



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

As I write the opening of this letter, smoke from the wildfires in Spokane and elsewhere in the state has mostly blown through for now. Our hearts go out to those suffering from the thicker smoke and searing heat elsewhere in the West and the world, and our gratitude for the fresh air we breathe most of the year in Seattle swells.

Summer Sesshin, 2026, was an intense week, with the largest group of participants we've welcomed since before the pandemic: twenty-six people in person and several more on Zoom. Felix Wazan Pekar was Shika (Host/Manager), providing a flow of work assignments and accomplishing much else behind the scenes. Jikijitsu (Timekeeper) Elijah Seigan Zupancic freed the rest of us from watching the clock. Rev. Soko Mackay as Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook) kept us well fed, and Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares as Inji (Abbot's Assistant) made sure that the dokusan procedures (sometimes difficult to manage with such a large group) were fair to all. In addition to these four seasoned post-holders, the posts of Jisha and Jisha Assistants were taken on with little advance notice by Vivian Anderson, Robin Green, and Gabriel Garret-Singh, who got valuable training from Matt Mobuku Thompson-Aue, who was able to be with us the first few days. Thanks to all of them for liquids and snacks. And thanks once again to our master gardeners, Randall Daigetsu Tanabe and Sally Zenka Metcalf and to everyone who pitched in with outdoors samu which boosted our garden for its gorgeous summer flowering.

Genjo Roshi followed yet another original "Mu" Teisho with a powerfully clarifying set continuing his exploration of the Rinzaï Roku, plus a middle day Teisho on a moving chapter detailing the awakening experience of one of Soen Nagasawa's students. All of these are



available as podcasts. He has now begun to publish polished transcriptions of his talks on the Hekiganroku; one of them appears in this issue, along with my third day Dharma Talk on "Kyogen's Man Up a Tree" from the *Mumonkan*.

Sesshin concluded spectacularly on Friday morning with an ordination ceremony for Felix Wazan Pekar. Wazan has been training with us since he appeared on our Zoom screens (from Spokane), during the pandemic. He subsequently moved to Seattle and quickly became a valued resident of our Temple. He has now held, masterfully, every post except Inji. A large crowd of family and friends joined sesshin participants for the deeply moving ceremony, culminating in our new priest's Dharma Talk reflecting on his path leading to that moment. Great joy was shared by all.

I was not at this summer's Odayaka Sesshin, August 15 -17, but have learned it was quite eventful. Twenty-four people attended, with an additional three people attending by Zoom. The Tenzo was Rev. Wazan, Rev. Shigyo served as Jiki, Muji and Vivian were the Jishas and Rev.

Seifu served as both Shika and Inji. However, Josen (Genjo's spouse) got a call on Friday that she should report immediately to the emergency room at Cherry Hill Swedish Hospital because a recent MRI revealed a large brain tumor. This meant that Genjo had to be absent for most of Odayaka, and that Rev. Seifu had to step in and fill three posts at once. Josen had brain surgery on Monday,



August 17 and came home from the hospital on August 20, much improved, tumor completely removed!

The summer has been generally busy with our calendar of sangha hikes, 100 sandwiches, peace vigils at the Beacon Hill light rail station, and more. Our major Capital

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Campaign, raising much needed funds for repairs and improvements to our building, has so far received more than \$70,000, putting us well on our way to our goal. The campaign continues; see Rev. Seifu's report about it in this issue. Also in the issue you'll find new posts for the coming Fall, and a Dharma talk by Rev. Seifu given during the August zazenkaï. In addition you will find more features we hope you find informative.

With gassho,

Anne Sendo Howells

Hekiganroku ~ Case 3

Basho's "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha" and Genjo's Commentary

Enjo's Introduction: Each *ki* and every *kyo*, every word and phrase is a means, for the moment, of leading students to realization. But every such manipulation is like performing an operation on a healthy body and will give rise to complication upon complication. The Great Way manifests itself naturally. It is limited by no fixed rules or ideas. But I must tell you that there is an advanced theme that you will have to learn. It presides over heaven and earth. However, if you try to guess at it you will be confused. This can be right, and that also can be right. It's so delicate. This cannot be right, and that also cannot be right. An unapproachable cliff face! How could you manage without stumbling here and there? Study the following.

Main Subject: The great master Baso was seriously ill. The chief priest of the temple came to pay his respects. He asked, "How do you feel these days?" The Master said, "Sun-Faced Buddha, Moon-Faced Buddha."

Setcho's Verse:

*Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha!
Compared with them, how pale the Three
Sacred Sovereigns, the Five Ancestral
Emperors.*

*For twenty years, I have had fierce struggles
Descending into the dragon's cave for you.*

*The hardship defies description.
You clear-eyed monks— don't make light of it.*

A year before I became ordained in 1980, I began attending four weeklong sesshins each year. I had already participated in many sesshins before that, starting back in 1977. The Dalai Lama first visited Seattle in 1979, where he spoke at the University of Washington and sat with us at our small Zen center. After his visit, I asked to become an unsui (a cloud and water person), a Zen priest in training. In October 1981, I traveled to Japan for one training period and returned to Seattle early in 1982. In those early years after ordination, I often wondered, "What have I gotten myself into? How could I possibly dedicate my life to all these sesshins?" And you know what? I still feel that way!

One of the challenges we often encounter during sesshin is dealing with body aches and tiredness. A few years ago, I was involved in a bike accident with another biker. We were both traveling at about fourteen miles an hour around a blind curve on a bike path and collided quite hard, almost head-on, just a few days before sesshin was scheduled to begin. I managed to get four osteopathic treatments and two massages before sesshin started, but as you can imagine, I wasn't completely recovered when sesshin began. Fortunately, by harmonizing with breath, it's not too hard to reach a state beyond just aches and pains. It's not without aches, pains, and fatigue, but in samadhi these symptoms become less prominent and more manageable.

The Chinese Zen Master Baso Dōitsu (Mazu Daoyi, 709-788, 馬祖道一) is considered one of the most renowned Zen masters ever. There are many tales about his life and teachings. He also had over a dozen Dharma heirs who continued his work. Among his most famous students were Daibai, Hyakujo, and Nansen. Nansen's students included Joshu, and from Hyakujo we get Obaku, then Rinzai.

At the time of this case, Baso was quite unwell. It feels fitting to consider him on his deathbed. The head priest of the monastery, also known as the Shika, who is the temple's host and manager, visits his bedside to offer his respects and asks, "How are you feeling these days?" Since Baso was nearing the end of his life, the Shika is probably asking about his pain and perhaps about any regrets or grief he might be experiencing.

I recall a time not too long ago when I was asked to be present at the end of life for a

Sangha member and a mentor I'd known for a long time. I sat with them, holding their hands, and asked them directly how their journey from this life was unfolding. Both were in pain, and they both knew the end was near. They were prepared in some ways, but not in others. They both wished the pain would end.

Zen Master Baso answered the Shika's question, "How do you feel these days?" by saying, "Sun-faced Buddha, moon-faced Buddha." Baso is saying "Sometimes I feel like a Sun-faced Buddha, and other times like a Moon-faced Buddha." Even when we're dealing with pain, tiredness, and the real possibility of dropping this body, there are still moments of Sun-faced Buddha, and probably more times when we feel more like a Moon-faced Buddha. So, what does this all mean?

Imagine you're on your deathbed, dealing with all the aches and pains, and perhaps even feeling fatigue with life itself. If someone asked you, "How are you doing?" how would you want to answer? What kind of response would you hope to have?

When I'm dealing with aches, pains, fatigue, and a jumble of thoughts and feelings, there's a comforting peace that comes with taking slow, gentle, deep breaths. When I accept things as they are without trying to change them, I start to relax into what I call the intimate infinite. And when I'm in touch with that, meaning I'm aware of the pool we're always swimming in, but not always aware of, my bubbling discomfort or troubles seem far away. The frothy bubbles of thoughts, feelings, and sensations don't disappear, but they become pleasantly distant.

I recall a spiritual direction session with a long-time client whose mother had recently been hospitalized, nearing the end of her life. According to what I was told, my client's mother wasn't connecting with the deep, infinite foundation of being, which meant she was in a great deal of distress. My client was also dealing with his own unresolved issues with his parents, particularly with his mother, and these issues were unlikely to be resolved in her lifetime. During our conversation, my client wondered about my experience with my parents. I believe we all have complex feelings about our parents. Of course, many of us have received wonderful things from them, which is why we're able to be here at

this sesshin. However, there are likely some challenging and unresolved parts of our relationships with them, or we probably wouldn't need to be here.

I can honestly say, I don't feel like a child of my parents anymore. That might sound a bit strange. Even though there are many karmic gifts, knots, and dents associated with my upbringing, I don't feel they are entangled with my parents anymore. I don't see any unfinished business that needs to be resolved with them. This doesn't mean I don't have my own baggage to work on; it just means that I'm no longer dependent on those relationships to help face my problems. Does that make sense? I'm free from feeling like they're my parents. So, who does feel like my true parent?

In each sesshin, I'm reminded that my true parent is the vast, intimate ground of being. I feel a deeper connection to Mu (無) than I

pondering the source of creation.

In Buddhist circles the principles that govern the flowering of Mu are known as Dharma. Sometimes, in relationship to Dharma, I feel Sun-faced, and other times, Moon-faced. One feels much more vibrant than the other, but they're both sources of light. Even when I'm dealing with a lot of pain, fatigue, confusion, or illness, there's always a faint light there. I have confidence this light will guide me through everything. I believe it will. We'll just have to see. It's not that I've abandoned my parents or that they have abandoned me. It's just that these relationships aren't as important now. Why? Because at this point, all the connections I have with others are secondary to the fundamental connection with the intimate infinite. This isn't a relationship with a person or an entity, but it's something that feels real and comforting. More importantly, when I'm feeling conflicted, confused, or

you can have with the intimate infinite, doesn't compare at all. There's no comparison.

When Carolyn suffered her spinal cord injury in September 2021, we were filled with uncertainty about whether she would be a permanent quadriplegic. At that moment, we were both heartbroken and terrified by the thought, but we had enough experience and background in zazen to stay grounded. However, as she was being loaded into the ambulance after the accident, she mentioned something like, "I've lived a good life, maybe it's time to go." I find her sentiment a beautiful example of the Moon-faced Buddha.

Setcho's verse continues, "For 20 years I have had fierce struggles descending into the dragon's cave for you." Here Setcho is referring to himself, working hard to invite all Followers of the Way to be aware and confident of the intimate infinite. We all work to feel and realize our relationship to the beyond the beyond more consistently. From time to time, we all get stuck and lose our way, which feels like descending into the dragon's cave. I certainly get stuck regularly, yet these days, because of years of regular practice, and confidence in the intimate infinite, I don't usually stay stuck for long.

As I continue my time as Abbot, I hope to inspire everyone to feel this sense of confidence in the ground of being. I'd like to emphasize one more point: flexibility. When we feel confident, flexible, and open, it's hard not to be caring, kind, and compassionate in our interactions with all living and non-living things.

Just a heads-up, there's a natural melancholy and grief that comes with the truth of impermanence.

Setcho says, "The hardship defies description." It's easy to say, "Just commune with the intimate infinite, and everything will work out." That's true, but sustaining an aware connection with the infinite isn't always easy. So, let's approach it seriously, commit to practice and go straight on.



do with my biological parents. I don't know what Mu is or where it comes from, but I feel this is the source of the universe and all of us. To me, this is our true and only parent. I'm not sure about the multiverse, but if it exists, Mu is the source of all of them. About 13.8 billion years ago, or perhaps even longer, this universe began from almost a point. All matter, dark matter, and dark energy emerged from this point, with laws so perfectly balanced that it gradually grew into stars, planets, life, and consciousness, a consciousness now

unwell, I nevertheless feel sustained and nurtured. This is especially true during sesshins!

Setcho's verse says, "Sun-faced Buddha, Moon-faced Buddha! Compared with them, how pale the Three Sacred Sovereigns, the Five Ancestral Emperors." Any idealization of any human being, including the historical Buddha or an emperor, a president or Nelson Mandela or the Dalai Lama or anybody that you might choose to name and idealize, compared to the relationship that

President's Corner

by Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

As Board President, I write with deep gratitude and steady purpose.

We have reached \$70,000 toward our \$100,000 capital campaign. *This is a remarkable milestone.* It reflects the quiet, consistent generosity of so many of you, and it strengthens the foundation we need to care for our century-old building. On behalf of the Board and the entire community, thank you.

In the Rinzai spirit that has guided our previous updates, we continue to hold the simple and profound understanding that this is our temple. Each of us is a host. The wellbeing of the zendo, the roof that shelters our practice, the walls that have held so many sesshins and sits, and so much silence, these are not someone else's responsibility. They are ours, together. The physical structure is one more expression of the dharma we have received and are entrusted to pass on. By tending it with care, we help create a resilient base that can carry the lineage forward for the next generation.

We now turn toward the remaining \$30,000. This final stretch is not a burden to be carried by a few; it is another opportunity for all of us in the sangha to act as hosts, each according to our capacity, and each in the spirit of shared stewardship. Every gift, of any size, is welcome and strengthens the same work.

This campaign is more than repair and maintenance. It is an act of continuity and of love: the concrete, tangible way we hand the practice from one generation to the next. The building could well outlast any of us. The sangha that sustains it after we are gone will itself continue the work of awakening. With much gratitude and sincere appreciation for all that has already been given, and with trust in what we will still accomplish together, in the Dharma.



Mumonkan ~ Case 5

“Kyogen’s Man Up a Tree”

Anne Sendo Howells, Osho

Third Day of Summer Sesshin

Koan: It is like a man up a tree who hangs from a branch by his mouth; his hands cannot grasp a bough, his feet cannot touch the tree. Another man comes under the tree and asks him the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West. If he does not answer, he does not meet the questioner’s need. If he answers, he will lose his life. At such a time, how should he answer?

Mumon’s Commentary: Even though your eloquence flows like a river, it is all to no avail. Even if you can expound the Great Tripitaka, it is also of no use. If you can really answer it, you will revive the dead and kill the living. If, however, you are unable to answer, wait for Maitreya to come and ask him.

Mumon’s Poem:

*Kyogen is just gibbering.
How vicious his poison is!
Stopping up the monks’ mouths,
He makes their devil’s eyes glare!*

.....

What a nightmare! This is such a vivid, dramatic koan, one I have never forgotten. The fear of falling takes me back to many bad dreams from which I’ve awakened just before I hit the ground. It also takes me to a childhood memory of climbing a tree. I hope all of you in childhood tried to climb a tall tree or so. Mine was a tall evergreen tree of some kind. I didn’t know the difference between pines and other kinds at the time. I was about nine, and it stood off to the side of my grandparents’ house in Carmel, California – shielded from the eyes of grownups. I didn’t go to the top – it was taller than the house – but I got pretty far up. And then, of course, I had to come down. And that was the crunch. It was pretty scary. But I had to do it; I wasn’t going to yell for help. And so I got down safely, I didn’t fall. I was pleased with myself; I might have climbed it one more time just to show myself I could do it again.

But this picture of Kyogen, who clearly has

fallen and grasped onto the bough he is clutching with his teeth, this evokes a higher, truly riveting level of terror. The teeth take me immediately to a root canal I had two weeks ago. It was a root canal I didn’t have proper medication for, so afterwards, when the numbness wore off I was overtaken by intense pain that lasted a couple of hours until the pills I did have kicked in. I hadn’t experienced such sustained intense pain for a very long time, and I hope it’s a very long time before that happens again. My next root canal, I’m going to make the dentist give me some codeine.

Anyway, here this person is, hanging with his teeth, or her teeth, or their teeth. Then this other person comes along and recognizes that the person in the tree is a Follower of the Way and thus can be plausibly challenged with the question, “Why did Bodhidharma come from the West?”

This is a traditional Zen question which the Rinzai Zen student will encounter in many koans. But the way Kyogen tells this story seems uniquely designed to arouse the student’s anxiety about challenging questions. Kyogen uses this nightmarish situation to pose a stark dilemma which seems to ask for total self-sacrifice. We take the Great Vow to save all beings: now let’s see if we can do it. There might be an obvious question in one’s mind about the other person’s Great Vow, let alone the minimal thoughtfulness of helping the hanging person get down the tree. But that doesn’t seem to be relevant in this koan, or only adds to its surreal quality.

However, this is not a nightmare tale, it is a koan. Thrown out to Kyogen’s students, it elevates the Zen dilemma about speech versus silence to an ultimate challenge. The student is put on the spot. What seems to be the right bodhisattva answer feels like a temptation: meet the questioner’s need regardless of your own. Open your mouth, say a word, and fall to your death trying not to scream. This seems to be what one is asked to do.

However, there’s a very bright Zen flag here in the way the challenge is presented. The red flag is that the student needing to respond to this koan is apparently faced with a choice between two actions, two responses. We’re apparently being given an either/or situation. The giveaway is that this kind of either/or demand, choose this or

choose that, appeals to our discriminating mind. And of course our discriminating mind is so ready to leap into action, so this is probably one's immediate response.

When I did this koan with Genjo, I thought I had a way to evade the dilemma. I couldn't. Instead of speaking and falling to my death, I mimed walking with my feet – as I was hanging in the air. I thought, well, this is a demonstration of what Bodhidharma came from the West to do, to say, "Find the answer for yourself and walk until you find it," something like that. Genjo said, "That's teaching. Is that what Bodhidharma came from the West to do?" No. Ring, ring, ring - show me. So the next time I went in, I mimed just hanging from my teeth. Genjo gave me a big smile.

More follows with one's exploration of the koan. The heart of this koan is about letting go – but it's about letting go and hanging on at the same time. Hanging on is an aspect of letting go. What we're letting go of is looking for answers outside ourselves. The teacher, Kyogen, who is actually in a way portraying himself with the man hanging in the tree, is just hanging on and not giving the student the answer, letting go of the temptation to give the student the answer.

Kyogen's own story, apparently well known in Zen circles, is recounted in Shibayama's notes in *The Gateless Barrier*. Kyogen himself, in his Zen student-hood, had found it hugely difficult to let go of the need to get the answer from someone else. He'd been an assiduous student of Buddhist texts, really into understanding them and understanding the answers. Kyogen's teacher, Isan, said, "Just give me the essential word about yourself before you were born." Again and again, Kyogen came back to Isan, made some effort, and was rung out or whatever they did then, and he felt just caught in failure. He was in total despair. He took off his robes, left the monastery, and wandered for a period, then after a long struggle finally had a breakthrough.

What did young Kyogen have to let go of? He had to let go of deep fears about his own inadequacy, fears of failure, the kinds of fears which reproduce failure, being stuck in those fears. He had a powerful need, or what he felt was a need, to find the answer outside himself because, of course, he wasn't worthy to have the answer. Kyogen later became an exemplar of the teacher who can compassionately let go of

temptation to feed the answer, who hangs on to the truth that students must find the answer within themselves, in surrendering themselves.

This is the teacher who figures in Mumon's commentary and poem. Mumon's line "Even though your eloquence flows like a river, it is all to no avail," is addressed to the student but also recalls Kyogen as a youth. "Even if you can expound the great Tripitaka, it is also of no use." Well, that's a pretty good clue to the Zen koan and to working with this koan. And then Mumon's poem scolds: "Kyogen is just gibbering./ How vicious his poison is!/ Stopping up the monks' mouths./ He makes their devil's eyes glare!" This is an example of Mumon, like other commentators on Zen koans, saying the opposite of what he means, calling it poison when it's medicine, calling it poison when it's the kindest of actions. Stopping up the monks' mouths as they identify with the man clutching onto the tree with his mouth, Kyogen makes their devil's eyes glare as with understanding, their ego self transforms to their big self.



The theme of letting go now takes me to a different story about a man in a tree. I came across this story last fall, when our Chobo-Ji book group read Norman Fischer's *Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong*. Fischer tells this story to introduce a section called "Transforming Bad Circumstances into the

Path." There was a Zen master called Bird's Nest Roshi, because he meditated in an eagle's nest at the top of a tree. Fischer says, "This was quite a dangerous thing to do. One gust of wind, one sleepy moment, and he was done for. He became quite famous for this precarious practice. The Song Dynasty poet Su Shih . . . came to visit him, and standing on the ground far below the meditating master, asked what possessed him to live in such a dangerous manner. The Roshi answered, 'You call this dangerous? What you are doing is far more dangerous.'"

The Roshi was saying, Fischer suggests, "Living in the world, ignoring death, impermanence, and loss and suffering, as we all routinely do, as if this were a normal and safe way to live, is actually much more dangerous than going out on a limb to meditate." Isn't this in an odd way a sort of prequel to "Man Up a Tree"? How did the man up the tree get there? Well, he was Bird's Nest Roshi, and he fell, and he was ready to meet the moment.

So what has Bird's Nest Roshi let go of? The fear of falling. The avoidance of danger. Attachment to life and the fear of death. He has let go of fears, avoidance, and attachment. Thinking further about this, however, we can ask whether, sitting up there, he can completely let go of the fear of falling out of the tree. We descend from primates who lived their lives scampering around trees, who still do, and they must be aware of the possibility of falling. This must be wired into them: I might fall. I must be mindful of where I am. For Bird's Nest Roshi to meditate up there in the eagle's nest, he has to be intensely mindful of the possibility of falling, injury, loss of physical and mental capacities, dying. What this implies is that his answer to Su Shih's question shows the complexity of letting go. Meditating, he isn't ignoring danger, he's facing it and accepting it. He's facing the big inevitabilities – impermanence, loss and suffering, death. These unavoidable matters. Meditating up there, he's accepting them, letting go of the panic fear of them, and taking the practical measures of staying awake, staying flexible to maintain his balance. The wind will blow.

Staying awake, maintaining balance in the midst of change: is this sounding familiar? Here we are in the third day of Summer Sesshin. In his meditation practice, Bird's

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Nest Roshi can simultaneously let go and stay present because he can tap into the great depth, the before-heaven-and-earth, sunyata. He can maintain a practical awareness of what he needs to do to stay alive as long as fleeting life is possible, while at the same time letting go of his fear of the ultimate reality of death, and he can let go of this because he no longer fears the loss of his ego self. Intensely present, alive, conscious, he is all that Genjo Roshi described in his Teisho yesterday.

Finally, let's return to the man up a tree, the man hanging there by the skin of his teeth, facing death and responding appropriately to another person who needs help. The man hangs there with no apparent support system. If Bird's Nest Roshi is an image of meditation, especially in sesshin, this is such an image on steroids. Here we are with our normal support systems absent. What are these systems? Well, getting enough sleep, to start with. The freedom to move when we need to. Engaging in conversations with others, connecting with them, which can validate us, help us feel recognized. And there's another crucial support system which is not completely absent but sure feels threatened, our bodies – hurting more and more, off and on, wanting to give in, supporting us less well. When Kyogen had his own breakthrough he was working in a graveyard, as a graveyard keeper. That's where he had ended up after he left the monastery. He had lost his support system of monastery and teacher. He was alone, sweeping graves, still with his teacher's challenge running through his head: show me your face before you were born. He was alone, throwing away rubbish, in the midst of death. He had taken himself as far as he could go. A stone hit a rock – and, bingo, all the fears, everything distressing fell away, and he was awakened.

If we take the hanging person as a figure of ourselves in sesshin, we can realize pretty quickly that the removal of our normal support system clears the space for another one. In sesshin, we have the forms, food, the sangha sitting together. We have teacher, ritual, chanting and movement, a regular predictable schedule, always something to do. All of this is our container, as Genjo so often says, for helping us face all that we need to face in sesshin and out. And then of course as the space feels more and more open, we glimpse what is always there: Mind, Mu, Sunyata, the reality before heaven and earth. Tapping into this, we face this great matter of life and death.

I want to conclude with some words about trees. I ask myself, well, aren't there other examples of trees in Zen literature? And of course there's Joshu's Oak Tree in the Front Garden, later on in the Mumonkan. And there's Sakyamuni sitting under the bodhi tree.

Trees are rooted; like most plants, they can't run away. Some trees are so ancient, so much older than we are, that their rootedness can feel permanent to us. They can feel permanent just as the ancient masters, the Zen tradition going all the way back to Sakyamuni under that bodhi tree, can feel permanent. Of course this whole Zen history and the existence of trees, the coming into being of trees, are just a blip in cosmic history. There's nothing permanent about any of it.

And whether we're thinking this way or not, we do know quite viscerally that trees aren't permanent. Our literature is full of trees letting their leaves fall, the falling leaves in the fall felt as images of letting go. Even trees that aren't deciduous let their leaves drift down. Trees are constantly dying, and with trees, we realize this is just completely natural. With trees, we can love this naturalness of dying, and that may help us find the way to loving it, feeling it natural for ourselves.

We live with paradoxes. Clinging and letting go are opposites, but letting go and

hanging on aren't necessarily opposites. Letting go and renewing are part of the same process. Zen practice is not about escape, but it is about liberation. Letting go and hanging on, breathing out and breathing in, we continually renew ourselves, moving towards the moment when our impermanence takes other forms.

Rev. Wazan's First Dharma Talk

on the occasion of his ordination.
Last Day of Summer Sesshin

There is a koan that asks, "At the sound of the bell, why do you put on your monk's robe?" I have always liked that question because my honest answer is simple: it feels like the next thing to do.

I know that is not a very satisfying answer. We tend to want reasons. We want a story. We want something that explains why we chose one path instead of another.

But when I look honestly at my experience, ordination has never felt like a goal I set out to achieve. More often, it has felt like something unfolding on its own.





I remember standing near the front entrance during sesshin, watching rain fall outside. Eventually, enough water collected that a small stream formed and made its way toward a drain. It was not striving. It was not deciding. It simply followed its course.

Something about that scene stayed with me. My experience of ordination has felt very much the same. Not like becoming something new, but like recognizing the direction in which life is already moving.

Still, while that may describe how ordination feels, it does not fully answer why I want to ordain. The deeper answer is that this tradition has fundamentally changed my relationship to being alive.

When I first came to Zen, I think I was looking for answers, relief, or some way to understand myself and the world more clearly. What I found instead was sustained attention to direct experience without judgment.

Zen kept directing me back to things I thought I already understood, breathing, walking, eating, sitting, pain, joy, silence. The more attention I gave them, the more I realized how little I knew.

Take breathing, for example. Before Zen, I would have told you that I knew how to breathe. Of course I did. I had been doing it my entire life. But I honestly do not think I had ever really encountered breathing. Not deeply. Not intimately. Not with sustained attention.

Years into practice, my relationship with breathing is still changing. I know where breath feels restricted and where it feels free. I know its rhythm. I know the feeling

of the inhale, the pause, the exhale, the pause. I know that my whole body breathes, not just my lungs. And I know that even the next breath is not guaranteed.

There have been times during meditation when I have become so astonished by breathing that I have cried. Not because anything dramatic was happening, but because this simple act that accompanies me every moment of my life suddenly revealed itself as miraculous.

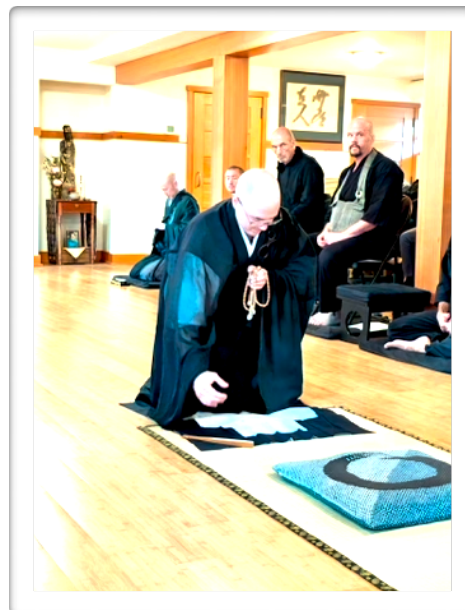
Breathing is so ordinary that it is easy to overlook. Yet somehow, when I see it clearly, its very ordinariness becomes extraordinary. Again and again, this has been my experience of Zen.

The bow teaches. Discomfort teaches. The chants teach. Silence teaches. The ancestors teach. Even the things I initially resisted have become teachers.

What I love most about this tradition is its faith in direct experience. Again and again, it points me back to what is already here. Not toward adopting someone else's truth, but toward discovering my own.

Perhaps most importantly, it has taught me to trust what is unfolding. At first, that trust was only for myself. Over time, it expanded. I began to see that each person's life unfolds according to conditions I cannot fully understand. Each person has their own readiness. Their own timing. Their own path.

I have come to love the Zen expression, "in



the readiness of time." To me, it points toward a deep respect for the unfolding of a human life. Not certainty. Not passivity. But trust.

For me, Zen has not reduced the mystery of being alive. It has deepened it. The longer I practice, the less certain I become. Not in a hopeless way, but in a curious way. A living way.

I never know how a sit is going to be. I never know what will arise. I never know what part of myself I might encounter. I never know when something completely ordinary might suddenly reveal itself in an entirely new way.

The same breath. The same cushion. The same forms. And yet never quite the same. There is always more here than I realized. And perhaps that is the clearest answer I can give to why I want to ordain.

I want to ordain because this tradition keeps teaching me how to be with what is present now. It has taught me to pay attention to what is unfolding, and slowly, to trust it. As that trust deepens, judgment softens, and aversion and attachment loosen.

After all these years, it is still teaching me. And I am trusting it more and more. But there is another reason I want to ordain. I want these forms to remain available. I know they can seem strange. I know they

Continued on next page ...

can seem foreign. Honestly, I know they can be difficult. I certainly have not found Zen easy. Many days I have found it frustrating, humbling, confusing, uncomfortable, and demanding. And yet, despite all of that, I cannot think of many things I would recommend more strongly. Not because Zen is pleasant. Not because it is efficient. Not because it promises answers. But because it has a way of stripping away assumptions and bringing a person into direct contact with their deep nature.

Again and again, this practice has shown me the interconnectedness of everything. It has softened my tendency to divide the world into right and wrong, good and bad, success and failure, pleasant and unpleasant.

This shift has been profoundly healing in my life. It has changed how I relate to suffering. It has changed how I relate to other people. It has changed how I relate to myself. And because of that, I want these forms to continue. I want someone who walks through these doors years from now to have the same opportunity that was given to me. The opportunity to sit still. To pay attention. To discover what is already here. To be surprised by a breath. To be transformed by a bow. To find wisdom in silence.

I want to continue being shaped by these forms, and I want to help preserve them so they remain available to others, because these strange forms gave me a way to encounter what had been here all along. This breath. This life. This moment. Exactly as it is.

So when I am asked why I want to ordain, the simplest answer I can offer is this: Because this tradition has transformed my life. Because after all these years, it is still teaching me. And because I want to help ensure that others have the opportunity to encounter it too.



Closing Incense Poem

Summer Sesshin 2026

*Deep in Puget Sound
is a mind with eight legs.*

*Circling Mt. Tahoma
is a mind with wings.*

*Sitting in the zendo
is a mind with four limbs.*

Which is the true mind?

*Flowing as free as clouds and water,
Three minds are one. Wake up!*

*This Mind has no form nor location,
Yet pervades the whole universe.*

Rinzai Roku,

Discourse XII

Dharma Talk by Seifu Singh-Molares
August 9, Zazenkai

“As to buddhadharma, no effort is necessary. You have only to be ordinary, with nothing to do — defecating, urinating, wearing clothes, eating food, and lying down when tired. Fools laugh at me, but the wise understand.”

During spring sesshin, I spoke at some length about Rinzai’s True Person of No Rank. I want to summarize and riff a little bit on that to get us started today.

That particular koan read: “In this lump of red flesh, there is a true person of no rank, constantly flowing in and out of our faces.” We explored form and formlessness and how the two aren’t equal partners. Formlessness is primary. The only real enduring “form” of the universe is what we usually call formlessness or impermanence.

— We are temporary expressions of that formless eternal being that never comes and never goes, and is always coming and always going.

— The Heart Sutra is not poetry for its own sake; it is a very precise description of this. Form is exactly formlessness. Formlessness is exactly form.

— And the whole point of our practice is to remember who and what we actually are — those true people of no rank. The formless itself flowing in and out of our faces constantly.

So that was the who, and this morning I want to talk a little bit about how and why. How do true people of no rank actually live? How do any of us actually live into this practice?

And that is a koan in itself, but it pervades the essence of the one we are considering today: “No effort is necessary. There’s nothing further to seek.”

In Soto Zen, Dogen says that if you sit, you’re enlightened. There is nothing else to do, and nothing further to seek. And yet we spend a lifetime seeking anyway. Why is that?

As many of you know, in October I’ll be taking on these additional roles of so-called “Dharma Heir” and “Vice Abbot,” and I’ll talk about that a little later. But I’ll tell you: when I started my Zen practice, the image, my aspiration, expectation, and delusion, was to be a wandering monk: to have the freedom to go from one place to the next, one monastery to the next, to be able to meet the world and its circumstances wherever and however they might manifest. And really, that’s a delusion in some ways, but it’s also what many of us intend with our Zen practice: to be harmonious with our surroundings as much as possible in any time, in any place, and in any role or non-role, as a wanderer.

These two sound like contradictions. Bounded on one side, through the roles that we all have, the posts that we hold here in this zendo, the discipline, all the sesshins, all the dharma talks, all the dokusan encounters, the samu, the cooking—all of those can be very tightly bound. And on the other side, the supposed freedom of wandering around the earth without a set destination, with just your robes or your rucksack and one or two little trinkets that you might want to take along with you, and just going with the flow.

So, it certainly seems like one is a prisoner of sorts, while the other one is a free person.

And of course, like all dichotomies, this is a false dichotomy.

Genjo has often talked about how the purpose of all of this structure is freedom. And the paradox is that in order to be free, we have to experience being tightly contained. And further, as he once put it to me, all of these boundaries serve to throttle the ego, to give it no room to breathe, to give it no escape, to make it unable to run away from our problems and issues with hierarchy, with authority, with who's on top, who's on the bottom, who's left, who's right, and who's wrong.

And all of those things in the laboratory of our sesshins. These safe containers where we can explore things rubbing us the wrong way, and most importantly, us rubbing ourselves the wrong way, and the things that are within us coming to the surface and realizing: "Is this really me? Is this who I really want to be? Is there another option? Is there something else I can do?"

Rinzai himself was a stern taskmaster and disciplinarian, but also very playful and kind of an anarchist in many ways, marrying that tough discipline with the freedom that it's supposed to help us navigate to.

So that eventually, the seeking drops away. What remains is simply functioning — being in the world with nothing further to seek. Just taking one step after another in an ordinary world, which is actually quite extraordinary. Ordinary mind is the way.

And it's tempting at this point to say that we can't push the river. That we can't force the issue, and have to flow and align to get to where we are meant to go. But after a couple of sits this morning, I no longer think that's true. In fact, we are forced to push the river. Circumstances demand it, and we don't really have much of a choice around it.

The image that comes to mind is that of a salmon. These salmon who breed in fresh water — tranquil, languid, a comfortable existence — and then as they get a little older, they move downstream and join the ocean where they mature, and where they grow bigger and stronger. All of this to eventually achieve their life's purpose, which is to trek back all the way to where they came from, to go back home.

These salmon often travel hundreds of miles to go back. With these really unique navigation abilities they possess, including geomagnetic tracking (where they can sense and map the earth's incline and their position); a very keen sense of smell that they have that allows them to smell their way back home; and celestial clues, including the sun's location and other visual cues. With these, they can track their home hundreds of miles away. And they will fight the current, and fight the river every step of the way, relentlessly. If they have to go up rocky inclines, they'll jump out of the water. Imagine being a fish that depends for its life on being in water, actually jumping out of the water, making itself that uncomfortable, relentlessly, to get back to where they came from, to get back to their home.

And what a perfect analogy that is for our Zen journey, and how well it explains spending all of this energy, all of these



Rohatsus and sesshins, long nights, sleeplessness and deprivation of all kinds, and suffering and processing all of this trauma and difficulty within us. Just so we can remember ourselves and return ourselves to our eternal home, like the salmon going back to its essence.

Now, the interesting thing about the salmon analogy is that if you're a Pacific salmon, once you reach home and you spawn, you're done. You're dead. Some of the Atlantic salmon can actually make the journey again, go back down and return, but eventually their outcome is also predetermined, just like all of ours is.

And it is a fantastic explanation for why we rub ourselves and each other so hard for so

long — just so that the being that is flowing in and out of our faces constantly, the true person of no rank, might finally reemerge.

Another analogy is building a glider. Our practice is like a glider, and we build it strong so that when the wind comes it can take us, when the formless arrives, we can use our little forms to navigate, to fly away on its wings.

And that sounds idyllic, but it's not. It can be a nice, enjoyable, beautiful journey on a sunny day when the wind is warm and peaceful, and you're just kind of floating in samadhi land. But very often there's a whirlwind instead that comes, buffets us and flings us all over the place, and crashes us into all sorts of things — into our traumas, into our shortcomings, our expectations, our disappointments and our broken hearts.

And it's another perfect analogy for why we relentlessly continue to focus on this practice: because it allows us to get back to our home, that place where we eventually all land when we shed these bodies, where we are truly home.

Of course, we're truly home before the body, right now during these bodies, and after these bodies. We're always home too. We just don't recognize it; we don't see it. Rinzai gives another image in the Rinzai Roku, when he says: "Emotion and emotionlessness are merely two kinds of state. It is the non-dependent person of the Way who utilizes motion and utilizes motionlessness, like a fish hidden in a pool, smacking the waves as it leaps from the water." Like the salmon.

The fish isn't stuck in the depths and it's not frantically leaping all the time. It is both solitary and engaged; it is both still and active.

In the same way, the formal training of the zendo and the open responsiveness of the road are both expressions of precisely the same thing.

I made a mention earlier about becoming a so-called "Dharma Heir." But really, everyone in this room is already a dharma heir. If you're here, because the call of this practice has brought you here, because the Buddha's resonant example has stirred your soul, has stirred your heart, then you are a dharma heir automatically.

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Doesn't matter whether you are priest ordained, lay-ordained, or not ordained — these are just words. The transmission isn't just, or even, a formal ceremony. It is a continuous living recognition that the true person of no rank is already present within all of us, already flowing, already complete. That is our inheritance. That is the Buddha's inheritance that we have received.

Abbots, vice-abbots, senseis, teachers are other terms for hosts. The post-holders are hosts. But anytime any of us helps somebody up who has fallen, anytime we flash a smile that can mean the world to a person who is lost and adrift — without you realizing how powerful that invitation is — we are hosts.

And everyone here is a host in different ways, particularly if you are wedded to this practice, or even if you're just exploring it: hosting the practice, hosting the silence, and hosting our own lives without clutching them too tightly.

When we host in this way, everything softens, everything melts. The person who is in the quote-unquote high seat, the one walking the road, the one unable to walk, the one at the beginning of their life, and the one at the end of their life are no longer different people. They are the same person of no rank—that eternal beingness of no rank, that eternity that is just waiting to manifest.

So be your words, be your silence. There is no Wizard of Oz behind the scenes in Zen. There appears to be, but that's part of the theater and the method and the process of this laboratory.

Be your words, be your silence, completely. When speech is needed, we speak. When silence is needed, be silent. Neither is higher nor lower. Both are the river moving, and both are us moving against the river, with the river, or both at the same time, as circumstances demand.

It would be nice to live in a life of paradise where everything flows, and everything is gentle and peaceful. And it would also be nice not to have to live in a place of constant discord, war and division, despair, and moral injury. But we live in this world with all of those things.

What carries us through is our practice: this practice. The vows that each of us have taken, whether formally, overtly, incipiently,

imminently, or with hesitation at this moment. These are what allow us to create something genuinely new, even as we recognize that there is nothing genuinely new ever. It's just our remembering that is the newness. It's going back to our home and rediscovering our true home that is new. We become available, and in that availability, something new appears. So solitary and engaged: we have to be both. The fish in the deep pool and the fish leaping into the wave. The one who sits alone and the one who hosts. The one who takes formal responsibilities, and the one who still carries that quiet desire to be a bohemian bum, to be free and unfettered. Those aren't distinct things.

The entire world is in the zendo. The entire world is in however many millions, or trillions, of pores Mu manifests. The whole world is here with us, and although we can rush out to meet it in a different way, still it is here right now. Within us, as we manifest the things that we can see, and also through many things that we don't. We are all this true person of no rank.

Someone was asking me what the essence of Zen is the other day, and anytime someone asks me that question, I always give a different answer because different aspects come to mind. And in this instance I said: it's the capacity to see things as they are, and to be with them, not as we would want them to be, but as they truly are. If we ground ourselves in that kind of understanding, that kind of insight where our delusions, happy places though they may temporarily be, give way to reality, to seeing things as they really are, that may well be the ultimate form of happiness.

The portal is wide open in any moment, in any place. As we were just reciting this morning: in every moment and in every place the portal is wide open. In the ordinary it's wide open: while ironing the laundry, while tending to our garden, while cooking our food, while embracing our loved ones, while crying when someone dear and near to us is lost or appears to be lost forever, or when some great tragedy befalls them or us, or both.

Let's all remember then to look, to see, to flow peacefully and quietly when that's possible; and fiercely and with determination like the salmon pushing the river when that's also required. And to remember that there is always nothing further to seek.

Fall Temple Posts

beginning Sept. 13, 2026

Rev. Soko Mackay
Shika (Host - Manager)

Rev. Wazan Pekar
Tenzo (Cook)

Will Kuen Rak
Aaron Kanzen Haas
Rev. Shigyo Marrero
Charles Porter
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

Michelle Muji LeSourd
Brooks Muben Donohue
Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sensei
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Matt Konsei Stebbins
Matt Muboku Thompson-Aue
Albert Shogen Billings
Vivian Anderson
Hans Altwies
David Russell
Andy Post
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Seifu Singh-Molares, Osho
Inji (Abbot Assistant)

Carolyn Josen Stevens, Sensei
Michelle Atkinson
Fusu (Accountant)

Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sensei
Intro Instruction

Anne Sendo Howells, Osho
Temple Happenings

Fall Intensive

An intensive covers roughly the same time frame as the traditional temple *kessei* period, beginning with the first zazenkai for that season (Sept. 13) and ending with Rohatsu Sesshin. It's a time for concentrated study and practice. *Please let [Genjo](#) know if you plan to participate ASAP.* Chobo-Ji participants receive dokusan once weekly on Wednesday evenings. *All ordained are strongly encouraged to participate fully.*

The purpose of the intensive is to give students the maximum opportunity to release entanglements by giving one's self to the Dharma.

To participate one must commit to:

1) ZAZEN: Five hours of zazen per week, most, if not all, zazenkaï, and full-time attendance at weeklong sesshins. This is the most important ingredient of the intensive.

2) Do a minimum of five hours of samu (working meditation - gardening or cleaning) per week. These hours can be in your own home, garden or community.

3) Read one book of your choosing from Chobo-Ji's [Zen Bibliography page](#) (or consult with Genjo about an alternative selection) and write a review of what you have read.

4) Keep a journal about your practice, at least one paragraph per week, and email a minimum of one paragraph per week each Friday to Genjo Osho on how the intensive is working on you.

5) Attend dokusan Wednesdays in person or via Zoom at 8:30PM, or if this is impossible arrange a Zoom call with Genjo Osho. Zoom calls can be short, 5 minutes maximum per week, or up to 15 minutes every two weeks, or 30 minutes once a month.

6) Be of service to this sangha or the wider community through some direct manifestation of our Great Vow.

Autumn Sesshin

Sept. 18 - 25

We welcome both in-person and Zoom participation in our week-long Autumn Sesshin. For in-person participation, 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 Sept. 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 [PayPal](#) or [Venmo](#) or leave a check in the bowl at the entrance to the zendo. (Using PayPal please note that your payment is for Autumn 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, Sept. 18 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.

Fall Book Group

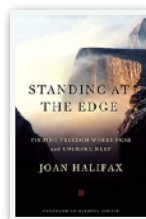
Thursdays, Oct. 5 - Nov. 5

7:30 - 8:45 PM

Chobo-Ji Lounge & via [Zoom](#)

This fall we're reading Joan Halifax's *Standing at the Edge: Finding Freedom Where Fear and Courage Meet* (Flatiron Books, 2018). From the dust jacket description: "In this book she identifies five psychological experiences that she calls Edge States - altruism, empathy, integrity, respect, and engagement - that epitomize our strength of character and are where great potential resides."

At each of our meetings we'll explore one chapter of this powerful book. All who have done a given week's reading are welcome to join our discussions! Reading for October 5: "A View from the Edge" & Chapter 1, "Altruism," pp. 1 - 51.



Fall Intro Series

Tuesdays, beginning Oct. 6 - Nov. 10

7:30 - 8:45 PM

Chobo-Ji Zendo

Bring your curiosity and your questions to our introduction to Zen class. This six-week, in-person course will cover everything you need to develop a meditation practice and teaches the fundamentals of Zen Buddhism. Each class is taught by a different, experienced, Zen practitioner. Classes start with introductions, a 15 minute sit, followed by a presentation, and ample time to ask questions. Recommendation is five dollars per class. Please register at intro@choboji.org.

Fall Precept Classes

Thursdays, Nov. 3 & Nov. 10

7:30 - 8:45 PM via [Zoom](#)

This two-part series explores the Zen Precepts, ethical guidelines informed by our Great Vow to care for all beings. The classes, led by [Rev. Sendo Anne Howells](#) (howellsab@aol.com) are open to all Chobo-Ji students and especially encouraged for those considering Jukai, for which participation in the classes is required.

The reading for the classes is Chapter 8 of Norman Fischer's *Taking Our Places*, pp. 141-183. You'll also need access to the [Chobo-Ji Sutra Book](#), pp. 96-98. Please read and [register](#) in advance.

100 Sandwiches

9:30 - 11:00 am

Sept. 5, Oct. 3, Nov. 14, Dec. 19

One Saturday each month we gather in the zendo kitchen to make 100 sandwiches, which we deliver to the 12th Avenue South and South Jackson neighborhood - so in need of food for hungry people. We hope you'll check the dates above and come help us assemble sandwiches after Saturday morning coffee. If you have questions, contact [Sally Zenka](mailto:metcalf.sally@gmail.com) (metcalf.sally@gmail.com).

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: 1st and 3rd 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 ...	Sep. 5, 9:30 - 11 a.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	Sep. 5, 10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Zen Post Workshop (come and learn what each post does)	Sep. 12, 9:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Fall Intensive ...	Sep. 13 - Dec. 8
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Sep. 13, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	Sep. 13 noon - 1:30 p.m.
Autumn Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...	Sep. 18 - 25
Fall Book Group begins (Thursdays through Nov. 5) ...	Oct. 5, 7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
100 Sandwiches prep ...	Oct. 3, 9:30 - 11 a.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	Oct. 3,, 10:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Fall Zen Intro Series begins (Tuesdays through Nov. 10th) ...	Oct. 6, 7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Oct. 11, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Dharma Heir and Vice-Abbot Ceremony for Seifu Osho ...	Oct. 24, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Precept Class 1 ...	Nov. 3, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Nov. 8, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	Nov. 8 noon - 1:30 p.m.
Precept Class 2 ...	Nov. 10, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

Plum Mountain News
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