Dear members and friends,

Seattle’s softly raining days have begun again. We did have a long dry spell right through our annual weeklong Autumn Sesshin, which ended on September 28th. Just a little earlier in September I had a lot of fun reviewing the Ten Zen Ox Herding paintings with everyone, and going over Zen Master Tozan’s Five Ranks just a couple of nights ago. The poetic verses associated with each have been a great source of inspiration and catalysts for insight for hundreds of generations. It was great to share my enthusiasm for these verses and to hear the Sangha’s questions and input. Every one of us has access to true insight, so it is delightful to dialogue together.

Autumn Sesshin continued the momentum started in Summer Sesshin. Twenty-two people attended and the dive into our collective true nature was quiet and deep. In fact, I think it was the quietest sesshin Chobo-Ji has ever had, and it’s got me looking forward to this year’s upcoming Rohatsu Sesshin in Camp Indianola, Dec. 1st – 9th. Scott Ishin Stolnack was the Shika (manager/host) for Autumn Sesshin and kept us organized. Steve Ganko Hanson was our Dai Tenzo (Chief Cook) and watching him prepare meals was like watching an artist at work. Ralph Muzan Leach, assisted by Sony Flores and Mike DaiUn Urban, were our Jisha (Tea Servers) and together they kept us liberally lubricated with tea, coffee and snacks. Peter Shinke Ilgenfritz was our Densu (Chant Leader) and kept the rhythm and the beat at a great tempo. Tobin Fudo Youngs and Ann Kugyo Rice shared the post of Inji (Abbot Assistant) and tended to my teisho and dokusan room needs. Last but not least, John Daikan Green served as our Jikijitsu (Time Keeper), he set the pace for sesshin and kept us quiet. Daikan also filled in for almost every other post as needed. For a few sits, he juggled three posts at once, and had a great sesshin to boot!

During our samu (work periods) the temple and grounds were immaculately cleaned and groomed. In addition, Rick Muken Proctor volunteered to lead a project to build the temple’s new garden shed from scratch. With the help of his samu crew, it was mostly completed by the end of sesshin. Genko Ni-Osho gave an excellent Dharma Talk the second day, and a transcript is included in this issue. Genko also has found the time to write another “Thoughts on Practice” column that I am sure everyone will enjoy. Three Zen monks attended Autumn Sesshin. Rev. Daitetsu Hull came up from Great Vow monastery in Oregon, Rev. Eshu Martin returned for his second Chobo-Ji sesshin from Victoria Zen Center and Rev. Joriki Baker came for his first Chobo-Ji sesshin from Blue Mountain Zendo in Allentown Pennsylvania. All three unsui (monks) are leaders in their respective communities and I’m so pleased that they are attracted to our practice.

Just after sesshin, DP Palmer Restoration Company got to work improving and restoring the exterior of our practice center. Larry Palmer who is heading up the project sits regularly with us and he and his crew are giving the restoration their best effort. I am really looking forward to the final result a few weeks hence. In addition, we recently had all the windows on the first and second floors, north and east sides replaced, and some excellent roof repairs made, so that the building is well prepared for this coming winter. All these projects were funded with the monies given the temple by my former partner in the software industry, Hugh Rogovy. I am so blessed to have the support of so many generous friends and members.
At the beginning of this month, October 5-7, for the ninth year I helped lead a three-day sesshin near Doylestown Pennsylvania hosted by George Lyons Sensei at Bucks County Aikido. His wife Patty and Robert Ryugan Savoca were the cooks and served us gourmet food. Rodger Tozan Park and his wife Terry flew in from Michigan; others came from New York and Connecticut. Even though three days is a short period of time, I could not believe how deep we all went together. Each year has grown and deepened my appreciation of both Zen and Aikido training; I can hardly wait until next year. October 5th is of course Bodhidharma day, and I celebrated it both in Pennsylvania and again here in Seattle upon my return. This same day marks the one-year anniversary of occupying our new temple space and the thirty-second year since my tokudo (ordination) by Genki Takabayashi Roshi. In honor of Bodhidharma’s memorial I was inspired to give two teisho in Pennsylvania on our First Zen Ancestor from China, which I hope will soon be released as podcasts.

Considering my tokudo anniversary brings to mind my Dharma Transmission with Eido Roshi four years ago. Because of an investigation instigated by Shinge Roshi in New York, it has been recently confirmed that Eido Shimano Roshi’s Dharma Transmission was never added to the rolls of the Japanese Rinzai Sect in Japan, probably because of Soen Nakagawa Roshi’s frustration with Eido Roshi’s perpetual ethical breaches. As Eido Roshi’s transmission is not official in Japan, neither are any of his five Dharma Heirs in the eyes of the Japanese Rinzai hierarchy. If anyone reading this is concerned, please first read my most recent blog post “Dharma Transition” at sweepingzen.com with all the linked addenda, then if you are still perplexed; please talk to me about it.

We should all recall that Zen transmission does not transmit anything. Transmission may be said to mean that the people who are being transmitted to are confident enough in their own true nature to know that nothing is transmitted. On the practical side, at least in the Rinzai tradition, it means the prescribed koan curriculum has been completed and that the authorizing agent believes that the one receiving transmission has a good chance of passing the tradition on. As far as the lineage goes, I am grateful to the lineage for being a catalyst for our collective awakening. I fully recognize that some of the lineage are a mythological composite of characters making a supposedly unbroken line to the Historical Buddha; however, this is of no importance to me. Ordination papers and transmission lineage papers are of no importance to me. In depth psychology one knows the client is ready for termination when he or she knows what you as the therapist are going to say and there is nothing more to be said. To me this is an example of a kind of mind-to-mind “transmission” where nothing is really transmitted. No papers are necessary, but there may well be a transition closing session of some sort. An analogous event in Zen circles is the Zen transmission ceremony. At such a ceremony the spontaneity and clarity of the one “receiving” transmission is tested by peers and teachers, which took place for me on May 21st, 2008.

Both the positives and negatives arising from my association with Genki Roshi and Eido Roshi have proved to be great catalysts in my own unfolding and development, and I believe they have served similarly for others. I derive my confidence in having no attachment to rank or position from my own hard work. I have no need of a title, and I have nothing against accepting a role/title to assist in others’ unfolding. If I had any dependence on a rank or position, the “transmission” would not be genuine. I hope to pass on the best of what I’ve learned in my more than three decades of Zen training, along with many necessary cautions. If I succeed in serving others in this way, I will be most blessed.

As I was out of town on the 5th – 7th, we had our First Anniversary Opening Ceremony for our new zendo and residential practice center on October 14th. We started with a shortened mini-sesshin and then rolled right into our ceremony; about thirty people were in attendance. We chanted the Heart Sutra in English and then did the Four Great Vows followed by prostrations to the Three Treasures. I gave an introduction to each of these actions so that those who were visiting with members would be able to have an inkling to what was going on.

On the same day I went off to Saint Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral hosted by Rev. Marilyn Cornwell, known to us as HoUn, to meet with interfaith clergy about a couple of interfaith events coming up this November. The first is a symposium on Awakening the Dreamer to be held, Sunday, Nov. 4th, 1-5PM, at Bloedel Hall, St. Mark’s Cathedral, followed by a meeting on Nov. 18th, 1-4 PM, on “Where Do We Go From Here.” Unfortunately, I will be out of the country Nov. 4th and in Montana visiting Genki Roshi on Nov. 18th, so I am hoping others in our Sangha might attend. Please let me know if you can attend. This movement is associated with the Pachamama Alliance, a fabulous organization that is really making a difference on the planet connecting indigenous wisdom and modern knowledge. See the following video as an introduction: http://vimeo.com/2217073.

Later on the same day, Fudo, HoU, Josen and I went on to a second interfaith event celebrating faith-based music as a bridge to harmony, acceptance and understanding between peoples and faiths sponsored by the Cascadian Center and held at Seattle University. Our part was to chant Namu Dai Bo Sa (Unite with Great Bodhisattva Spirit)
ten times. There were over an hour of songs and chants from all over the world, many that we could all sing together. Later we came home to the temple to do zazen. It was a long day!

We had our quarterly seasonal Potluck on Saturday, October 27th. The raffle ticket for a piece of Genki Roshi’s calligraphy was selected, Daikan won, and Genko Ni-Osho and Fudo led a discussion on concerns and hopes for our Sangha as we grow into our new space.

At the end of next week, I will begin my journey to do a Bearing Witness Retreat with the Zen Peacemakers Organization at the Auschwitz/Birkenau concentration camp in Poland. I leave Nov. 1st and return Nov. 10th. It is my hope in participating with so many others that together we can help soothe and release a bit of the trauma associated with this location in our collective unconscious. This will be the 17th year this retreat is led by the founder Bernie Glassman. The day after I return there will be a mini-sesshin here at Chobo-Ji, where I am sure I will share something of what went on at the retreat.

The Thanksgiving holidays are quickly approaching and daily zazen will be suspended Nov. 23rd–27th. Shortly thereafter we will be preparing for our upcoming Rohatsu Sesshin, and you will find more information about this a bit later in this issue. On Saturday, December 22nd we will hold Toya Party to celebrate Rohatsu’s completion and the winter solstice. Toya, close to the shortest day of the year, is the night to break all rules. We will have a potluck party here at the temple, 6-9PM with music, good food, conversation and funny skits, everyone is welcome. The zendo will again be closed to daily group zazen from Dec. 25th to New Year’s Day. Of course on New Year’s day we will have our annual chanting ceremony, and potluck from 10AM to noon. Come ring in the New Year with us!

I hope you enjoy the offerings in this issue and may everyone have a joyous holiday season.

With gassho,

Genjo

Thoughts on Practice
by Genko Ni-Osho

For practitioners of Japanese tea ceremony, this is a wonderful time of year. As I write, it is late October. We are approaching the end of autumn (August-September-October) in the tea calendar and will soon change over from the warm season brazier to the cold season sunken hearth in the middle of the tearoom. For tea people, the changeover is considered the beginning of the new tea year, with many of the same celebratory images as in January.

With the new arrangement of the charcoal fire, all of the tea utensils are placed differently, and some, such as the ladle, are handled differently as well. To a new tea student, it seems as though one has just mastered one style of tea when it must be laid aside and a new one taken up. Re-programming oneself requires considerable effort, and leads to many mistakes at the beginning of each tea season.

Strong motivation is necessary to fuel the effort required to learn new beneficial habits in place of old patterns. A clear, specific, concrete motivation to change a particular habit pattern keeps us from drifting in and out of commitment to change.

Perhaps most importantly, we must include ourselves among the beings we know to be benefitted by changing our habit pattern. In that way, we can truly enjoy and appreciate any success we have in making this change, and our motivation grows stronger as a
result. Taking the time to acknowledge and appreciate our own efforts is as important as stopping to rest on a long hike. We can proceed refreshed and renewed.

For a tea person the reward for diligent practice is the pleasure of sharing a bowl of tea with someone heart to heart, unhindered by performance anxiety or fear. How do you see and appreciate your own progress on the path to change?

Board Report

This past quarter, the Chobo-Ji Board has met twice, on September 16 and October 27. At these meetings, we have primarily made decisions regarding a very generous gift to the temple made by one of our many Dharma Angels. As a result of this gift, we have been able to:

- Pay off a debt remaining from the Zendo remodeling construction costs;
- Make much needed repairs and restoration to the Zendo’s exterior walls, windows and staircases;
- Set aside money to help refinance the building in a way that will be much more advantageous to our cash flow;
- Set aside money to rebuild the south fence;
- Contribute to the Chobo-Ji Retirement Account set up for Genjo and Carolyn; and
- Set up a “rainy day” fund for future needs.

Board Committees continue to work on revising our bylaws; setting up programs (such as our recent potluck and all Sangha meeting); addressing building needs; and developing a new website.

With gassho

~ Seishun

We’re desperate to escape it and yet get drawn right into it. It takes a while to get past that.

This koan is not a talk between a Chinese Zen teacher and one of his students but rather a conversation between Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom and Vimalakirti who was a wealthy lay person at the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. This sutra that it comes from, the Vimalakirti Sutra, was probably written in about the 100th year of the Current Era, so quite a while ago. It’s one of the key Mahayana Texts. We tend to think of Mahayana in terms of our current arrangement of Buddhist traditions around the world: Chinese, Japanese, Korea and a little bit Vietnam, but this actually is from India. Buddhism split early on into many ways of thinking of itself and this was one of the early Mahayana sutras. If you read it, you can hear the underlying message, “The Mahayana folks are way cooler (laughter) than the folks in the other traditions.”

It’s kind of a fun Sutra to read, actually. The first couple of chapters are all about Vimalakirti taking on the role of a sick person. He’s made himself sick and lay down in his bed in order to teach. Being sick and being one of the wealthy townspeople, people will come in and pay their respects and this will give him an opportunity to teach. But the first couple of chapters are all about the Buddha wanting to send somebody in to question Vimalakirti, who is very wise, hoping his disciples will learn a lot from him. So he asks each one of his disciples to go in, one by one, to Vimalakirti. Vimalakirti has spoken to each of them at one time or another and the disciples each say, “Oh, he always bests me when we have a debate about something; he always comes out on top. I don’t want to go in there to talk to him!”

So then the Buddha runs through all of the Bodhisattvas, thinking at least one of them will go in and take on Vimalakirti. He goes through everybody and they all say, “Nope! I had this conversation with him and, you see, he came out on top again! I’m not going in there with him. I’m not interested. He’s way too sharp for me.” Until finally, Buddha gets to Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom and he says, “Surely you can go in there.” And Manjusri says, “Okay, I’ll go see Vimalakirti” and then, of course, everybody wants to tag along and find out
who wins. So they all go along, thousands and thousands of Bodhisattvas and disciples go into Vimalakirti’s 10-foot square hut. So that of itself is pretty special because Vimalakirti magically makes this room big enough for everybody.

Sariputra, whom you may remember from the Heart Sutra, is one of the disciples - he’s the one that is always ruminating about stuff - and he’s thinking, “Huh! Where are we all going to sit?” Vimalakirti, of course, being fantastic as he is, hears his thoughts and sends down thousands of Lion Thrones for people to sit in. Most of the Bodhisattvas, however, are too small to climb up into the chairs and so they have to shrink some of the chairs and there’s a lot of arranging going on.

So, finally, everybody’s in the hut and the debate begins between Vimalakirti and Manjusri. Of course, other beings pipe in. This particular koan is one of the most famous sections of the sutra. In Zen circles, it’s highly thought of. But this whole sutra is really a funny sutra! If you have a chance, it’s a good one to read; there are a lot of other debates beside the Gate to the One and Only.

There is one in particular I like that I’m going to read for you. This is a conversation that’s going on between Manjusri and Vimalakirti about living beings, what they are - what it means to be a living being. So at one point in here, one of the godly beings —and it happens to be a Goddess—pipes in (she’s the only woman in this group and she’s really holding her own). And Sariputra, the ruminating disciple, is listening to her talk and says, “Why don’t you change out of that female body?” Figuring, hey, you’re good enough to be one of us! “Why don’t you change out of that female body?” The Goddess replies, “For the past 12 years, I’ve been trying to take on a female form but with no success. What is there to change? If a sorcerer were to conjure up a phantom woman and someone asked them to change out of the female body, would that be a reasonable question?”

“No,” says Sariputra, “Phantoms have no fixed form so what would there be to change?” The Goddess said, “All things are just the same, they have no fixed form. So why ask why I don’t change out of this female form?” At this point, the Goddess used her supernatural powers and changed Sariputra into a Goddess like herself and she took on Sariputra’s form and asked, “Why don’t you change out of that female body?” Sariputra, now in the form of a goddess, said “I don’t know why I have suddenly changed and taken on a female body!” The Goddess said, “If you can change out of the female body, then all other women can do likewise. Sariputra, who is not a woman, appears in a woman’s body and the same is true of all women. Though they appear in women’s bodies, they are not women. Therefore, the Buddha teaches that all phenomena are neither male or female.”

So, that’s one of my favorites and, if I had a koan book, that would be in it instead of this one! (laughter) So it’s a wonderful sutra and, as I say, there’s also this subtext that, generally speaking, the folks on the winning side of these debates are in the Mahayana camp and the others—the more hidebound, as they saw it—the more orthodox monastic traditions.

So the main part of this koan comes when Yuima (Vimalakirti) asks Manjusri, “What is the Bodhisattva’s Gate to the One and Only?” Manjusri answered, “To my mind, in all Dharmas, there are no words, no preaching, no talking, no activity of consciousness. It is beyond all questions and answers. That is entering the Gate to the One and Only.” Then Manjusri said, “Each of us has had his say” (and there is a whole chapter of people answering this question), “Now I ask you, Vimalakirti, what is the Bodhisattva’s Gate to the One and Only?” And, if you read in the sutra, it says, “Vimalakirti was silent.” So, once again, Vimalakirti trumps Manjusri’s response, or so we might think.

This particular koan is one that I’ve been thinking about a lot recently. My son, many of you know him, Michael, about 10 years ago, was in the first group of people to march into Iraq in 2003, at the beginning of the Iraq War. He knew he was going to be shipped out and before he went, he asked me to give him a Dharma name, to help him in that new life he was going into. And the one that we settled on, given that he was in the army, was “Mul”, which means “Person of no rank.” So that was the Dharma name that he chose at the time. He went to Iraq, came back and—as some of you know— was quite messed up with PTSD when he came back. He has gotten through that very difficult time in his life and is living in Phoenix now and, oddly, is a bartender at a hotel pool. Seems like a strange occupation for the son of a Zen priest. But, actually, how he got the job was kind of interesting. He started out—as many former Army people do—as a security guard at the hotel. One of the things that he had to do was to pull drunks from the hotel pool and march them away to a taxi cab, and he was very, very good at it. Most everybody that he bounced out of the hotel would thank him. They had such a good time talking to him as he gave them the “heave-ho.” (laughter) It’s true, he’s a really charming person and really silver-tongued. He can talk anyone into anything! So the hotel management watched this and said, “We would like you to be the pool bartender. What we’d like you to do is cut people off before they get to the point where you have to haul them away. And he said, “I don’t drink anymore, I don’t know how to make a cocktail.”

They said, “We can teach you how to make cocktails, but not how to talk to people and really get through to them. So what we’d like you to do is be the pool bartender. He’s been doing that for a few years now. It’s good money. Drunks give good tips. (laughter)

It’s been an interesting thing for him to be in that role, because he has to talk, he has to have these conversations. As he’s gotten more serious in his practice, he’s been
wondering if he can really do Right Speech in a situation like that. He and I have been going back and forth about what does that mean, how do you do Right Speech in a really weird situation. Anyway, he asked for a new Dharma name this past summer since he felt he’d moved past working on “No Rank,” and we settled on “MokuRai,” which means “Silent Thunder,” the Japanese word for Vimalakirti’s response in this koan. MokuRai, Silent Thunder. And now he is trying to understand what that means for him. He has been working with Right Speech and, in the traditional way of looking at Right Speech, there are five factors.

One is that what you say must be true. The second factor is kindness, it should be said with kindness. The third factor is called timing. Is it the right time? For the person you are speaking to, is it the right time for them to hear what you have to say? It may be true and kind, but is it worth saying if they are not able to take it in? The fourth factor is, will it be beneficial to say this? And the fifth factor is what is your intention in saying what you have to say? These are the five factors of Right Speech.

You can imagine, if you had to bring each of these factors into your consciousness every time you said something, you wouldn’t say much at all. You’d get kind of paralyzed. In fact, we were talking about Right Speech in one of my prison groups several years ago and a couple of the guys said, “We’re going to try that tomorrow. You know, this place, by those standards, has absolutely no Right Speech at all! We’re going to try for a day to say nothing unless it’s Right Speech.” And I said, “Go for it!” When we got back together the next time, I asked them how it went, that day of Right Speech. They answered, “Well, as we expected, we really didn’t say much of anything the whole day, we couldn’t get it together.” And I said, “How did that work? How did it feel?” And they said, “We had to go around the next day apologizing to people because we pissed everybody off.” And they realized that sometimes it doesn’t work to say nothing. Sometimes, you’ve just got to give it the best you’ve got and you’ve got to say something. So we talked about how you would do that. So, maybe you can meet one of these factors. If a conversation goes sideways on you, you can go back and say, “Okay, let’s see, what would have been better about that?” So that’s Right Speech, working towards it.

And one of the questions is, What is truth? And this is the one that my son Mikey was most concerned about. He said, “What we see, we see through our senses and we automatically—no matter how open we are—we filter (because we are in human form), we filter everything we perceive, so how can we say that whatever we are saying is the truth?” Whatever we see is limited by our perception and those filters and then, when we wrap words around it, it will be even more limited. Which, of course, was the point that Vimalakirti was making with his silence. It’s already limited, whatever concept we have, and the words just clamp down further on that. This is really a very important question.

So, when we think about how to speak the truth, all that we can do is open more and more. Learn to lighten the grip that we have on our own filters. This is a gradual, ongoing, never-ending process to loosen our hold on these filters. One of the things about this, too, as I’m always telling the men at the prisons, “You really have got to have a good grip on something before you can let it go.” Which means, you have to know what it is that you’re holding on to. So a piece of this is really learning what are the things we hold in us that filter information as it comes through us. What are our prejudices, all the things we do to shape the world in a way that we want it to be, to work for us?

There’s another chapter in this sutra that I love, too. After several chapters of debate, Sariputra again starts ruminating and he says, in the middle of the debate, “What’s for lunch?” (laughter) “What are we going to eat? How are we going to feed all of these people?” And Vimalakirti again comes to the rescue. He sends a Bodhisattva up to another Buddha land, the one that has the most fragrant food. And the folks there are, needless to say, having a feast with their Buddha, and this bodhisattva comes up with his begging bowl and says, “Do you have any leftovers we can take down? Vimalakirti is having a group in his little hut and we need some rice.” So they fill his begging bowl with rice and he comes back down.

Well, this is the most fragrant rice in the world! And the Bodhisattvas in this other Buddha Land, upon hearing that Vimalakirti is talking to Manjusri say, “Oh, that sounds like fun!” and all nine million of them go down to Vimalakirti’s hut and Sariputra says, “Where are they going to sit?” Nine million more Lion Thrones materialize. (laughter) “And how are we going to eat this little bit of rice?” Which is so fragrant that even the townspeople are wandering into the little hut. And, of course, the rice is magic and there’s plenty to go around so they all have lunch. (laughter)

Wouldn’t that be nice to have those powers? Unfortunately, being in human form, we’ve got to work with what we’ve got! But I do love that story.

So, the truth is one of these factors. And kindness - so many times, we hook these two together. “This person needs to know this truth, it would be a kindness to tell them.” And that hooks into intention. What is our intention in saying this to this person? If we’re really honest with ourselves, most of the time we speak, we’ve got a personal agenda somewhere in there. If we’ve thought about it at all, what we’re going to say to a person, there is a personal agenda. Once we’ve formed the thought, “I’m going to say this to this person,” we’ve developed an agenda. So, one of the ways, we support Right Speech is to recognize when we’re firming ourselves up as “I have some information to share with these people and I’m going to say it as skillfully and as kindly as I can.” There is, in that, an agenda. Just by virtue of being human and saying I’m going to say this to that person, it’s not Right Speech, because it’s not from the deep intention that Right Speech is driving at.

So, kindness, truth, timing—here again, we have to be really open to the other person. We may want this other person, more than anything in the world, to hear what we’re saying. So we’ll repeat it over and over again with the idea that, at some point, they’re going to hear it. But, if the timing is not right, they won’t hear what we intend for them to hear. So, whether or not what we’re saying is true, their filters are going to prevent the message from coming through in a form that is beneficial, which is another of the five factors.
So to be true, to be kind, to be appropriate with the person you are speaking with, beneficial and to have a deep intent—all of these are the factors that make Right Speech. And we're thinking, “Well, it’s a good thing I’m a Zen student because I can fall back on all of this silence.” (laughter) And, I know most of us have gone into the dokusan room thinking, “Well, I have no idea about this so I’m just going to go in and look impressive. (laughter) I’m sure I’ll get some credit for that!” (laughter)

You know, sometimes the only thing you can do is be silent, but sometimes you have to speak. And it is our job here in this zendo to really go deep into each of these factors in order to come up off our cushions and interact in any sort of way that manifests the precious gifts of this practice. Right Speech is only a part of it. But each of these factors can be looked at in anything that we say, anything that we do. It’s not that we go out and we think, “Is this true? Kind? Beneficial? Will they hear me?” We don’t go through that list every time. But we prepare the ground. We open our hearts. We quiet our minds. We deepen our intention by sitting here. And then we do the best we can when we get up from the cushion.

Koans are an important part of the Rinzai style of Zen training. In our lineage, which comes out of the Hakuin School in Japan, we investigate three great collections: The Mumonkan (The Gateless Gate), The Hekiganroku (Blue Cliff Record) and the Rinzairoku (The Book of Rinzai). After that, our curriculum goes on to explore Tozan’s Five Ranks and concludes with a reexamination of the Ten Precepts, turning them on their head a bit. The completion of the koan curriculum doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re a Zen Master, but it means that you’ve jumped all the hoops in this sort of investigation of the classic texts. Observing how we live our lives makes for a much deeper discernment of our maturity than how many koans have been examined.

Even though exploring koans doesn’t directly lead to psychological maturity, examining them does serve some really excellent purposes. Investigation of koans increases our capacity for discernment, flexibility and intimacy. For example, when investigating the Mumonkan, we come to a deep awareness of what is relative, what is absolute and what is transcendent. As our skill increases to discern and work with these various varieties of reality, we become much more flexible, creative and playful in a wider range of circumstances.

Everyone who has worked with koans knows they can be very frustrating! However, as we go through the Mumonkan, we come to realize that koans are designed to take us out of our rational, egocentric, dualistic way of thinking of things to a whole new way of seeing the world. It’s interesting, and I’ve said this many times, that when we have a breakthrough of some sort, it’s like coming home. A deep “ah, ha” feels like, “Oh, I always knew this, but just now I’m remembering what it is like to see the world in this way.” The first time we experience seeing this way in our adult lives, we realize that we saw this view as young children. Soon after birth, we start making distinctions between self and other; however, when we were in utero, there was no distinction between self and other and we undoubtedly felt in union with the whole Universe. This natural sense of union gets lost in our normal psychological development and, by the time we’re adults, this unified, non-dualistic view, is hidden, but not gone. When we have a breakthrough, we think, “Ah, that’s right! That’s how I remember it.” There’s nothing to attain because it’s already part of our innate experience. When we have a breakthrough, we recognize our own deep experience of our True Nature.

In the Blue Cliff Record (Hekiganroku), we continue to dive deeply into the heart of some of the greatest Zen ancestors and their characters, exploring Unmon, Joshu, Baso, Bodhidharma and others. Over time, by examining the koans associated with them, we really begin to know the ancients from the inside. Not only do we get inside their heads, but also feel their hearts and eventually come to temporarily embody their spirit. Through working successive koans their characters from long ago become alive in us. I don’t believe that doing straight scholarly study of the ancient masters can bring the same kind of aliveness that comes from examining koan after koan. You can read about the Zen ancestors and their antics, but koans invite us to enter into their kokoro (heart/mind) so that they become alive in us.

If we are musicians and don’t just study Mozart, Beethoven or Bach but play or

Continued on next page…
conduct their music, perhaps we will have an experience of entering the kokoro of these great composers. Similarly, we could study great physicists such as Newton and Einstein, but only after we tested and expanded upon their experiments would we really know these physicists from the inside. That’s what koans are asking us to do, to know these ancient Zen masters from the inside. In the readiness of time, we come to use our own true insight to test and expand upon the exchanges (mono) of our Zen ancestors. Koans are experiments to explore these characters and bring them to life in this time and culture. With enough experience we begin to expand on their work with our own insight and style.

The Rinzairoku really dives primarily into the characters of Obaku, Rinzai’s teacher, Rinzai and his “side kick,” Fuke. Here is where we really get to know the founder of our lineage. You could say that we dive, dive, dive into the depths of this one ancient worthy. The section of the Rinzairoku called “Teaching the Assembly” is brilliant and relatively easy to understand because they are discourses. These discourses talk about philosophy and practice in very descriptive terms. Now that we’ve turned a corner and entered the section titled the Kamben (Cross Examinations), we dive into the heart of Rinzai. We are leaving the discursive behind and through our examination will be learning what it is like to play, in Rinzai fashion, with the material discussed in the discourses. Even though Rinzai demonstrates how to play with the material, he is nonetheless deadly seriousness about it. By the time you get to this part of Rinzai training, I hope you feel yourself becoming deeply intimate with Rinzai and the characters close to him. Koans related to this section prompt us to find the same sharpness, wit and playful spirit as Rinzai himself. Here we must learn to hone our ability to find balance quickly, while cutting straight to the matter, leaving everything else aside. It’s like a cutting board where you learn to select only the prime cuts.

Obaku is the abbot of the temple at which Rinzai is training. In this case, Obaku comes to the kitchen and asks the hanzu (head rice-cook), “What are you doing?” It was obvious that the hanzu was sorting the rice for the monks. So why is Obaku asking, “What are you doing?” Already, I’m on guard (laughter), and so should the hanzu be. With his question, Obaku’s already announcing, “I’m here to play.” On the first pass, the hanzu says, “Hey, I’m sorting rice!” No fault yet, though he only gives a purely relative response to the question. The first part of the koan is, how could the hanzu have responded to Obaku’s first inquiry that wouldn’t have been responding from the relative.

Obaku follows up with, “How much do they eat in a day?” How much rice are they putting away? Of course this is another relative question, but it contains opportunity around the question “how much?” The hanzu is being invited to respond in a “Zen” fashion, to show a little bit of his style in response to Obaku’s playfulness. However, the monk doesn’t bite. He responds once more in the relative again and says, “Oh, they eat two and a half kokus!” presumably a lot of rice. Undoubtedly, at this point, Obaku’s gets fed up. He’s come there to play and the monk’s not playing at all. Finally, he gives the hanzu an unmistakeable opening when he asks, “Isn’t that too much?” Why is this question an unmistakable opening?

This whole drama plays around a line from the Shin Shin Ming (Verses on the Faith Mind), by Sosan Ganchi Zenji, which goes: “The Way is perfect like vast space where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.” If nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess, how can there be too much? However, the monk doesn’t get it and says, “Oh, I’m afraid it’s not enough.” Not only does he not catch it, he steps right in the shit by continuing to talk about “enough.” By now the hanzu should realize that Obaku is coming from the absolute. Obaku hits the poor monk, hoping he will wake up.

In Obaku’s temple, this kind of exchange is a relatively common occurrence. People are getting slapped around all the time and not just with a keisaku (waking stick). They are getting pushed, slapped, shoved, pulled, shouted at. It’s just the way they played! If I went around pushing, slapping and playing the way they did, oh, god — we would read about it in the press! So we don’t expect such behavior even in the Dokusan room. How we do Zen here at Chobo-Ji is not much like these guys used to do it. Boys will be boys, and they all pulled, slapped, yelled, screamed and rolled around in the dirt. They were like kids playing! Everyone took a turn being a little bruised physically and emotionally, but overall I think they were having fun seeing who could best the other.

Being hanzu is a relatively important post in a Zen temple, which means that this monk had been around for a while. Nonetheless, this time at least, he got caught stuck in the relative. Each line of this story can be considered a koan. How would you have responded at each point? Could you have bested Obaku?

The hanzu tells the whole incident to Rinzai, “Look, Obaku asked me what I was doing? I said I was sorting rice. Then he asked me how much they eat and I told him. Then he asked me whether it was enough
and I told him no, they could eat more and he hit me! I don’t know what was going on!” It is natural that the hanzu would consult with Rinzai, the sharpest kid on the block. Rinzai tells the cook, “Look, I’ll go investigate him for you.”

Rinzai sees right through the story and likely says to himself, “Oh, I get it, Obaku was really being so obvious with the hanzu.” Did Rinzai help out the hanzu one iota? No! (laughter) Rinzai knows the hanzu will have to figure it out for himself. Rinzai must be thinking, “Look, you’ll really have to take care of this yourself but I’m looking forward to the opportunity to play this out with Obaku. What fun!”

So he stands next to Obaku and reveals what the monk has told him, and he says to Obaku, “The hanzu didn’t get it. But I beg you, Osho, tell me how you would have responded if you were in the hanzu’s position.” Rinzai totally hits the ball back into Obaku’s court. Rinzai jump-starts the exchange with, “Isn’t that too much?” He naturally begins where the previous dialogue left off, and offers the most obvious place to jump back in. Obaku takes the bait; he has no choice; he’s the abbot, after all. He has to play. Maybe he could have said, “I have a headache,” but this of course is a certain kind of play! So, Obaku says, “You could have said, ‘Tomorrow we will eat again.’” And with this approach he gets out of the trap of too much or too little, but Rinzai sees an opening and says, “Why tomorrow?” The last line of the Shin Shin Ming goes, “Where mind is not divided from its own thinking, words fail for the Way is fundamentally undivided.” In it, there is no yesterday, today and no tomorrow.” Oh, oh! Obaku stepped out of one trap and fell into another. He talked about tomorrow as if it were real. Put a piece of tomorrow in my hand! Put a piece of the past in my hand…you can’t do it! It’s fine to talk about tomorrow but be careful to remember that yesterday and tomorrow are not real. Even today is just a concept. You could say, “Now” but since “now” is overused, I don’t know what to say. There’s just this.

Rinzai says, “Why tomorrow? Why not eat it right now!” and then he slaps Obaku. I think Obaku was used to getting slapped by Rinzai. And I’m sure Obaku was laughing when he says, “This lunatic came here and pulled the tiger’s whiskers!” In other words, “Yes, you’re right! I said the word ‘tomorrow’, you caught me.” Obaku then shouts, (loud shout), turns and leaves. Another koan can be found in exploring what is that shout about and why Obaku turns and leaves? Is the game over? I’ll tell you this, the game’s over when the game’s over. It doesn’t much matter who has won or who’s on top, but it’s important to know when the game’s done. Therefore, when the little dokusan bell rings, don’t push it! Come back another time. (laughter) And that’s just fine. It doesn’t matter if you feel like you’ve won or lost, whether you’ve got it, or feel lost. The important point is that we engaged with each other in the Dokusan room. Perhaps we didn’t understand each other or perhaps we were both “on” and playful, but this is quite secondary. The fact that we engaged and both made a sincere effort to be clear, direct, succinct in investigating this matter is great practice for us both, and builds on our capacity to realize No Mind.

Later, Isan asked Kyozan, “What was the intention of these two venerables?” Kyozan said, “What do you think, Osho?” Isan said, “You could have said, ‘Tomorrow we will eat again.’” And with this approach he gets out of the trap of too much or too little, but Rinzai sees an opening and says, “Why tomorrow?” The last line of the Shin Shin Ming goes, “Where mind is not divided from its own thinking, words fail for the Way is fundamentally undivided.” In it, there is no yesterday, today and no tomorrow.” Oh, oh! Obaku stepped out of one trap and fell into another. He talked about tomorrow as if it were real. Put a piece of tomorrow in my hand! Put a piece of the past in my hand…you can’t do it! It’s fine to talk about tomorrow but be careful to remember that yesterday and tomorrow are not real. Even today is just a concept. You could say, “Now” but since “now” is overused, I don’t know what to say. There’s just this.

Being able to see this empty, seamless indivisible reality while at the same time learning to play freely with yesterday, today and tomorrow, self and other, right and wrong, life and death, too much and too little…we are freer. With this freedom it becomes increasingly easier to be caring and giving; moreover, we find our fears and instincts for survival take a back seat. Giving ourselves to the Dharma, we gain freedom, actualize a caring open heart and lose concern for how long we live or how much we have. Sesshin is a wonderful place to practice; let’s not waste it.

With gassho,

Genjo

Closing Incense Poem

Autumn Sesshin 2012

Mountains, Moon and Sound,
No talk of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.
Does the little pisser have the True Eye?
Bald Eagle transits from East to West,
Passing over without trace.

Rohatsu Sesshin

Dec. 1st - 9th, 2012

Please make your reservations by Nov. 19th. The cost of sesshin is $390 (less dues). No part-time participation is allowed. We will leave from our Practice Center parking lot, behind 1727 S. Horton St., by 4 PM on Saturday, Dec. 1st. Please be at the Zendo by 3 PM so that we can pack up and make carpool arrangements to Camp Indianola. Formal zazen will begin after a light dinner. Rohatsu ends around 10 AM on Sunday, Dec. 9th. Please don’t plan departure flights before 2 PM. From airport take Light Rail to the Beacon Hill stop or call Shuttle Express 800- 487-7433.
# Important Dates to Remember

**Daily zazen, M-F, 5:30 AM; Sat. 6:30 AM; M & W, 7:30 PM, Sun. 6:30 PM**

**Dharma Talks, Sundays: 11/4, 11/18, 12/16 - 7:30 PM**

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Awakening the Dreamer” at St. Marks Cathedral</td>
<td>Nov. 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 1-5pm</td>
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<td>Dharma Dialogue, with Genko Ni-Osho</td>
<td>Nov. 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 7 - 8:30pm</td>
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<td>Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)</td>
<td>Nov. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 5-11:30am</td>
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<td>Book Group, “12 Steps to Compassion”</td>
<td>Nov. 11&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 12 - 2pm</td>
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<td>Thanksgiving Holiday, no group zazen</td>
<td>Nov. 23&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; - 27&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Rohatsu Sesshin at Camp Indianola</td>
<td>Dec. 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; - 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Toya Potluck, “Night to Break all Rules”</td>
<td>Dec. 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;, 6 - 9pm</td>
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<td>New Years Holiday, no group zazen</td>
<td>Dec. 25&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; - Jan. 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>New Years Day Chanting Ceremony and Potluck</td>
<td>Jan. 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;, 2013, 10am - noon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dharma Talk and Dialogue by Rev. Kojun Hull of Great Vow</td>
<td>Jan. 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;, 8:30-10:00am</td>
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<td>Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)</td>
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<td>Mini-sesshin (half-day Zen retreat)</td>
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**Why we Sweep**

Poem by Rick Muken Proctor

From dust we come and go.  
In a cloud we sweep.  
Seeing no path, we clear the way for others.