Dear members and friends,

It has been a busy summer for me, starting with a trip to Ledyard CT in early June for a three-day sesshin, where there was a cockpit fire that required an emergency landing on my commuter flight to Hartford. Speaking of fires, as I write this, it feels like the West is burning, with major fires in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California and Montana. Flying home from a three-day sesshin at Lake Chelan in July, we could clearly see the Wolverine (Holden Village) fire that was building then and has now consumed 65,000 acres in late August. I’m just about to leave for a trip to Montana to pick up some of Genki Roshi’s things to bring back to Seattle, but there is so much smoke in the Bitterroot Valley today that there is less than one mile visibility, so I won’t be flying. As of this date, three people on a fire crew have perished, and our hearts go out to everyone impacted by these fires. The effects of global warming are having an impact on us all today. It is time to radically shift to renewable resources wherever possible. I hope to explore solar electric panels for our property.

Summer sesshin the last week of June was strong with 28 participants. Ishin was our Shika (host/manager) for this sesshin, making sure we all knew where we were meant to be. The Tenzo (cook) duties were shared by Seishun, Shodo and Kyosei, meaning we always had delicious offerings. Rinzan kept time as our Jikijitsu, and Daikan and Sendo kept the beat as our Densu (chant leaders). Tendo was our lead Jisha (tea server), as Seiho was mostly absent dealing with his mother’s passing. Zenka served as my Inji (abbot assistant). By the end of sesshin our garden looked immaculate, which matched our brightly shining kokoro (heart-mind). I did teisho on The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women and included in this issue is a transcription from the sixth day.

In mid August, Jion and I attended the first of what I hope will be many Native American Bearing Witness retreats in the Black Hills of SD. You can listen to my account of this deep encounter by listing to the Dharma Talk I gave on this subject at Chobo-Ji’s Podcast. If you weren’t present for this live, please listen to this one, but be prepared to dip into the reality of both physical and cultural genocide of the first peoples to settle this continent. If we don’t learn what these ancient indigenous cultures have to teach us about harmonizing with Mother Earth, our species will not survive its adolescence. You can also read Jion’s account printed in this issue; be sure to check out the links associated with her article.

On July 12, Chobo-Ji, with Genko Ni-Osho’s coordination, hosted a very enjoyable evening with Insight Meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg.

In addition to these offerings, you will find in this issue new posts for the Fall, instructions for those who wish to participate in the Fall Intensive, an announcement for Autumn Sesshin (a great place to reconnect to Mother Earth, and be cleansed and restored by rooting in deep, dark, vast Mu) at the end of September, and several reports from various sangha members.

As the rains begin to return, may the fires of this summer be quenched and may we all cool down in preparation for autumn.

With gassho,
Genjo
Being with Dying

I'd heard of Roshi Joan Halifax’s book *Being With Dying*, some time ago and only had a mild interest in it. I figured that eventually, I’d get around to reading it, but had no specific thought about when. As it turned out, I reached out for her book on July 4th, 2015, having discovered a reason and motivation to do so.

From the very first paragraph of her book, I could relate to her work. In the forward she writes, “‘Being with dying’ is a phrase that aptly describes the human condition. We may be unique among species in being aware of our mortality. Although the capacity to contemplate death is an essential human trait, most people actively eschew thinking about how their life might end.”

On June 11, 2015, I was supposed to be heading to SeaTac, catching a flight to Columbus Ohio. I was scheduled to do a keynote-speaking event at a convention for fellow recovering addicts. The moment was not to be had.

At 10:30am, I received a call from my brother. It was about what was described as a “simple” medical procedure, but it appeared to have gone badly… so badly, in fact, that there was the very real possibility that my Mom wasn’t going to live.

Though I hadn’t read it, in the book, I naturally and intuitively practiced what she called the “Three Tenets,” developed by Joan Halifax’s teacher Tetsugen Bernie Glassman. She writes, “The first tenet - not-knowing (or no-knowing), invites us to give up fixed ideas about others and ourselves and to open the spontaneous mind of the beginner. The second tenet, bearing witness, calls us to be present with the suffering and joy in the world, as it is, without judgment or any attachment to outcome. The third tenet, compassionate action, calls us to turn or return to the world with the commitment to free others and ourselves from suffering.”

From the moment that I received the call, getting in from the airport, arriving at the Hospital in Atlanta at 3am, and meeting a kind and caring nurse by the name of Charlie, it was all “No-knowing.” It was all discovery channel, playing out moment-to-moment. What was I going to find? What was wrong? How can I help? Will I be able to help? Will my mom make it? How will I manifest loving presence?

Steadily the answers to my questions shifted from “no knowing” to “bearing witness.” It was bearing witness to my mom’s breath. Bearing witness to her needs. Bearing witness to measures that might help her live. Bearing witness to my brothers and a few people close to my mom; being in deep pain, confusion and at times agony, because we were powerless over what was transpiring. It was bearing witness to the fact that every single day during the course of the seven days, I saw men dressed in very nice suits remove at least one person a day who had exhausted his or her last breath.

In *Being With Dying*, Joan Halifax points out that we are in one of two possible states. We are either passively dying or actively, and the lesson of my life is that there’s a thin line between those states. She also points out there’s something of a myth that we hold to because of the nature of our culture and how unfamiliar we are in examining or relating to dying. We have this goal that we’re inadvertently striving for.

In the hospital, one of the main doctors working with my mom, after one of the dialysis attempts used to try and filter her blood failed, sat across the table from all of us. I was crying. My brother was deeply upset. My mom’s friends were visibly shaken. We were losing hope, as we were asked about advanced directives and how we felt about “Do not resuscitate,” if the moment came.

The doctor looks at all of us and said, “I’m sorry if you feel that I’m taking away your hope. Here in ICU hope isn’t static as some people think of it. Here, hope is measured by the moment.”
And this is where the “Third Tenet” of “compassionate action,” “iron person” and “wooden puppet” all come in. In each moment it was working the situation with “giving no fear.”

That brings me to two moments. One I met as the “iron man.” It came when I listed everything that was going on as more extraordinary means were being considered. I spent all but one night with my mom. I was excessively intimate with the problems, pain and challenges. It was the blood clot, the hematoma, the kidney failure, the liver failure, the bruising on her body because it could no longer heal itself; with or without assistance. The doctors were saying these were the effects of metastasized colon cancer. After reading the list out loud to everyone, I asked a simple question… What’s the goal?

We all wanted to give my mother dignity and grace. We moved her to hospice on that day.

And this is where I met with the “wooden puppet.” It was going with the flow, without knowing, not giving into fear. For me it was surreal.

In ICU everything was measured, monitored, somehow disruptive and loud. In hospice, it was a breathing mask, the sound of air and comfort meds. There was no struggle. It was simply following the moment, wherever it led, and making no judgments about it.

And so there we were. My mom and I. I sat in zazen with my mom, her hand in my hand. I was playing music from India that was calm and gentle. After a bit, I realized that she liked it okay but didn’t love it. On my computer, I made a playlist of music that I knew my mom loved. It was Janis Joplin and Eric Clapton.

I started with “Mercedes Benz.” As soon as the first words were heard, my mom’s breathing changed. It was somehow lighter. As I continued to sit with my mother, the woman that I loved, admired and could not imagine my life without… I held her hand as she exhaled her last breath. It happened on the very last note of a song called “Wonderful Tonight,” by Eric Clapton.

And as I continued bearing witness and as Joan Halifax puts it, literally saw my Mother become an ancestor, I stood wearing the rakusu given to me by my teacher, where on the back he wrote, “Unchained to preferences,” and “Like a dream….” which is a verse from the Diamond Sutra. Through my tears and sorrow, I began to chant the Heart Sutra.

And for me the next stage of “Knowing,” began and ended. I didn’t know that I was going to have to begin the process of bearing witness to my own tears, sorrow and grief.

In the following days, I returned to Chobo-Ji with the cremated remains of my mother. I returned to the embrace and hugs of those attending Summer Sesshin. I returned to see her picture on the altar and Dai Segaki chanting being given voice with people that I’m coming to know, in a very caring way.

Three short months before, she was in the zendo, watching my teacher ordain me as a Rinzai Zen Buddhist priest. It was a moment that was 25 years in the making and she got to see it… and the interior of my robes that are accented and lined with the fabric of the brown robe she made for me, when I went to my first Zen temple to live. She also got to meet and talk with people in the sangha and experience the beauty of Chobo-Ji. She really enjoyed her time here.

I’m still grieving in my own way. I am extremely appreciative of the support and warmth of so many here at Chobo-Ji. I continue to follow the practices and reflect on the words from Being With Dying. Whether we or someone we know is passively or actively dying, it’s a powerful read. It helps me every day and I will end sharing my experience as Roshi Halifax ends the book.

“Life and death are of supreme importance. Time passes swiftly and opportunity is lost. Let us awaken. awaken. . . .

Do not squander your life.”

With nine bows,

Mudo Seiko Morris

Black Hills Retreat

One day, while looking through the tourist guides about Seattle, I remembered my first association to the word “Seattle.” This happened when I got to know that Genjo came from Seattle, and I had no idea where it was, but what I knew was that I once have read the speech made by Chief Seattle, which I remembered as brilliant and elegant. As I wanted to use my study and practice time in Seattle in a meaningful way and connected to the Bearing Witness Retreat I would attend at the end of my stay, I started to ask questions: Where is the gravesite of Chief Seattle? While I was trying to find traces of Native Americans in Seattle, an article in the Seattle Times caught my eyes: A press conference at the Duwamish Longhouse was held. The recognition as an Indian nation the Duwamish had once had and then was withdrawn, again was denied to this first people. Where was this longhouse? Not far from Chobo-Ji, Edwin and I found the longhouse situated on a noisy street. We were lucky to be received by the event coordinator Linda Dombrowksi, who offered us a guided tour through the museum part and the big hall of the beautiful longhouse, answering our questions and accompanying us through the park opposite to the longhouse with pieces of art, meaningful places along the river Duwamish, a sacred tree circle and more. The following Sunday Genjo would accompany me, and we attended a part of the Sunday program: sharing traditional food, storytelling, dancing. Young and old guests were sitting together.

From this meeting a touching exchange began to unfold: Genjo and I, together with the sangha, were announced as Zen Peacemakers who would offer a heart ceremony to the Duwamish people. Which we joyfully did! Together six sangha members drove to the longhouse one Monday evening, found a good place for the zabutons and zafus at a broad bench along the long side of the big hall, and Ken Walkman, the great-grandson of Chief Seattle, welcomed us warmly. An artful tobacco pouch in the colors black and red was passed to Genjo to take to the retreat in the Black Hills. We from our side presented our gift consisting in a tobacco pouch, which has been lying on the altar in the...
forms of exploitation, burdened with the collective and family shadow of Nazi cruelty – my grandparents were owners of several factories and used slave laborers – feels so close to the natural, warm, authentic, sincere, proud and direct way of the indigenous peoples I’ve met. They have a way of entering into dialogue and expressing themselves in Mother-Earth-spirituality with a deeply grounded connection to minerals, plants, animals on a basis of equality, for the sake of the future generations.

Can you imagine how much this adventure, this experience meant to me? It was wondrous to be allowed to undertake such a long journey, first to my home temple and then to South Dakota to take part in a retreat. This retreat was in the making for over a decade, intensely for the last five years. I got to see and feel the landscapes of the Badlands, listen to the talk and songs of Gus, a Native American tour guide on our bus, witness the terrible memorial of Wounded Knee, and leave a tobacco pouch in the wire fence. Can you imagine how it felt to embrace Zen Peacemaker friends, with some of whom I shared more then one Auschwitz Bearing Retreat? Experiences like these bind you together forever, and now this happened at the campsite in the Black Hills. There was a huge white tent set up for meeting, eating, listening to eye witnesses, prayers, songs, music performances, a dance, attending a 12 step group and much more together. The organizing effort was amazing and most skillful!

Our mornings started with a ceremony in a huge circle around a perpetual campfire: Paying respect to the seven directions, expressing the privilege to be there, and honoring all relatives. Every Native American was invited by Tiokasin Ghosthorse to gather in the east of the circle to step forward to speak from their hearts. Oh, how I miss the smell of the fresh grass, the sight of the close forest, the smoke and the colorful people, standing or hurrying to take their place in the circle.

The speeches, talks and eyewitness accounts we listened to, I liked so much and wouldn’t miss a single one! We heard from Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Chas Lewett, Charmaine White Face, Tuffy Sierra, Steven Newcomb, Birgil Kills Straight, Beatrice Long Visitor, and many more. They all let us take part in their life journey, education and research. We heard of their suffering, spiritual growth, and social-political engagement. They shared their resistance, resilience, writing and ceremonies, always brought forward with humor, a big-heart and a big-mind. Their sadness and worry for their family and people was heart breaking. They allowed us to become deeply aware that their native peoples have faced physical and cultural genocide. Yet, always they remained grateful and humble, praying to and for Mother Earth to help us all. This impressed me most deeply. I so admired their surrender and determination.

The tobacco pouch from the Duwamish people Genjo and I gave to Charmaine White Face, a mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, spokesperson for the Sioux Nation Treaty Council, and author of the book – Indigenous Nations Rights in the Balance. Mrs. White Face founded Defenders of the Black Hills and helped found Clean Up the Mines. She is a physical scientist and biologist. Charmaine gently received the pouch, promising to honor it on her altar.

I loved giving gifts in the form of the tobacco pouches I had prepared. In addition to our time with Charmaine, one of the most moving encounters was with Chas Lewett, a courageous and powerful young Indian woman and peace activist in Rapid City. I gave her a pouch after hearing her story and
Mountain Practice
by Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick

I went to the mountains to find my way into the heart of things; to drink deeply from glacier fed waters; to walk with the trees; to gaze out into that wilderness where the mountains march endlessly into the distance fading into blue layers. All routes into the mountains follow rivers and as I made my way into the North Cascades I followed the Skagit River. In the flat rich loam of the Skagit Valley, the river cuts a wide muddy green slow path. Right on the edge of the Puget Sound, the winds blow constantly off the water and one easily frays into just existing in the midst of the wind working one’s way east.

“Because green mountains walk, they are permanent. Although they walk more swiftly than the wind, someone in the mountains does not notice or understand it. “In the mountains” means the blossoming of the entire world. People outside the mountains do not notice or understand the mountains’ walking. Those without eyes to see mountains cannot notice, understand, see, or hear this reality.” – Dōgen Zenji, Mountains and Waters Sutra

As the flatlands transition into forestland and begin their inevitable rise into the mountains, the river too transforms, becoming increasingly blue-green, shallower, rockier and more lively. The hills in the distance resolve themselves from watercolor diffused blue shapes into spiky tree green mounds that poke out above the valleys the rivers have carved through them. Vast patches of desolation, gouged out of these mountain forests, reflect humanity’s needs, needs seemingly without limits. When you are in the midst of the foothills and mountains, following the river path, these scars feel like wounds on your very body. You feel as if humanity’s appetite knows no limits and must be fed regardless of cost. It is much harder to feel oneness with those who have caused these scars, than it is to feel a connection with the landscape that you are part of. Deeply question our how our actions, directly or indirectly, have led to these wounds.

All of us can appreciate that we must be responsible for our actions — whether it’s in the context of our work, our family, or our relationships. What is harder to understand is that the simplest of events also affects the environment. To realize "you and I are the same thing" points to our identity with the whole universe. It also underlines the great responsibility that comes with being human. — John Daido Loori, The Way of Mountains and Rivers

The foothills give way to towering edifices with increasing amounts of snow crowning their rocky peaks. Clouds seem to hover above them like silent, ephemeral alien beings. The river now is exuberant, moving vibrantly over rocks, sometimes pooling under shady trees, other times falling in swift rapids. The glacier melt has transformed it into pure blue with flecks of white from its path through the stones of the mountains. The river’s continuous activity is withheld by dams; this landscape has been transformed to power the city and the needs of humans throughout this region. We marvel at the heroic efforts of those who built these gigantic cement structures out here in the wooded wilderness, while shaking our heads at the imposition inflicted upon the landscape. It is always this dichotomy: what is that imposition in the dead of winter as we heat our homes and read our books in the light they have made possible?

Continued on next page…
You may not notice that you study the green mountains, using numerous worlds of phenomena as your standards. Clearly examine the green mountains’ walking and your own walking. Examine walking backward and backward walking, and investigate the fact that walking forward and backward has never stopped since the very moment before form arose, since the time of the King of the Empty Eon. – Dōgen Zenji, *Mountains and Waters Sutra*

Situated in the cool mountain air the sounds of myriad birds, insects, woodland creatures, chuckling brooks, wind shaking the trees blur into undifferentiated aural vibrations. It was hot this summer, even at four thousand feet amongst the trees on the western side of the Cascade Mountains. Having scrambled over rocks beyond a narrow rocky trail below Sourdough Mountain, I sat and watched the continuous fall of Sourdough Creek from the rocks above. It seems to slow down and become this wavier white streamer undulating in the wind and then snaps into the deep focus of countless drops of water spraying out from the rocks above. Put yourself in the place of a fish in its water home suddenly shooting over that edge and into free-fall still fully enveloped in water. Put yourself into all possible views of Sourdough Creek falling down that rocky mountainside.

The nature of the mountains is completely different when we separate ourselves from them as observers, and when we are the mountains with the whole body and mind. — John Daido Loori, *The Way of Mountains and Rivers*

Moving along the forest roads where for mile after mile you seldom see another person, any sense of separateness begins to fade away. The need is no longer as necessary, and simply absorbing all of the sensory stimulation becomes sufficient. The butterflies and dragonflies that float alongside or perhaps hitch a ride on your handlebars are your fellow travelers. The sky in its multitude of conditions is better than any painting and it is always there and it is always your world. The closer you get to the bare essentials, the less there is that stands in the way. There is no silence in the woods but there can be a deficit of the sounds of humanity and the distractions of perceived distinctions. Is that the knocking of a woodpecker or a raven clacking its beak? Sitting here in these woods it doesn’t seem to make much of a difference.

Thus, the views of all beings are not the same. Question this matter now. Are there many ways to see one thing, or is it a mistake to see many forms as one thing? Pursue this beyond the limit of pursuit. Accordingly, endeavors in practice-realization of the way are not limited to one or two kinds. The thoroughly actualized realm has one thousand kinds and ten thousand ways. – Dōgen zenji, *Mountains and Waters Sutra*

How is it that we came to this idea that nature is a place that we have to travel into to rejuvenate ourselves, as if “nature” is this thing “out there” that is pure and completely distinct from us. If we can come to see that there are myriad views of everything and that all of them do not ‘add up’ to reality but merely point towards it, can we not also come to see that our cities and suburbs are not separate from nature. And yet, and yet… Why is it so much easier to forget yourself amidst the sounds of the roaring river, the calling birds, the tapping of rain on your tent, the quaking aspens that, in a light breeze, sound so much like a gentle spring rain? John Daido Loori reminds us: “Because so many of us nowadays are city dwellers, it is easy to romanticize nature at a distance. Sitting in an apartment somewhere in Midtown as we plan a summer adventure to Yellowstone Park, it is important to remember that wild nature is also in our backyard.”

Pursue this beyond the limit of pursuit.

The entirety of this essay can be read at: http://draftymountainhut.com/2015/09/01/mountain-practice/

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**The Heart Sutra, Old and New**

*by Anne Sendo Howells*

We chant it every day, sometimes more than once, joining our voices in its sounds, strange and other-worldly even when our text is English plus bits of Sanskrit, and triply so when it is our Japanese version’s Japanese sounds transliterating Chinese characters and the bits of Sanskrit. For the beginning Zen practitioner, much of the Heart Sutra makes little sense, but the chanting is compelling.

Explanations abound, of course, and now we can seek them in a marvelous new book by Kazuzaki Tanahashi, The *Heart Sutra*: A Comprehensive Guide to the Classic of Mahayana Buddhism (Shambala Press, 2014). A great gift of this book is that Tanahashi not only offers his own inspired interpretation but gives us the resources to go through the text for ourselves, Sanskrit word by Sanskrit word and Chinese character by Chinese character, pondering the ranges of meaning which live in each. Along the way we can examine 22 different versions in a range of Asian languages plus four different English translations. The last of these was published, after years of discussion, by Tanahashi and Joan Halifax in 2002. Tanahashi places it at the beginning of this new book; it represents Joan Halifax and his long-considered conclusions about the text’s crucial concepts and gives English speakers a version which brings out the sutra’s poetry while making its meanings more accessible, though still challenging.

This isn’t all. The book is indeed the comprehensive guide its title promises, so Tanahashi recounts the early history of the sutra and sorts through the scholarly arguments about the chronology of its many versions. He shows how it made its way from origins in the Sanskrit Prajna Paramita literature which developed with early Mahayana Buddhism in India around the beginning of the first millennium, to the formulation of the Heart Sutra as a separate text in China between the fifth and seventh centuries CE, to its “retranslation” back into Sanskrit and its spread through Asia and then the whole world. He examines the various scripts in which it has been written and provides photos of them, including one in pictographs for illiterate Japanese peasants and an artistically expressive German version. And as a special treat for those of us interested in
science, he has assembled four contemporary scientists to speak in their own words about the connections they find between the Heart Sutra’s conception of “emptiness” and the insights of today’s physics, astrophysics, cell biology, and neuropsychology.

In the long version of this review which I wrote at the end of this spring’s Intensive, I had a chance to explore the work done by the two greatest Chinese compilers and translators of the materials which ended up in the Heart Sutra, the stellar Indian/central Asian linguist Kumarajiva and the Chinese Xuanzang. I first got interested in both of them when I visited places where they lived during a Silk Road trip I took in 2004, little knowing that a decade later the Heart Sutra would become part of my daily life, and I’ve enjoyed meeting them again. I also tackled a couple of the interpretive choices Tanahashi and Halifax make in their lovely new translation, and I want to speak briefly about those here.

The most startling of these choices is their decision to translate shunyata (which our English translation leaves as Sanskrit), and to translate it not as “emptiness” but as “boundlessness.” So their translation reads, “form is not separate from boundlessness; boundlessness is not separate from form.”

And “O Shariputra, boundlessness is the nature of all things.” When I first read these lines, I felt relieved: finally a word which says what I tend to plug in for shunyata while always going through mental motions like “not really empty, but . . .” Tanahashi is eloquent about the reasons for discarding the negative and even nihilistic connotations of the English “emptiness,” and he makes a good case for “boundlessness” as a justifiable translation both of shunyata and kong, the Chinese character chosen by Kumarajiva (probably) and Xuanzang. As for me, with “boundlessness is the nature of all things,” I luxuriate in a sense of expansive release.

But then I think, something’s missing – the challenge of “emptiness.” “Emptiness” forces me to ask, can I really give up the comforts of clear outlines, distinctions, belief in the distinctiveness of my self? Do I really want to do this? Why? – Well, because all that is an illusion which keeps me stuck in something pretty narrow. “Boundary-less, “boundlessness,” openness,” “nonseparation,” “oneness” – that’s the reality. And having both words – as I can, by keeping shunyata – helps me approach it.

A parallel choice by Tanahashi and Halifax is to let the idea of freedom permeate the sutra. They accomplish this primarily by eliminating most of the repeated “no’s” (the Japanese “mu”). Here’s a sample of how this works, in their lines 17-22:

Boundlessness is not limited by form, nor by feelings, perceptions, inclinations, or discernment. It is free of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind; free of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and any object of mind; free of sensory realms, including the realm of the mind. It is free of ignorance and the end of ignorance.

Our translation reads, in contrast:

Hence in sunyata, no form, no feeling, no thought, no volition, no consciousness, no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no seeing, no hearing, no smelling, no tasting, no touching, no thinking; no world of sight, no world of consciousness,

Our “no’s” almost all match Sanskrit “na,” Chinese “wu,” and Japanese “mu.” Is it a relief not to hear so many of them, drumming in the voice and ear? Or do you find something wonderfully bracing about the “no’s”? The feeling of freedom is certainly present in our version: in moving beyond the separate self with its often annoying eyes and ears, “I” am freed. Grateful, then, to Tanahashi and Halifax for insisting that “freedom” is at the heart of the Heart Sutra, I am happy that their new translation has been added to the repertoire available to us.

In his preface, Tanahashi hopes “those of you who are used to chanting the common English versions of the sutra will find our translation helpful and thought-provoking.” I’ve found it just that. This and the myriad other riches of Tanahashi’s book make it one I’ll keep.

Our translation has been added to the repertoire of all the English versions of the Heart Sutra. I am happy that their new version makes an eloquent about the reasons for discarding them. Hence in sunyata, no form, no feeling, no thought, no volition, no consciousness, no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no seeing, no hearing, no smelling, no tasting, no touching, no thinking; no world of sight, no world of consciousness.

Bhadda-Kundalaksesa Cannot Answer Sixth Day Summer Sesshin, 2015

Bhadda-Kundalaksesa was a wandering Jain ascetic famous for her debating skills. Whenever she came to a new place, she set a branch of rose apple in the ground and put out the word that whoever wished to debate her should trample the branch.

When she was 70 years old, she came to Savatti, and Buddha’s disciple Shariputra came forward to engage her in a public debate. First she asked a series of philosophical questions of Shariputra, and he was able to answer them all. Then he said, “You have asked many questions. I would like to ask only one.” She said, “Please ask, venerable one.” He asked, “One—what is that?” She was unable to answer.

He said, “If you don’t even know that, how could you know anything else?” and began to teach her the Dharma. She was so moved by the teachings that she fell at his feet and asked to take refuge with him, but instead he told her to come and meet the Buddha.

The Buddha recognized her spiritual maturity and said to her, “One phrase that brings peace is better than a thousand words that have no use.”
When she heard there words she was freed and became an arhat. Then the Buddha ordained her, saying simply, “Bhadda. Come.”

Study Questions: How do you know when to stop talking? How do you give up the ‘knowledge’ that keeps you apart from others? What does ‘not knowing’ have to do with intimacy?

Bhadda was a wandering Jain ascetic, famous for her debating skills. Jainism is a religion that is still alive today. I understand that there are five million adherents and it dates back to before the time of the historical Buddha. Strong asceticism is part of its doctrine. It is principally a doctrine to cause no harm. A lot of the Jainist statues I see around the world look like Buddha statues, sitting in full lotus. We can even think of it as a kind of sister religion to Buddhism.

Kundalaskesa became a Jain ascetic because of the following story. Much of this story is probably mythology, but is relevant to understanding this case. It is said that she saw a High Born who was also a thief about to be executed for his crimes. He was so handsome that she saved him from execution by declaring that she wanted to marry him, which she did. This action somehow excused someone from execution! (laughter). So they were married but the thief said, “Dear wife, please dress up in your finest clothes and your finest jewels; I have a debt to a mountain deity that I must pay and I want you to come with me.” She

Shariputra came to engage her in debate and she tested him with many questions. He passed each one much to her satisfaction and, perhaps, surprise. She was very moved that he was so sharp. It wasn’t that he was coming from such a “learned” place, but he could just naturally could respond to her questions, spontaneously, deeply, intimately, succinctly and clearly. She was both moved and impressed. Shariputra said, “I have one question for you.” She says, “Please ask, venerable one.” And he asked, “The One — what is that?” This is like Zen Master Gutei holding up a single finger in response to all comers. What does it mean?

What is this One? Or simply, “What is this?” To this question, she could not respond. For all her asceticism, deep learning and debating skills, she was stumped by this core question. This One — what is this?

Seeing that she was unable to answer him, Shariputra said, if you cannot respond to this question, how can you know anything else?” and began to expound something of the Buddha Dharma. She was so moved by the teachings and her own failure to be able to respond to such a simple question, that she fell at his feet and asked to take refuge with him, and become his disciple. Instead of accepting her as a student, he said, “No, you need to meet this fellow Buddha.” So she came with him and met the historical Buddha and he immediately recognized her spiritual maturity. Even though she couldn’t respond to this fundamental question, he could certainly see that she’d been through hell and back. Certainly it was clear to Buddha that her asceticism, study and suffering had taught her a lot, and that she was ripe for a deep insight. By the time she met the Shariputra and the Historical Buddha, she was like a fruit ready to fall.

The Buddha said the following phrase, (and this is referring to Shariputra’s question, “What is this One?”) “One phrase that brings peace is better than a thousand words that have no use.” Today, from a Zen perspective, the same can be said about the Tripitaka, the Three Baskets of Buddhist Canon, which is a library that could fit in this room and contains the Sutras, Commentaries and Regulations. However, at least from the Zen perspective, Buddha would say that this one question — What is This? — surpasses all doctrine.

When she heard these words, “one phrase that brings peace is better than a thousand words,” she had a breakthrough, a big shift in her perspective. It was immediate. The fruit fell. The historical Buddha recognized this. I’m sure tears were streaming from her cheeks. He ordained her on the spot by simply saying, “Buddha, come!” Come and join us, be embraced, be fully accepted; you are seen. The story concludes that she was at once freed and became an arhat, which is to say a buddha, fully awake, no more transcending birth and death; no need even for birth even in the celestial realms. Transcending birth and death entirely, the fruit really fell.

Now I ask you sincerely, what would she say, when asked the question, “What is This?” What is this One that is everything seen and unseen? How do you think she would respond after this breakthrough?

The words that leap to my lips when I contemplate this are, “I can’t say.”

All of us have trouble knowing when to stop talking from time to time. We love to talk so much! But in great awakening, great grief, even great anger, there are no words. In those moments, we stop talking. It reminds me of when Nansen killed the cat and Joshu put his sandal on his head and walked away from his teacher. He had no words. Hopefully, after six days of sesshin, we too are close to no words and yet we can feel them bubbling, just waiting to come out. Be careful of the effervescent bubbles of thought. Often our ideas tend to separate us from one another. The thoughts arising from strong emotion especially anger, hate or displeasure, are even more suspect. (Genjo takes a deep breath). It’s not easy, but it is important to let it go of these thoughts as quickly as possible.

If we can learn to let go of thoughts and conclusions about ourselves, others or the nature of reality, we have a much better
chance for deep intimacy, where the barriers between self and other, inside and outside, life and death, conscious and unconscious have fallen away. Deep intimacy is not dependent on words and letters. It’s not dependent on concepts or ideas. It’s not dependent on any kind of knowing or instruction.

Can we right now feel the deep intimacy beyond words, instructions, concepts, ideas, preferences and formulations? Sometimes, we do. May we carry this intimacy forward into our daily lives!

With gassho,

Genjo

Closing Incense Poem
Summer Sesshin 2015

Near the temple fountain,
Morning birds sing.
What is this?
Foolish to try to grasp
flowers in the air.
Distant thunder
rumbles in the Cascades

August Odayaka
by Steve Ganko Hanson

A handful of experienced sitters attended the three-day August Odayaka sesshin, led by Genko Ni-Osho with a graceful and informal style. Genko set the tone right away with her opening remarks: “Odayaka means ‘gentle’ – but that doesn’t mean weak at all!” The freedom and relative “formlessness” of Odayaka reminded us that we are each the masters of our own practice – not some set of rules and formalities to be conformed to. Genko also provided longer dokusan periods for all of us. To spend so much time with Genko was precious to me (and I am sure for everyone else). At Odayaka sesshins, you sleep more, have longer breaks after meals, and have shorter samu periods -- which means more energy for concentrated sitting. During the breaks, many of us walked around the neighborhood, admiring the little houses, each lovingly cared for, some probably hand-built. A few of us happened on an old woman whose husband recently died. We help load his remaining possessions into her car, destined as donations to Goodwill.

A sunny, hot Friday suddenly changed into a very windy and rainy weekend – the big maple in the garden was animated by the wind, the branches lifting up and whipping like banners. In the storm, our tenzo, Kyosei, treated us to the best, and perhaps last, of the summer garden with a tomato and kale soup. That night, Buji and I returned home to find a fallen tree had cut the power. We stayed up a few hours enjoying our house in the candlelight. I had vivid dreams listening to the rain that night.

Genko gave a series of connected dharma talks on the Eightfold Path, each day going deeper into key aspects. At the end of each Dharma talk she invited questions and discussion, which the participants used to good effect. Led and refocused by the discussion period, the first day we focused on the importance of “intention,” the second day focused on “speech,” and the third day focused on “action.” The dharma talk and discussion on action were especially moving to me. Genko also conveyed messages from the prisoners she sits with. Speaking about the “seeds” of action that we all share, both wholesome and unwholesome, she conveyed to us something she’s heard from many prisoners: “I don’t know what came over me when I committed that crime – and now I regret it so much.” She reminded us that, “if one person is capable of an unwholesome act, everyone is capable of it – no one is especially immune.” Her final question for us is still echoing in my head, “Now that you are leaving sesshin, what will you do to help the wholesome seeds develop?”

As she slept on the night of May 23, 2015, Jodo Barbara Bullock gently dropped her 70-year-old body. Her daughter Tara took her picture the next morning. She looked like a young girl, mirroring her heart.

When Genjo Osho asked me to write a memorial for Jodo for Plum Mountain News, I planned to email her many friends at Chobo-Ji and ask for their memories of her. Of course, I waited too long and now the deadline is upon me! So I hope that these words speak our collective love for Jodo.

Many things could be said of this longtime Chobo-Ji member: that she had lived a life of adventure up and down the West Coast, a true “hippy”; that she had studied in a number of different spiritual traditions and settled finally as a student first of Genki Takabayashi Roshi and then Genjo Marinello Oshe; that she was an extraordinarily loving mother to her daughter; that she was a lifelong learner; that she was a true and devoted friend; that she was a teacher and an artist; and that she had her quirks, like all of us.

I loved all of these things about Jodo. But what stands out above everything else is her great open-hearted gratitude for her life and her graceful surrender to whatever is. As one friend put it, “Every apple Barbara eats is the best apple she’s ever had!”

It was like that being with Jodo. She marveled at flowers on the path and posters on the telephone poles. In her tiny apartment, she would root among her belongings, she could sense the particular beauty of that flower, that poster or that apple.

At age 60, she developed Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (“Super Parkinson’s!” she called it). When the disease took her job as a teacher, she cut her expenses to live on a small disability income. When the disease stole her eyesight, she sold her old truck and walked. When it took her balance, she got a cane. When she began to fall down...
even with the cane, she’d sit on the ground and lovingly hold her banged elbow or knee and then she would get up again. When her manual dexterity began to go, she allowed her friends to help out (although she was steadfast in maintaining her own sense of agency, sometimes frustrating us over the piles of old newspapers she just would not allow us to throw out!)

She did all of this with lightness, with no complaining or self-pity. I remember the two of us laughing uncontrollably at a restaurant in the International District where we’d ordered Vietnamese Crepes. This dish required that we pick up vegetables and tofu and roll them into a kind of Asian burrito and then eat it with our hands. Jodo couldn’t spear anything for her crepe, couldn’t roll it up or eat one that I’d rolled for her without spilling the entire contents. What might have been an embarrassing moment became, for Jodo, a hilarious one.

“Do you know what I love?” she said to me one day. “That line from ‘The Song of Zazen’ that says, ‘Those who truly practice zazen will find all their evil karma erased. Nowhere will they find evil paths...’ That’s what it’s like. When you sit zazen for long enough, nothing that happens looks evil anymore.”

Jodo Barbara Bullock found no evil paths. Her way of being bore witness to the fruits of long and sincere practice.

At age 65, Jodo moved to Australia to be with her daughter Tara who is a nurse there. Many of us remember the project of helping her to pack up those thousands of books and finally, tortuously getting rid of those newspapers! And, in her fashion, she finally and gracefully let go to be in her daughter’s care. We all kept apprised of her doings by Friending Tara on Facebook! Thanks to Tara, we got to post “I love you, Barbara!” over and over again.

Sometimes, I still say that. We love you, Barbara.

Dee Seishun Endelman

Dongshan’s Five Ranks
Review by Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik

The Contingent within the Essential:
At the beginning of the third watch, before moonrise,
Don’t be surprised if there is meeting without recognition;
One still harbors the elegance of former days.

The Essential within the Contingent:
Having overslept, an old woman encounters the ancient mirror.
This is clearly meeting face-to-face — only then is it genuine.
Don’t lose your head by validating shadows.

Arriving within the Essential:
In nothingness, there is a road apart from the dust.
If you don’t break the taboo on mentioning the Emperor’s name,
You will surpass the eloquence of the previous dynasties worthies, who cut off tongues.

Approaching from the Contingent:
No need to dodge when blades are crossed.
The skillful one is like a lotus in the midst of fire.
Seemingly, you yourself possess the aspiration to soar to the heavens.

Arriving at Concurrence:
Who would presume to join their voice with someone
Who has surpassed “there is” and “there is not?”
Everyone longs to leave the mundane, yet finally, you return to sit on the charcoal heap.

In Dongshan’s Five Ranks: Keys to Enlightenment, Ross Bolster offers a rich and deep exploration of the depths of Zen, of living an awakened life and of deepening one’s sense of wonder and beauty. Both a Zen teacher in the Diamond Sangha tradition and a professional musician, Bollster explores Dongshan’s (Tozan in Sino-Japanese) Five Ranks from multiple lenses, perhaps most compellingly through the lens of aesthetics and beauty. His own musical creations, while difficult, come across as curious, questioning, exploratory and incredibly present, and he brings this same sensibility to the exploration of Dongshan’s Ranks making them more alive and beautiful than might be so if he approached it merely from a scholarly angle.

He explores the Five Ranks from four directions: history, practice, philosophy, and art. The first three are explicit. The fourth expresses itself when he veers away from the explanatory to invite the reader into aesthetic experience, First evoking the Absolute then settling us into the everyday with subtly poetic prose. He states, for instance: “When we awaken to [the] mode of the contingent within the essential, we die to our isolation from stars and earth into the radiant darkness of nothing at all. Each thing is and all things are obliviously and helplessly us, as they have always been. Although this experience is personal, it isn’t just our matter — a cat, an earthworm, even a clump of wild oats is thus.”

From the historical perspective, Bollster puts the five ranks in the cultural context of 9th Century China, tracing the concept’s influence back to Nagarjuna, Huayan thought, the four Dharmadhatu as expounded in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the I Ching, Shitou Xiqian’s “Accord on Investigating Diversity and Wholeness,” and Dongshan’s own “Precious Mirror Samadhi.”

From a practice perspective, Bollster asks us first to memorize each of the verses for the Five Ranks and then to work with them as koans, both on the cushion and in our everyday life. One should walk with each rank and see the world through the lens of each rank. What’s wonderful is, given his aesthetic context, there is an implicit respect for letting the Ranks as koans settle on us just as a piece of music might. We can sit and absorb and let them work us. All we need do is turn our minds toward them.

Most rewarding in the text is that Bollster explores not only the initial verses of the Five Ranks but the corresponding Five Stages of Merit as well (Orientation, Service, Merit, Merit in Common, and Merit upon Merit) wherein Dongshan points to the manner in which to live the five ranks as stages of increasing maturity.
In each of the Stages of Merit, the practitioner is encouraged to practice selflessness and caring for others as part of the Bodhisattva path so that the Five Ranks become not markers of spiritual achievement but the foundation of being in the world in a caring, non-egoistic way. Indeed, without the Stage of Merit, the Five Ranks risk becoming an abstracted philosophical pursuit.

The philosophy of the book is deep and thick, and it was truly rewarding to engage a level of Zen thought not often found in contemporary Zen books. Bolleter is able to strike a perfect balance between practice, expression and scholarship. Still more compelling than the philosophy, is how Bolleter, though his aesthetic orientation, helps the reader experience each rank, allowing the reader to enjoy shifts of consciousness that help lay new cognitive pathways. While reading, I often found myself lowering the book for a long pause to sink more deeply into what had been opened before me much as I might linger on a new slant of light falling gently and suddenly into the room.

Though the book is not overly poetic and gives good measure to historical and literary scholarship, one is able to read it as one would listen to music, simply absorbing it and, with repeated exposure, deepening into it. Music, art, poetry, honors a natural unfolding of beauty, it explores and plays with it. Bolleter aligns with this view, and his alignment helps his book move beyond a scholarly text or a practice manual, into something that breathes. The Five Ranks are not things unto themselves, but fingers pointing, just as music, art, poetry and the best parts of his text point to what cannot be said, expounded upon, or even understood.

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**New Posts**

*Beginning Sept. 1st*

- John Daikan Green
- Carolyn Josen Stevens
- Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik
- Edwin Kyosei Beatty
- Tenzo (Sesshin Cooks)
- Anne Sendo Howells
- Gavin Ozan Mackay
- Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)
- Robert Tendo
- Kirkpatrick
- Densu (Chant Leader)
- Rev. Seicho Morris
- Robin Fuji Capwell
- Ralph Muzan Leach
- Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)
- Eddie Daichi Salazar
- Chris Zenshin Jeffries
- Inji (Abbot Assistants)
- Carolyn Josen Stevens
- Fusu (Accountant)

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Steve Ganko Hanson, John Daikan Green, Sogetsu Hernandez, Anne Sendo Howells, Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sally Zenka Metcalf

**Introductory Zazen**

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**Autumn Intensive**

An intensive covers roughly the same time frame as the traditional temple kessei period, beginning with the first sesshin for that season and ending with the second. It’s a time for concentrated study and practice. Chobo-Ji participants receive dokusan twice weekly between sesshins. Zenka says, “I’m deeply grateful for how supportive regularly doing the intensives are to my practice and highly recommend them.”

**Chobo-Ji’s Autumn Intensive will start Sept. 13th with mini-sesshin, and conclude on Dec. 6th.** The purpose of the intensive is to give students the maximum opportunity to release entanglements by giving one’s self to the Dharma.

**To participate one must commit to:**

1) **ZAZEN**: Five hours of zazen per week, most, if not all, mini-sesshins, and attend two weeklong seshhins full-time (or nearly full-time) during the intensive. This is the most important ingredient of the intensive.

2) Do a minimum of five hours of *samu* (working meditation - gardening or cleaning) per week. Most of these hours can be in your own home, garden or community, but at least one should be at the temple.

3) **Read one book of your choosing from the [Chobo-Ji Bookstore](http://www.chobo-ji.org/bookstore) and write a review of what you have read.**

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

5) **Come to Dokusan at least once a week or if out of town try and schedule a Skype video call with Genjo Osho.**
Important Dates to Remember

Daily zazen: M-F, 5:30-6:30am; Sat. 7-8:30am; M & W, 7:30-8:30pm; Sun. 6:30-7:30pm
Dharma Talks, Sundays, 7:30pm: 9/6, 9/20, 10/4, 10/18, 10/25, 11/1, 11/8, 11/22, 12/13, 1/20
Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30-8:45pm (except 12/1 & 12/29)

Skillful Communication Workshop with Seishun … Sept. 3rd, 7:30pm - 9pm
Shobogenzo Reading Group … Sept. 10th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Post Holder Workshop … Sept. 12th, 9am - noon
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk … Sept. 13th, 5am - 11:15am
Odayaka Sesshin with SU Staff (Chobo-Ji members welcome) Sept. 19th, 7am - 8pm
Autumn Sesshin … Sept. 25th - Oct. 2nd
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk … Oct. 11th, 5am - 11:15am
4th Annual Opening Anniversary Potluck … Oct. 11th, 11:30am - 1:30pm
Shobogenzo Reading Group … Oct. 15th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Senior Student Talk - Virginia Myoshin Dunthorne … Oct. 18th, 7:30pm - 9pm
Genjo Osho at Zen West in Victoria, BC … Oct. 23rd - Oct. 24th
Shobogenzo Reading Group … Oct. 29th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Shobogenzo Reading Group … Nov. 10th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk … Nov. 15th, 5am - 11:15am
Rohatsu Sesshin at Camp Indianola (Zendo closed) … Nov. 28th - Dec. 6th

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