Dear members and friends,

Yesterday was the solar eclipse, but with the return of Seattle’s traditional cloudy weather pattern, we could hardly see it, except that it was lighter after Sunday evening zazen than before. Spring is nearly complete and summer is around the corner. The yard in front of the Zendo main entrance is unfolding day by day. Josen and Edwin planted greens, tomatoes and herbs in the vegetable garden. The yard in front of the Residential Practice Center has passed the City’s inspection with the principle help of Daigetsu and his crew, assisted by Muzan. With the lawn reseeded, Daigetsu has donated a hearty gas lawnmower so that your abbot can once again engage in weekly lawn-sculpting samadhi.

The City has approved the Final Inspection for our expansion project, so we are officially complete, but of course never completed. A section of floor in the zendo has been replaced, and a dehumidifier has been ordered that should prevent any further bubbles or buckling in the bamboo floor panels. The source of two of the three basement ceiling leaks has been found and remedied, and the last we think was spilled water on the first floor that has not shown any signs of repeating, so all will be patched and restored shortly. Some additional roof work was done by MRJ (our contractor), but about $10,000 more needs to be done, ideally sometime this summer. There are several other projects and some building debt we are trying to remediate; overall we could use about $75,000 to do everything and provide a small reserve.

Our Spring Sesshin had an unusually high contingent of participants who needed to meet responsibilities off campus during sesshin, but this is how it goes for a city practice. My Teisho from the first day which has been transcribed for this issue, talks about this. Genko Ni-Osho’s excellent Dharma Talk from second day is also transcribed here. As always we are grateful to Seishun for drafting the transcriptions. Many shared the sesshin posts. Steve Ganko Hanson was Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook). John Daikan Green handled both the Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) and Shika (Manager) posts for most of sesshin. Tom Shodo DeGroot was Densu (Chant Leader). Ezekiel Mudo Smithburg was Jisha (Tea Server), and Peter Shinke Ilgenfritz was Inji (Abbot Assistant), but as I said many people rotated in and offed assistance as needed. Many contributions and improvements were made to the property during samu (work meditation), including a balance rock unsui (Zen monk) like statue put together by Rev. Eshu Martin from Victoria, BC, which is still standing. Everyone did a fabulous job doing and sometimes learning each post.

It has been a jam-packed spring. We had a wonderful workshop, March 10th, on Nonviolent Communication led by Rev. Daitetsu Hull. The next day, Chobo-Ji held its Annual Meeting to elect the board and officers for this year. We had a lovely Buddha’s Birthday celebration on April 8th. Janaki and Chris Howard, and Sonja Aikens hosted me in Walla Walla to do a one-day Sesshin, April 14th, along with visiting the WA State Penitentiary and speaking to students at Whitman College. I did a three-day sesshin at San Diego Aikikai, April 20th-22nd, hosted by Leslie Senko Cohen, Steve Shinkai Garber and Coryl Crane. The following weekend I was at the Grunewald Guild a few miles outside of Leavenworth to

Continued on next page…
lead my first three-day sesshin in that beautiful area of the state, which was hosted by the Wenatchee Stone Blossom Sangha, principally organized by Meho and Daiko Petit. I stayed east of the Cascades an extra day and flew to see Genki Takabayashi Roshi, Chobo-Ji’s founding abbot, in the Bitterroot Valley of Montana. His energy was low, but his spirits were good and we had a fine visit. We are working to help him with new glasses and dentures, which hopefully improve our chances that we may get him to come for a visit sometime soon. Several Chobo-Ji members participated in some or all of a nine-mile kinhin (meditation walk) around Elliot Bay to increase awareness of climate change on Earth Day, May 5th. About twenty people made it all the way around, and my sandals got a lot of wear.

The six people participating in the residential side of our practice are getting to know each other better. Naturally, we are all practicing zazen together, working samu around the property, sharing meals occasionally, and have gone on one bike ride together. One warm afternoon, several us joined with Zenka, who lives off campus, to work around the grounds; we concluded with cool drinks sitting in the Zendo garden. All the apartments are currently full; two of the eight apartments still have tenants residing from before our purchase of the property. We are starting a waiting list of those who would like to live and practice here.

Recently, I was published in the current practitioner’s quarterly, Buddhadharma. The title is Get Ready for Conflict, and can be directly downloaded by following the link. The subject is on the importance of a healthy sangha having a dynamic, workable ethics and reconciliation policy. By necessity this must be a work in progress, which allows everyone to grow, learn and better adapt to circumstances as they arise. You can read Chobo-Ji’s current Sesshin and Zendo Guidelines and current ethics and reconciliation policy, by following these two links. Sally Zenka Metcalf also wrote something related to this in her review of Shoes Outside the Door, which the reader can find in this issue.

As you read on, you’ll find that we are really making efforts to expand our practice; Genko, Daiki and I will be reporting on this. Speaking of practice, our Summer Sesshin, June 22-29, is coming right up; please have your deposit in by June 16th. I hope everyone this spring is getting a chance to work in the soil; it is so grounding to do so. I look forward to working and in the garden and practicing zazen with all of you.

With gassho,
Genjo

New Program Offerings

After years of using the same format for Tuesday evening Introduction to Zazen, starting May 29 Chobo-Ji will be trying a four-week series of introductory classes, with a new topic each evening. The series will lead up to the mini-sesshin included in the first day of summer sesshin, available at a discount for those who take the intro series.

We are trying this new format based on input received at the annual meeting in March. The four-part series will include, in addition to the regular training and practice of zazen, sessions on the other types of meditation (working, walking, chanting, bowing), mindful eating and meal preparation, and koan training. The series will repeat beginning in July. ~ Genko

The Chobo-Ji program committee has met recently to consider ways to extend our Zen practice to our sangha and outreach to new people. The group has discussed three topics so far. First, the schedule for sesshins has been adjusted to allow morning or evening attendance for those who wish to continue to attend daily zazen when not enrolled in the full sesshin. Second, the Tuesday evening introduction program has been examined to provide a deeper and more expanded coverage of our practice at Chobo-Ji. There’s a flyer on the last page for more information.

Lastly, the group has planned enrichment opportunities beyond the present schedule. A community picnic has been planned for Sunday, July 29th (save the date!). In addition, a series of Zen-related talks has been scheduled for Genjo Osho to present to the community. Look for a survey to appear soon, asking your input on additional activities.

Another workgroup established at the annual membership meeting is looking at the website and other means of communicating with sangha members and others to make it easier to learn about our program offerings. ~ Daiki
On March 11, 2012, Chobo-Ji held its annual meeting with a quorum of active members present.

Retiring from the Board were three members: Genko Kathy Blackman, JoAn Diane Ste., Marie and Daiki Edward Cadman. Thanks to all three for their long service and wonderful work on the Board; their efforts have been critical over the years and especially in this last year, as we designed and built the new Zendo and transitioned into our residential practice center.

The Board’s nominating committee presented a slate of potential Board members to replace the three departing: Daikan John Green, Muka Linda Wehnes and Gankô Steve Hanson. All three were elected unanimously by the membership present.

Board officers for 2012 were then elected: Seishun Dee Endelman, President; Ishin Scott Stolnack, Vice President; Gankô Steve Hanson, Secretary; and Josen Carolyn Stevens, Treasurer.

At the meeting, Genjo also proposed a new schedule for 2013 that includes six Sesshin; a year of five, seven or eight days; three 3-day Sesshin; and 3 mini-Sesshin. We held a lively discussion on the questions, concerns and enthusiasms for this new schedule. With the some refinements made by the Practice/program committee, the Board will make a decision on the new schedule at an upcoming meeting.

Finally, we organized work groups for the coming year to help with the work required as we grow as a community:

- The Policy Task Group is getting the Board policies into a final format (Daikan, Convener, Ishin and Zengyoku);
- A By-Laws Task Group is reviewing the by-laws for revision (Genko, Convener, HuO, Josen);
- The Ethics and Reconciliation Committee is an ongoing Sangha committee existing to hear and work on ethical concerns and matters of interpersonal harmony.

Current members are Ishin and ShinKe Peter Ilgenfritz. New members will be presented to the Board for approval in June.

- The Finance Committee is an ongoing committee existing to develop a budget for Board approval and to monitor financial matters (Daikan, Convener, Josen and Daigan Bob Timmer).
- The Outreach Committee is a new committee to develop and maintain all forms of outreach to Sangha members and the wider community (Shodo, Convener, Mudo, Edwin Beatty and Gankô).
- Program/practice Committee is a new committee to recommend and coordinate training and other events (Genko, Convener, Genjo, Mucken Rick Proctor, Daiki, Fudo Tobin Youngs).
- The Building Committee exists to assist in building maintenance, including long-term planning (Genjo, Shodo, HoU, Meken, Buji Jane Orvis).

The next Board meeting will be on June 10, 2012, after mini-Sesshin.

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Thoughts on Practice

by Genko Ni-Osho

Having recently been ill and needing more time to rest my body, I’ve been taking the opportunity to study, in particular the ways in which different aspects of the Eightfold Path have been emphasized by different Buddhist traditions over the years. One very notable way in which we have diverged is in our understanding of the roles of two of the steps on the path – mindfulness and concentration. This divergence shows itself clearly in the difference in how the practice of meditation is taught in different traditions.

In our Rinzai Zen practice we often understand mindfulness as something that we develop through sitting meditation, or concentration, and then apply to our activities once we get up off the cushion. As we clarify our minds through zazen, we see the ephemeral nature of the many distractions and delusions that arise, and are better able to let them go. In this clarified state we are more able to be mindful in our activities. During Rinzai style meditation our concentrative state provides excellent conditions for working with koans. We can only do koan work effectively when we connect directly with their essence, beyond analysis.

Mindfulness meditation, however, is a practice of noticing. The formal sequence of mindfulness practices – contemplating the body, feelings, mind, and dharmas – provide a systematic framework for analyzing and then seeing through the nature of each of the so-called distractions and delusions that come up for us. This sequence is the basis of the vipassana practices of S. N. Goenka and of the insight meditation practices brought to us by teachers who trained in Burma. At its best, mindfulness is a gentle, open curiosity about what is happening.

Recently on Tricycle’s Daily Dharma there was a passage that highlighted very well the interplay of concentration and mindfulness in meditation:

Concentration and mindfulness are distinctly different functions. They each have their role to play in meditation, and the relationship between them is definite and delicate. Concentration is often called one-pointedness of mind. It consists of forcing the mind to remain on one static point. Please note the word force. Concentration is pretty much a forced type of activity. It can be developed by force, by sheer unremitting willpower. And once developed, it retains some of that forced flavor. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is a delicate function leading to refined sensibilities. These two are partners in the job of meditation. . . . Mindfulness picks the objects of attention, and notices when the attention has gone astray. Concentration does the actual work of holding the attention steady on that chosen object. If either of these partners is weak, your meditation goes astray.

-Bhante Henepola Gunaratana.
Bhante Gunaratana uses the word “forced” to describe a quality that can be seen in those who practice primarily a concentrative meditation. In Zen activity, as in many of the Japanese arts, we value highly the ability to do what needs to be done with no thinking, no gap between seeing the need and acting. But sometimes the speed and directness with which we act can have a harsh quality to it.

I found myself reacting to the word “forced” when I initially read this passage. But I think recognizing this quality can be a useful indicator to those of us who practice in the Rinzai tradition, an indicator of when our meditation is a bit off balance. Allowing in more of the gentle, open curiosity of mindfulness towards the distractions that arise for us in our meditation, and in our daily lives, can help. Concentration should be a well-grounded discipline, not a forcing of our attention.

Shoes Outside the Door
By Sally Zenka Metcalf

The story of Richard Baker Roshi’s blow up at San Francisco Zen Center—known by the people who were there for it as “The Apocalypse”—was made agonizingly public well beyond Buddhist circles by Michael Downing’s controversial book, Shoes Outside the Door, published in 2001. It’s old news now. And yet it’s still being revisited by present accounts of seasoned teachers, who should and do know better, repeating the offense of exploiting their students; damaging those students, undermining their sanghas, and irretrievably clouding the credibility of their life’s work into the bargain. We’ve been through our own episode of Shoes Outside the Door with Eido Roshi.

As I read the story of San Francisco Zen Center, I wanted to look closer to home to take away a fresh viewpoint that would help me to be proactive in future in our sangha. Three things stood out to me about Zen Center’s Apocalypse.

First: Suppression

Many personal accounts in Shoes Outside the Door reveal a culture of direct and indirect suppression of the power to speak out. For example, Baker Roshi forbade his colleagues to speak about him when he was not present, or insisted they clear what they were going to say with him first. Women whom he used sexually did not feel free to refuse him, nor could they speak to his wife or their sangha friends about their situations. Complaints from students who were used in a slave-like manner and given scant recompense and support in return were quelled, as well. A culture of suppression prevailed.

Surely, one of a sangha’s greatest protections is the power to speak freely, even to call the sangha’s teacher to account. When I reread the koans, many feature dharma dialogues and battles. Might this have been not just a teaching system, but a healthy opportunity empowering the sangha to strengthen its skill at speaking forth and questioning? I like Chobo-Ji’s Sunday Dharma Talks and our book group for this very reason. Questions and comments are encouraged and our Oshos make their experience and perceptions available to us without overshadowing participants. Our board serves this function, as well. In dokusan we are asked for transcendent responses. Open Dharma exchanges, it seems to me, are opportunities to practice this amongst our sangha and to prepare us for our lives.

Interestingly, Zen Center students were repeatedly told by the Japanese Buddhists that dissatisfied students don’t get rid of their teacher. Instead they leave and find another place to practice. Baker Roshi’s students did leave, in numbers. I don’t count this as a tragedy, because many of them carried their experience and heartfelt practice to fledgling Buddhist communities across the continent as seeds spreading and supporting the Dharma. Perhaps American Buddhists will change this dubious tradition of departing to leave an unscrupulous teacher in place. I’d rather we demand upright conduct from our teachers or at the cost of their jobs.

Second: Harm

The women with whom Baker Roshi had affairs all asked him, what about his wife? When these women finally were able to compare their experiences openly, they found that his language to each of them was exactly the same. He said, “What I want matters more than what I do to anyone else.” This strikes me as a recipe for exploitation and harm.

Long-time Zen Center practitioner, Lew Richmond says, “Serious harm was done to these people. There is only one precept. Do no harm. When people do not have a clear idea of harm—and it is very hard to talk about sex and get it right—they accuse others of being Puritans.” When a student offered herself to Suzuki Roshi in his bedroom one night, he very kindly escorted her back to her room. He was Japanese, so we can’t accuse him of American sexual Puritanism. Suzuki Roshi’s is the conduct I expect from a teacher of integrity.

The exploitation so damaging to Zen Center was more than sexual; it was financial and social, and it dominated the so-called “work-practice” that used hundreds of students as unpaid employees in myriad Zen Center businesses, and in Baker Roshi’s three homes as virtual servants.

So, to protect our sangha from exploitation—sexual or any other kind of exploitation—a powerful tool could be a deepening understanding of harm and harmlessness amongst us.

Third: Dominance

Baker Roshi commonly responded to complaints by saying, “This is not a democracy. If you don’t like it, leave.” To this point, one of his students referred to Richard’s domain as a “Zen Versailles.” That says it all. Baker Roshi brings to mind people like Michael Jackson and Howard Hughes, who were so powerful and self-isolating they had no one to call them on their stuff. The license with which they lived and, ultimately, their deaths, were brought about by the disempowered who served them and in response to their own unhealthy demands.

Richard Baker is alive and well, though deposed from San Francisco Zen Center. To the chagrin of many, he walked away with a great number of the priceless antiques and ancient brocade robes he purchased with Zen Center funds, including a $10,000 Buddha. These extravagances were bought while his students lived on $60-a-month stipends. In contrast, Genki Roshi found our Buddha, cracked and on a throw-away
shelf, in the back of a dusty Seattle store. Our Kannon, he accidentally unearthed while working on a landscaping job—gardening kept him afloat in America.

I’ve quoted Sosan Ganchi before regarding idealization and vilification. In their absence, everything is clear and undisguised. It follows that in their presence, everything is obscured and those whom we objectify are disguised from us: Hence, the Apocalypse at San Francisco Zen Center.

To avoid trouble, I prefer Daito Kokushi’s man to the Baker Roshi’s of the world. Give me someone who lives in a leaky hut, or an unassuming apartment, drives a beat car, insists on recycled furniture in the zendo, and mends his robes time and again. Genjo Osho concluded his teisho today (to a chorus of laughter) by saying, “Of course, I’m not worried about being put on a pedestal — HERE!”

Darn straight! Let’s keep up this excellent sangha approach.

The Mumonkan

1st Case, Joshu’s Mu
First day of Spring Sesshin 2012

Koan

The monk asked Joshu, “Does the dog have Buddha nature or not?” Joshu said, “Mu.”

Mumon’s Commentary

In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by the Ancient Masters. For the realization of incomparable Satori, one has to cast away one’s discriminating mind. Those who have not passed the barrier and have not cast away their discriminating mind are all like phantoms haunting trees and plants.

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

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

It is as if you have snatched the great sword right out of the hands of General Khan. You kill the Buddha if you meet him. You kill the ancient masters if you meet them. On the brink of life and death, you find yourself utterly free and, in the six realms and four modes of life, you are able to live in great joy, a genuine life in complete freedom.

Now how should one strive? With might and main, work at this Mu and be Mu. If you do not stop or waiver in your efforts then, behold, when the Dharma candle is lighted, darkness is at once vanquished!

Mumon’s Poem

The Dog! The Buddha Nature! The truth is manifested in full. A moment of yes-and-no: Lost are your body and soul.

With a few new variations added to Chobo-Ji’s style, we begin doing our zazen (seated meditation) for sesshin, about ten hours per day. Even though there are quite a few people in the room right now, in time there will be fewer. But that’s how it is in a city practice versus a monastic practice. We all have lives in the real world. We are not isolated in a monastery in the mountains. Our lives are entwined with the city. Responsibilities and commitments require that we integrate our lives with Zen practice. Not everyone has either the inclination or opportunity to train in a monastery for 1000 days or more; regardless, at some point it is essential to learn how to integrate Zen practice with daily life outside of monastic walls.

For the moment, we’re taking some time away from our rather complex, busy lives to live much more simply. We do so in order to cultivate awareness of our True Nature. If you were here for the introduction and instruction given last night, you will recall how I said everything is a manifestation of our True Nature, including our very conflicted and competing desires. Of course in Sesshin we are hoping to expand beyond this limited scope and encounter some depth. We hope to deepen our awareness of who we fully are. Our deepest reality knows no bounds and has no beginning or end. Our True Nature and the True Nature of the universe is incomparably profound and minutely subtle.

As you all know, I am fond of using an ocean metaphor for True Nature. Our confusion, conflicts and multiple layers of complexity are together just the surface waters on the ocean of our True Nature. The waves can get pretty wild and woolly, and also can be very calm. The deeper you go, the calmer, stiller, darker and colder the waters get. At sesshin we have the opportunity to get to know these still, dark depths. However, the metaphor begins to fail, because an ocean has a bottom and the Ocean of our True Nature has no bottom. The Ocean of Mu has infinite depth and breadth. To penetrate Mu (switching metaphors) is to “fall down the rabbit hole,” a bottomless pit. For some, that’s a scary prospect. It can certainly seem foreboding. But just as in the depths of the real ocean, there’s a lot of life down there, despite the cold and darkness. In fact, just as we think of the origin of life as being the oceans of this world, so too the origin of the universe and all of life everywhere comes from Mu. And this origin, which is also at the root of our True Nature, is something we cannot know, but can be experienced. We can experience what it’s like to go down the rabbit hole. We can experience the great bottomless, cold, depths where there is no light. At these depths there is no form, no light and no beginning; yet, by allowing ourselves to sink to these depths, we can experience the source that gives rise to everything.

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Once we have experienced this celluly, then we can rightfully say that our Zen training is just beginning. Of course, it is always just beginning! Nevertheless, learning to directly and intimately experience multiple depths, from the surface waters to the depths and everything in between, is what our training is really all about. It’s simple to say that we are here to become aware of these multiple layers and integrate them with our conscious daily life, but it is not easy to do.

The more practiced we become at being aware of our own true depths, the more we are able to manifest these depths in our daily, ordinary lives, and this is what maturity in the way is all about. As we make this effort and do this learning, it is critical that we not get stuck in the depths, abandoning the surface confusion and complexity. We must work hard to integrate and balance our experience of the depths with the surface activities of daily life. This zendo (meditation hall) is a laboratory, in the midst of the city, built to explore and integrate deep experience of our True Nature with our often turbulent, everyday lives. There will be people coming and going from this sesshin, only able to do snippets of experimental work and then immediately given the chance to implement what they have learned with their ordinary activities. As I have said, much easier said than done.

The deep koan for all of us is how do we live the depths or bring our experience of deeper waters into our everyday, ordinary lives, and this is what our training is really all about. He is not calling on us to set aside our discriminating consciousness and knowledge accumulated to date, but to learn to directly and intimately experience our own depth? How do you integrate your experience into your own consciousness and knowledge accumulated to date, but to learn to directly and intimately experience your own depth, we can augment our experience our own depth, we can augment our exploration with koans from the Rinzai School. These koans constantly prod us asking, “What’s your intimate experience? What’s your true insight? How do you experience your own depth? How do you integrate your experience into your own life?” Without trying to tell us what it is, Rinzai training keeps poking us to demonstrate our experience, so that we might better integrate our realizations with daily ordinary life activities.

In today’s koan a monk is asking, “Does a dog have the same nature as you and I?” At another time, Joshu responded to a similar question and simply said, “Yes.” Everything is connected to everything else and it all comes from this bottomless, fundamentally unknowable source. Absolutely! But to know this intellectually is so superficial. Yes, it is the, “Fathomless, infinite depth that has no form, let alone a name, prior to heaven and earth, infinitely profound and minutely subtle.” Beautiful, but so many words! Even these words are susceptible to becoming a formalistic idea or concept that’s not alive at all. So too with words like, Dharma, Shunyata, Buddha Nature or even True Nature, yuck! In Zen, we want to be experiencing something that is alive, something that is truly genuine, immediate, visceral, cellular and above all real.

When Joshu was asked the question this time around, rather than making an explanation, or getting caught in any kind of conceptualization of “yes” or “no,” he just said, “Mu.” Now, whether he said it that way, or “M U U U U U U !” or “muuuuuu” (whispered). It doesn’t matter. However he actually said it, I’m sure it was something alive, that gave a token of his own direct experience and also revealed a confidence, and an intimacy with it. Undoubtedly his response was more dynamic and alive than any conceptualization could be. This is what made Joshu so great! Rinzai Zen points directly at True Nature; it pokes and pokes us to experience this directly, to have an intimate experience beyond dependence on words and letters or explanation of concepts. Rinzai Zen invites us to wake up and to begin the process of figuring out how to integrate our realization into our daily, complex lives, with compassion and care for all beings.

In studying Zen, we must pass these barriers, koans, set up by the Ancient Zen Masters. In the Rinzai lineage, we work with the Rinzai koan curriculum. Whether we isolate ourselves in a monastery, which has its advantages and disadvantages, in a city sesshin with a lot of coming and going, or don’t participate in sesshin at all, we’re engaged with the koan of life and death, training on planet earth. Our short, brief exposure as a part of this biosphere gives us the opportunity to test ourselves as the voice of the Dharma. The whole planet is our monastery and life is sesshin. We are the earth and universe becoming conscious of itself. Are we able to unfold and flower as the voice of the planet and speak well, act in a caring manner towards all beings great and small, animate and inanimate? If we look in the newspapers, we’re not doing such a good job! Even in our Zen monasteries, many are not doing such a good job. Collectively we have a long way to go, but this sesshin and this planet are our crucible where we examine, “What is this?” while facing our own mortality. We all come to realize that life is brief and we’re all going to die. This realization gives us a certain impetus to wake beyond our surface view of self. We must awaken to the depth that moves beyond our instincts for survival. Otherwise, we’re truly lost, and life is so brief.

Mumon gives us some hints on how to proceed. He says that if we want to experience our own depths, we must learn to set aside our discriminating consciousness and knowledge accumulated up to now. He is not calling on us to abandon our discriminating consciousness; we can pick it up again anytime we want,
but he is demanding that we learn how to lay it down. Too often, with our discriminating, rational mind, we go around hammering everything. “Let’s see what that is! Hammer, hammer, hammer!” Apparently, like little children, we love to hammer everything into little pieces. Rinzai Zen is saying, “It’s great that we have such a wonderful tool! But, right now, during zazen, put it down. No hammering!! All right? Now, without using your hammer, tell me what is this?” Without using your hammer, but learning to rely on the depth of your true insight, “What is this?” Furthermore, once you have some confidence in your own insight, Rinzai Zen asks us to demonstrate how we integrate our insight into living our daily lives.

Mumon asks, “Now tell me what is this barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this Mu!” The depth itself. There can’t really be a gate between you and your own depth, that’s why it’s called the Gateless Gate. “Those who have experienced their own depth go hand-in-hand with all the masters of the past and all the masters of the future. Not only do you see them face-to-face but you see with the same eye and hear with the same ear. Wouldn’t that be wonderful?” Then, it’s such a beautiful verse, “Sit, breathe and listen with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, allow your whole body to become one great inquiry.” Here on the cushion, become an open microphone with every channel of perception open and just listen. As we sit, breathe and listen, the awareness of our deep true nature bubbles up and our bodies naturally soak it in.

Sometimes all that we will be aware of is the surface waters. This too is our True Nature. Get used to it! The surface waters are never going away! But, if we sit here together long enough, no doubt from time to time, we will become aware of more than that. We learn, in the course of time, how to deal with the wild, busy complexity that is our surface nature. We learn to approach these surface waters with, “Hello! It’s okay you’re there! I’m not going to fight against this. I’m not going to try and make it go away. Yes, there’s fatigue, confusion, complexity, and multiple competing desires. Hello!” I don’t try to change or repress any of it. What a useless endeavor that has been for me! At this point in my own training, there is now no effort to repress or change the surface waters. At the same time, I’m always “listening” for indications of deeper waters. When there is a dawning awareness of these deeper waters, the surface becomes no longer distracting or disturbing, only interesting. The surface waters may be crazy and woolly, but so what, as I have said, they all become interesting, but no longer distracting.

If we work night and day at it and we don’t attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations, everything will become clear. However, sometimes searching for our own depth is like having a red-hot iron ball in our belly. We try to vomit it, or pass it, but it just sits there. We ask the koan over and over and over again, “What is this?” or whatever more specific koan we are working on. We may feel like we are knocking our head against a wall and going nowhere. In such instances, we just want to vomit, but we can’t, our brain is stuck. Yes, sometimes it’s like this.

When we learn to cast away our discriminating consciousness, in other words, when we stop trying to get it, we are much closer to a breakthrough. Whenever I’m trying to get it, it’s like beating my head against the wall, and it becomes like a broken record that skips in the same spot repeatedly. To get out of this ever repeating loop, just remember to stop trying to get it, and return gently but attentively to sit, breathe and listen. In time, you can ask the question, “What is this?” or “What is my True Nature?” or “What is Mu?” or whatever more specific koan you are working on, but don’t attempt answer it with your discriminating consciousness Just sit, breathe and listen.

In the readiness of time, we become like a person struck dumb and we can’t say anything. We become like a person who’s had a wonderful dream, who only knows it within. As we break through the barrier of our narrow idea of self, we are astonished by heaven and earth and we astonish heaven and earth. In other words, we have an intimate experience of our depth.

In such a moment, it feels like you can fearlessly snatch the sword out of the hands of General Khan. There is no fear of death, and, if we meet the Buddha or the Ancient Masters on the road of life, we kill them, we dispel the delusion that they are out there. We realize directly that indeed we are all one, they are not separate from us! During meditation, please try and sit still, breath so quietly that no one else can hear you, back erect, chin level, eyes slightly open looking down and forward. Root yourself deep in the earth, so that you cannot be moved. From this position learn to have no fear of life or death; it’s very freeing to transcend the surface waters of birth and death.

Transcendence is just the beginning; how do we integrate our experience of what is real into our real life, our complex city life? I’m still working on it. My efforts so far have just scratched the surface. Yet, blending and harmonizing with our surroundings is essential to fulfilling our vow to care for all beings.

“The dog! The Buddha Nature! The truth is already manifested in full.” Just sit, breathe and listen, we know this much. “However, a moment of yes and no, right and wrong, lost are the body and soul.” Don’t get stuck trying to get it, there is truly nothing to get. To the extent that we can make use of this sesshin in the midst of our busy lives, make sure to do nothing more or less than sit, breathe and listen. Listen for the stillness, listen for the depth, the dark, still depth. The silence or stillness I’m speaking of is all around and between each note of this symphony of now. The stillness is alive. Have you heard the sound of silence? The thundering silence is shouting at us all the time. It’s here, and it up to us to allow ourselves to be intimate with it.

Make use of every form of sesshin practice: walking meditation, chopping vegetables, sutra recitation, drinking tea, coming to dokusan, interacting with each other. These are all experiments in our laboratory where we must learn to integrate the silence and stillness with the aliveness of our daily life. We will be spending our lives learning these simple lessons, but there’s no better, more important work to do. If our species is to survive its own adolescence and we are to manifest the voice of the Dharma, the voice of the planet, we will have to learn how to be intimate with the bottomless depths. In order to thrive and grow in our practice, we must be vulnerable enough to bring our intimacy of Mu into our daily actions.

With gassho,

Genjo
In the fifth book of the basket of sutras, there is a chapter called “The Collection of Little Texts.” The Dhammapada is in this chapter so it is a very important chapter. The Metta Sutra is considered so important that it is repeated in the chapter. First, it has a section all of its own, and then it is in a collection intended for the novices to memorize as part of their training. One that we chant in the morning, the Tisarana, the Three Refuges, is also in that collection. Anyway, the Metta Sutra is very key, so it's repeated twice.

It may seem odd to read this on the second day of Sesshin, especially since it talks about the characteristics of someone like this: “Straightforward and gentle in speech; humble and not conceited” and on and on! It doesn’t sound like a student on the second day of Sesshin, does it? (laughter) So we’ll get back to that part in a minute. When we hear the Chinese texts, we need to work with their poetic style and language. These Pali texts have a particular style as well, that we need to be able to see through in order to be able to appreciate the depth of their teaching.

The story of how the Metta Sutra came about is a really sweet one. The Buddha sent a group of young monks out into the forest to train and they were supposed to be meditating all night but the forest nymphs and spirits were not happy about the monks coming into their forest. And so, determined to chase them away, appearing as really horrific apparitions and ghastly smells and the monks ran back to the Buddha and said, “Give us a different forest. We don’t like this forest.” So the Buddha said, “No, you're going back into that forest. That’s the one you need to be in and I’m going to give you something that is the only thing you’ll ever need to overcome your fear of this forest.” And, traditionally, that is the first time the words of the Metta Sutra were said. And he said, “Do this practice, really sincerely do this practice, and it will work.” And the way this story ends is quite wonderful. The spirits were so overwhelmed with the loving-kindness coming from the monks that they determined to serve all their needs. So that’s the story of how the Metta Sutra came to be.

Genjo was talking yesterday about how analytical thinking is the hammer we often try to apply to whatever it is we’re working on, whether it’s a problem in our lives or a koan. I was thinking that today probably zazen, as a tool, feels like a screwdriver, putting the screws to us. I know everybody’s a little uncomfortable and tired - maybe a lot uncomfortable and tired - so a screwdriver might be what you think this tool is!

But, actually, there’s a tool with a better fit, I think. There’s a story that I love about a sculptor who is chipping away at a rock with his chisel and someone asked, “What is it that you’re making?” And he said, “An elephant.” And the person asked, “How do you get from a rock to an elephant?” And he said, “You take away everything that is not the elephant.” And zazen is something like that. You keep chipping away, and for a while you may not appreciate that the elephant is even in there. But we chip away and we chip away and get to a place where the elephant appears from in the rock. So zazen is this kind of a tool - a chisel - and we really have to engage with it for it to work.

One of the things that can happen at this point in sesshin is that we get pretty resistant to what it is we’re feeling. All we can do is just stay with it and keep chipping away. Maybe little tiny rocks come off; sometimes big chunks come off; you’ve got to just keep chipping away.

This Metta Sutra is quite a different kind of tool. It helps us with the integration that Genjo talked about yesterday. So I see this practice as a pivot, a tool to turn our thinking around and help us integrate our practice into our life.

So getting back to the text itself, in the beginning, there is this whole list of characteristics of a person who is skilled in goodness. And the idea is not to try to plaster these all over the surface of ourselves so that we appear that way. Sometimes we do that here. We work really hard at looking like good Zen students and, inside, things are just in complete turmoil. And trying to look good may get us through this piece of time or that piece of time, or through the impulse to hit somebody over the head - which are all worthwhile - but in the end what we need is to have that calm inside. The characteristics listed in the sutra are the way to tell if that elephant is coming.
through. So, as we chip away, we should be able to see these characteristics.

But getting to the heart of the Sutra itself, the practice of metta, or lovingkindness.

“Wishing in gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease. Whatever living beings there may be, whether weak or strong, omitting none…” and going through this long list of possible beings. When we do this practice, we start by loving ourselves. This is the most important place and, if we can’t do that, we can’t move out in any kind of genuine, sincere, deep way to anybody else. And so we apply this to ourselves. May I be safe, first and foremost safe. May I be happy. This is happiness, not in the sense of having a bunch of toys, happiness in the sense of true peace. May I be healthy. Here again, this isn’t healthy in the sense that you can do 200 push-ups, but at ease in your own life, in your own body’s condition. And may you be at peace. We’re speaking about may your life running as smoothly as possible. No unnecessary obstacles. If there’s an obstacle, you can treat it as a challenge, but hopefully, you’ll have some easy going in your life. So these are the sayings that we use to bring out this loving feeling.

It’s sometimes hard, starting out with the practice of sending lovingkindness to ourselves. You say, “Well, I don’t really deserve this much love.” If it’s difficult to do this, we pull back to “All beings wish and deserve to be happy, all beings wish and deserve to be safe.” We are one of those beings. So if we can’t say the phrases to ourselves, we can at least rest in that understanding.

Then we move on, from ourselves to a benefactor, someone who has inspired and cared for us, someone we can’t help but feel warm towards. And then we move on to a beloved friend, someone who has supported us and stood by us through thick and thin. These are people for whom it should be fairly easy for us to express lovingkindness.

And then we move on to a neutral person, someone we don’t have an opinion about. This is actually a fairly difficult person to find, because one of the things we notice when we get to this point is that we have opinions about just about everybody, pretty much right off the bat, too. It might be a small opinion, unimportant opinion, but nonetheless it’s there. So finding somebody who is neutral to us can be a challenge. When I started this practice, I started with a cashier assistant at the pharmacy. All she ever did was hand me my pills and say, “Have a good day.” So I felt I was sufficiently free of opinions about her that I could direct this practice to her. You learn a lot of things about yourself when you look for somebody to apply this practice to.

Having done that, we move on to difficult people and the problem there is, oh, so many and who to choose first! (laughter) And, as always, the Buddha is very gentle and says, “Start with the simplest one,” one who is just a bit annoying, and work up to irritating, and then work up to infuriating (laughter) and after that, truly evil.” You can move up this whole chain; there are many, many stages to practicing with a difficult person.

But, with each difficult person, as we move through that practice, we need to be careful to stretch and maintain deep understanding. Remember the elephant. We’re still looking for that. So, at first, saying the phrases may seem really stiff. “May this person be safe; they be healthy; may they be happy; may they be at peace.” Sometimes, if it’s too difficult, I bring myself back in. “May we be safe.” This is a group here. “May we be healthy, may we be happy, may we be at peace.” It reminds me, each time, that this person deserves to be happy as much as I do. So we continue.

Working through the practice with individuals in some ways is the most difficult thing. It’s much easier to spread lovingkindness over the whole world, but when we see each individual person in the world, it is much harder. But we work with individuals because it is the best way to expand our constricted world, to begin to expand it through space and time, through all the realms of existence. We stretch and stretch and, whenever it becomes difficult, come back to a place where we feel comfortable and safe, restore ourselves, touch base with the depths of our intention, and come back out again.

This practice requires patience. It requires setting an intention that is very, very deep. And one of the things that we find, as strong feelings come up for us - fear, anger, pushing away, separation – is that all we can do is stay tolerant. Maybe that’s all we can do right now. But we renew our intention, and continue to work toward lovingkindness.

When metta practice gets really difficult, just go back to Mu, back to your breath, back to the place you find an anchor. The other night I was talking with some folks who get together, folks who are released from prison, who gather every couple of weeks to meditate together and discuss how things are going. We were talking about fear and the deeply entrenched habit patterns that bring us from fear to wherever it is we tend to - often anger, paralysis, or defensiveness. And it happens so quickly, the rising up from fear to our habitual response that it’s difficult to see any gap in there, any separation in the progression from the event to our perception of it to our response.

But every once in a while, we’re given a wonderful gift where we can see that gap. I told the releasees about my son Michael who, as many of you know, was in Iraq in 2003—in fact, he was in one of the first units into Iraq; his unit was staged in Kuwait for some time and then marched in. And, on the march into Iraq, there was a sandstorm swirling around. It’s the time of year when they have sandstorms. Michael had been driving the Humvee with his unit for about four hours, then another person switched out into the driver’s seat. There was enough room for everyone in the truck but one, and so whoever switched out of the driver seat went to sit in the bed of the truck. So Michael turned over the driving to someone else and was sitting in the back of the truck.

They were trundling along through this sandstorm, very difficult to see and, all of a sudden, there was a roadblock—which you couldn’t see until you were right on it. The driver was going what we’d call “too fast for conditions” and stopped suddenly, and the truck rolled over. Michael, because he wasn’t secured in the back, flew out of the back of the truck through the sand and air, and he said, “It was like everything stopped and I was just grateful I didn’t know this at the time.”

Continued on next page…
And then he landed on his head. He immediately ran to the truck. But he said, “I want you to know, Mama, that was not about bravery, running to the truck. It was just the next thing that had to happen. I ran to the truck to see, because it was the next thing that had to happen. People said, ‘Oh, you should have checked to make sure whether you were injured or not’ and I replied, ‘No, the next thing was check on the truck and the folks in it.’” Great peace, he had. And he said, still, he didn’t feel any fear during any of that. It wasn’t until after he began talking to his men and they said, “Sergeant, you could have been killed! It’s a miracle you’re alive!” And he realized “I’m alive, and I could be dead.” And this division became very strong for him and then fear rose up in that division between life and death. That’s where fear rose up for him.

Where zazen comes in in all this is that it allows us, like Michael, to go flying out of the truck while on our cushions, truly. Everything you need is here for you. You are not struggling on the cushion because you’re a bad person, or all these other stories we tell ourselves when we’re uncomfortable in our bodies, minds, or hearts. The clarity that comes from zazen allows us to say, “Oh, there’s my story again.” And when we can say, “there’s my story again,” we can begin to lighten up on it a bit.

It’s like the pain in your knees. I always start out with the pain, thinking it’s some crazy animal that’s biting me. But it’s not. I can’t push the pain away, there’s no way to pull it off my knee, it’s integral to my knee. However, I can lighten up around it, loosen up around it and hold that pain with just a little more space and then it becomes a challenge, it becomes part of this spaciousness where we can go, “Oh, this is it.”

Coming to the end of this Sutra, there’s this piece at the end after all the practice has been described. So we’ve gone through all the creatures, seen and unseen, born and to be born, “May all beings be at ease. May none deceive another or despise any being in any state.” Now we come back to those characteristics at the beginning which, if you think about it, these characteristics “...humble and not conceited; contended and easily satisfied...” - describe a person who has integrity. They are integral with themselves walled off so that they can’t be seen, can’t be felt, can’t be heard. Sometimes, we have a different persona in the zendo, that of a Good Zen Student, and then we get home, and we let everything hang out. This can happen. It’s natural to be this way, but what we’re working towards is integrating so that we have integrity and wholeness wherever we are and whatever circumstances we are in. So when it says, “Let none deceive another,” this is especially important for ourselves. Don’t deceive yourself about what is going on in you. You do not have to tell anybody else but be honest with yourself. Work with it until you get to a place where you can be open with yourself. We open gradually through this practice. “…or despise any being in any state.” Likewise, everyone here is working on their own stuff. However we can do it, to the extent we can, we support their work through our own demeanor here.

So this practice is a pivot, and in some ways, it’s also a buffer, a sander, a polisher that helps to bring out that warm glow that we know is the essence, this essence, when we see it, when we experience it as human beings, we experience as pure compassion. This is why, when our hearts are really open and we bow, it is a true “thank you, thank you.” Right now, we might be thinking, “Oh, God, I don’t remember. Am I supposed to bow this way or that way? Do I face into the room when I go out? I can’t remember. This zendo is so different from other places. Why do they have so many rules?” But, when we come from a place of open-heartedness, from that warm glow, it doesn’t matter if we bow to the cushion or a book or a frog or whatever. It’s “Thank you.” This bow is “thank you.” So it’s this “thank you” mind that we are bringing out.

Continuing, the Sutra says, “…freed from hatred and ill-will, whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection.” This hatred and ill-will is the anger we refer to in the meal sutras, “…greed, anger and delusion.” It is one of three poisons. Freed from hatred and ill-will doesn’t mean they don’t rise up. Whether we ride them and stay with them, or not, is the key. Being free to choose our response is key.

“Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down...” These are the four traditional postures for meditation, but they are also how we live our life. Whether meditating or sweeping the floor, “…free from drowsiness” Stay awake! Be awake to your life! Don’t sleep-walk through it. “Sustain this recollection...” Sustain this understanding, this compassion, which we recall from deep within ourselves.

This is said to be the sublime abiding: by not holding to fixed views, the pure hearted one, having clarity of vision...” This is running to the truck. “...being freed from all sense desires...” This is the greed of “greed, anger and delusion.” Again, not that the sense desires don’t arise, not that we don’t indulge them from time to time, but that they do not have us by the throat. This is being free.

In the Pali Canon, the understanding of that time was that Nirvana meant you were not
re-born into any of the realms of existence: the lower realms of hungry ghosts and animals, the human realm, or the higher realms of gods and devas. Nirvana meant moving beyond that. When we’re fully awakened, we’re a Buddha.

From a Zen perspective, Nirvana is right here now. When we don’t give birth again and again to our own old stories, we’re free. We’re free from the clinging to desires, from being enslaved to our desires. We’re free from our old habit patterns, the anger and separation from others. We take responsibility for our own practice and our own life. Our hearts are open to the world.

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**See Is This Way More Clearly**

_Verses by Brian Daisen Holeman_

_Today the Way is intellectualization_
_What does it mean? Who is it? Who am I?_
_Intellectualization_
_It is all pervading, manifesting everywhere_
_Intellectualization_

_Esoteric means simpleness beyond belief_  
_Esoteric means easily-doing beyond belief_  
_Unbelievable_  
_As is now experienced_  
_Forever_  
_THIS way_  
_More clearly._

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**Summer Sesshin**

_June 22nd - 29th_

Please send a deposit by June 16th, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. Make your deposit check to Chobo-Ji. The cost of sesshin is $250 (less dues). **Sesshin will start Friday evening, 6/22, 7:30 PM; one sit, followed by a 30 min. orientation.** If you can’t make Friday night please be at the zendo before 5AM the morning of Saturday, June 23rd. Sesshin will end around 11AM, the morning of Friday, 6/29. The first half-day of Saturday, 6/23, may be taken as a mini-sesshin.

You may participate in daily zazen during sesshin, 6/23-28, mornings, 5:30-6:30 AM and evenings, 7:30-8:30 PM.

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**In Depth Dharma Dialogue**

_Genjo Osho will be leading an in depth Dharma Dialogue on the following three topics: ($10 per meeting suggested)_

**Four Noble Truths,**

**Four Principle Forms of Meditation,**

**Layers of Awareness.**

These are sequential, but they also each stand alone.

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**Zen: An Introduction**

_A Four Week Series at_  
_Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Temple_  
_Tuesday Evenings 7:30-8:30_  
_(Next Series beginning July 17)_  
5/29  Zazen: seated meditation
6/5  Meditation in Motion: walking, chanting, bowing, working
6/12  Zen Meals: eating and preparing food mindfully
6/19  Roots of Rinzai Zen: koans and the Zen master
With Rev. Genjo Marinello-Osho

(Sat.) 6/23  Half-day Mini-Sesshin  (intensive zazen retreat)  5:00-11:30 am

$20 Donation Requested
$40 for Series and Mini-Sesshin

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www.Choboji.org
Important Dates to Remember

Daily zazen, M-F, 5:30AM; Sat. 6:30AM; M & W, 7:30PM, Sun. 6:30PM
Special Zen Introduction Series, Tuesdays, 5/29-6/19, 7/17-8/7, 7:30-8:30PM
Weekly Dharma Talks, Sundays, 8:30PM until June 17th

Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)...
Book Group, “Spiritual Bypassing”...
Ryogon Shu Chanting Practice for Zen Ancestors...
Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)...
Book Group, “Spiritual Bypassing”...
Summer Sesshin (weeklong Zen retreat)...
Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)...
Dharma Talk (by Genko Ni-Osho)...
Dharma Dialogue, “Four Noble Truths”...
Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)...
Dharma Talk (by Genjo Osho)...
Chobo-Ji Picnic (save the afternoon)...
Dharma Dialogue, “Four Principle Forms of Meditation”...
Dharma Talk (by Genjo Osho)...
Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)...
Dharma Dialogue, “Layers of Awareness”...

May 27th, 5-11:30AM
May 27th, 12-2PM
June 2nd, 9:30-10:30AM
June 10th, 5-11AM
June 10th, 12-2PM
June 22nd - 29th
June 23rd, 5-11:30AM
July 1st, 7:40-8:20PM
July 12, 7-8:30PM
July 15th, 5-11:30AM
July 22nd, 7:40-8:20PM
July 29th, time and place to be announced
Aug. 11th, 9-10:30AM
Aug. 5th, 7:40-8:20PM
Aug. 12th, 5-11:30AM
Aug. 19th, 5-6:30PM