivates me. While the perfectionist in myself would encourage me to forget the precepts when I will undoubtedly fail, I am grateful for Sendo's

precept class last fall, which opened my eyes to not only the importance of the precepts, but to how our actions are more complex than simply good or bad, acting with or against the precepts. Instead they are a compass that I can orient myself towards. If there is anything I have learned, none of us are an island, and I humbly request the Sangha's support as I take up these vows.

Given Matt's realization of interconnectedness and his commitment to care for others, I gave him the Dharma Name: KonSei, “Kon” = Hospitable Kindness (懇) – “Sei” = Well (井). A well from which everyone is welcome to drink.

The second Jukai presentation was for one of Chobo-Ji's Zen residents, Aaron Haas, and here are some excerpts from his Jukai letter:

Gratitude is the first word that comes as I think of this sangha. I started coming to Chobo-Ji in 2023 when I moved to Seattle from LA, and as time goes on, and my practice unfolds, the more deeply I feel held by this place and by these people. And the more I feel held, the more I know my own resource in the holding itself, as the upwelling of light and love, and deep groundedness in the dazzling darkness.

I honestly never thought I'd be drawn to the practice of Zen, let alone Rinzai Zen. My root teacher, and my natural temperament, leans more toward a “California style” of spirituality. Lots of long naps, late mornings, blankets and padded chairs, and ample opportunities for appreciation of music, nature, and beauty. Yet, to my surprise, I've found a home in this practice as well: in the early mornings, salted plum tea, long hours of sitting with physical and emotional discomfort, getting hit on the back with a stick, and probing thousand-year-old riddles spoken in a language I don't know, from a place I've never been. Somehow I feel it changing me on a cellular level, entering my bloodstream, and settling in my bones. I haven't found anything like it in my 20+ years on a spiritual path.

Which brings me to Jukai. My main desire, and commitment, is to deepen in the practice, and bring it, in my own imperfect way, into a world that is starving for our authenticity, love, and courage. My circle of influence is relatively small, but the waves of impact I make are large. My suffering is the world's suffering, and the world's





suffering is my suffering. With the help of the precepts, I wish to make that reality more clear, more felt, and more practical. And I already see it happening, in studying to become a therapist, while making coffee, playing guitar, in my relationships. I know the work of integration is never done, but who knows... maybe some structure might actually be good for little California Aaron! I am eager to make the precepts a part of my practice, to help bring love to a broken world.

And still, there is another reason I want to take Jukai. It has become obvious to me, writing this letter, that Aaron is not the one taking Jukai at all. Rather, someone else is. If Aaron could, he would lounge on the couch eating potato chips, bumble his way through failed relationships while pushing away true intimacy, and wander aimlessly through life without landing on a powerful purpose. But this one, who has emerged through the practice of Zen, can simply do things which ordinary Aaron can't. He takes those baffling riddles and presents answers to them which seem to emerge spontaneously, without trying or not trying. He sits in discomfort and feels no struggle or agitation in himself. He can witness self-judgment and shame, yet feels only compassion towards them. This deeper impulse, this current of life-energy rising from beneath, within, and all around, will have nothing short of the fullest, brightest, and most loving life possible. His desire is for a life in service of the Loving Presence, which we all already are. In service of the light within and without. The arms of this one are always fully extended and open, ready to welcome the world with an open heart and a rooted seat in himself. I already have a name for Aaron (which in Hebrew means "mountain of strength" or "warrior lion" among other things), but it would be

nice to have a name for this one as well.

Given Aaron's mountain of strength and prodigious musical talent, I gave him the Dharma Name: KaZan "Ka" = Singing (歌) – "Zan" = Mountain (山).



Closing Incense Poem Spring Sesshin 2026

*Who hears the great garden maple
singing in the spring breeze?*

*Followers of the Way sit in zazen
investigating Heart-Mind.*

*Genuine insight
kindly fills the Dharma well.*

*Whoever drinks the still waters,
will freely sing from the mountain tops.*

Sydney Seicho Roth's
Spring Sesshin Poem

*Little boys and girls
buddhas, dogs and devils*

*Spring from her lotus womb
to play in the golden field*

*Whose flame lights
this eternal moment?*



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. 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.

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

June 6, July 18, August 22, Sept. 5

Social Action
Committee Report
by Michelle Muji LeSourd

As the weather becomes warmer and drier, the Chobo-Ji Social Action Committee has begun holding a weekly, half-hour meditation vigil at the Beacon Hill light rail station each Wednesday at 5:30 PM. We sit below a sign that reads "Meditating for Peace and

Continued on next page ...

Summer Sesshin

June 19 - 26



Human Dignity.” Anyone is welcome to join in; look for posts in Temple Happenings confirming each week’s session. If you know of an event that would benefit from a meditation vigil component, please contact Muji a at michelle.lesourd@proton.me.

Committee members continue to monitor and participate in events such as No Kings and relevant training and information sessions.



We still collect and deliver donations to the Riverton Park Church Migrant Center monthly; please use the bin in the lounge hallway or add a note to your online monetary donation. Many thanks!

In addition, as a member of our state's Faith Action Network (FAN), we respond to calls to support or comment on current legislation.

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 Summer 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 19, 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.

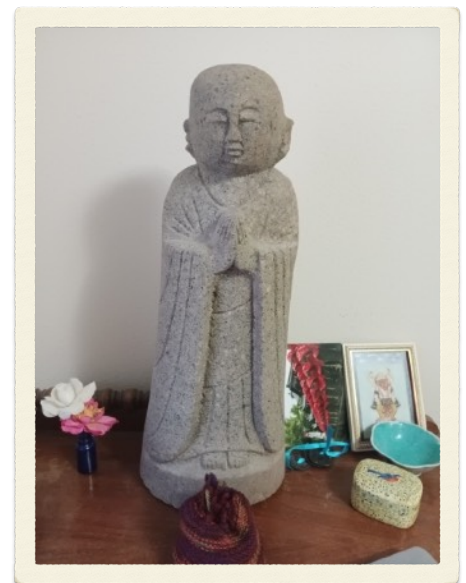


Genjo giving a talk at Whitman College

Recent Sangha Hikes



Neighborhood Cleaning



Second the partner of former long-time sangha member Peggy Kochi Smith-Venturi, Pamela Murphy, found herself the executor of the estate of a close friend of hers, Marsha Hollingsworth. Marsha has long loved this Jizo Bodhisattva garden statue created in cast stone by the late Rev. Richard Kirsten-Daiensai, a long-time prolific Seattle Zen artist. This statue now resides in our temple garden facing the fountain (see the picture on page 4).

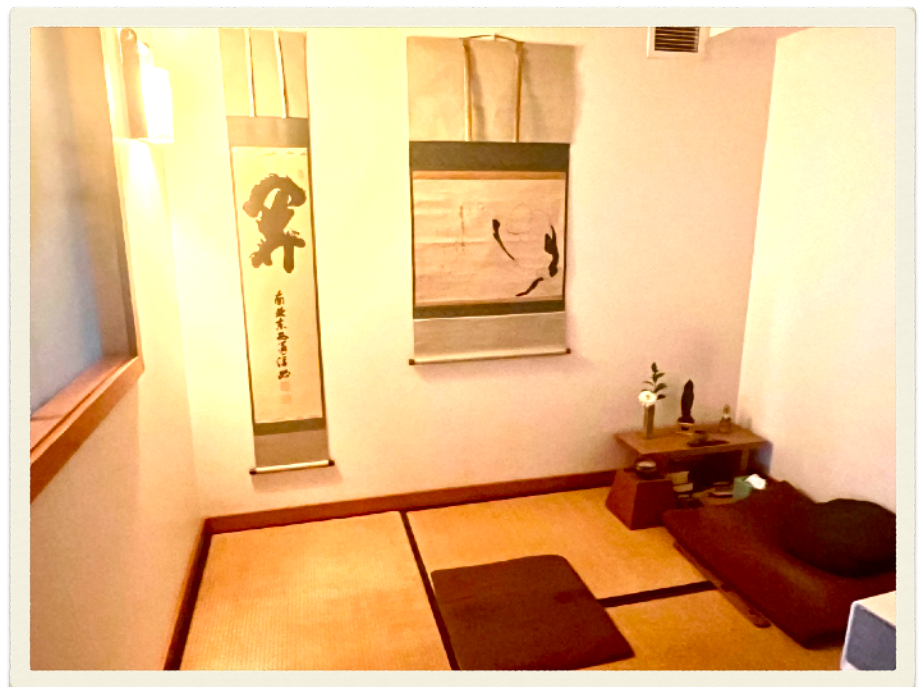
and I must say I personally feel more united with my own lineage with this piece of art hanging in the Dokusan Room.”

New Temple Art!

First, our former long-time sangha member John Daijo Lowrance, who has contributed mightily to Chobo-Ji over the years, has been looking with me for some original Hakuin Ekaku Zenji art. And after three years of searching, he says he found a bargain on the following piece which is now hanging in our dokusan room.

The drawing is a picture of Hotei Bodhisattva (the Laughing Buddha) blissfully holding a flower. Hotei represents abundance, contentment, and giving. The verse accompanying the picture is about “blowing out” or dispersing blessings of joy and good fortune, implying a carefree state of being, rather than depending on the blessings of others from devotional chanting. In Zen Hotei represents the pinnacle of non-attachment (no rank) – the 10th Zen Ox picture. I would put it this way, “No need to seek blessings of others, instead offer blessings to all by being joyful and caring in this life with everyday heart-mind activity.”

I’ve told John that “We are all so grateful,



Important Dates to Remember

Daily zazen: M-F, 5:30-6:30 AM; Sat. 7-8:30 AM; M & W, 7:30-8:30 PM; Sun. 6:30-7:30 PM
Intro to zazen most Tuesdays 7:30-8:45PM; Zazen and consult with Rev. Seifu: Sundays 9:00-10:30 AM
Dharma Council, most Saturdays at 8:30 AM – Dharma Dialogue, most Sundays at 7:30 PM
(See Google Calendar at <https://choboji.org/schedule/> for more detail and Zoom links.)

100 Sandwiches Prep	June 6, 9:30 - 11 am
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	June 6, 10:30 am - 4:30 pm
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	June 14, 5 - 11:15 am
Summer Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...	June 19 - 26
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	July 12, 5 - 11:15 am
Board Meeting ...	July 12 noon - 1:00 pm
100 Sandwiches Prep	July 18 9:30 - 11 am
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	July 18 10:30 am - 4:30 pm
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Aug. 9, 5 - 11:15 am
Summer Odayaka Sesshin ...	Aug. 14 - 16
100 Sandwiches Prep	Aug. 22, 9:30 - 11 am
100 Sandwiches Prep	Sept. 5, 9:30 - 11 am
Post Workshop (all invited) ...	Sept. 12, 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Sept. 13, 5 - 11:15 am
Board Meeting ...	Sept. 13, noon - 1:00 pm
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Oct. 11, 5 - 11:15 am



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

Plum Mountain News
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