Dear members and friends,

The sun is shining as I write this, but, as all of us in the Pacific Northwest are aware, we have had a great deal of rain so far this winter, and happily the nearby mountains are getting a heavy snow pack. Our Rohatsu Sesshin the first week of December was outstanding. We had a very strong group and retreat at Camp Indianola on the Kitsap Peninsula, with 35 people attending from three countries and seven states.

This may have been our last Rohatsu at Camp Indianola; I don’t know. I do know that next year’s Rohatsu will be held at The Gwinwood Retreat Center just north of Olympia, WA. All of us have loved our many years of retreats at Camp Indianola, but the costs of renting the space have gone up prohibitively. The Gwinwood Retreat Center is just over an hour drive south of Seattle. This location is beautiful and very peaceful on Hicks Lake. There is a spacious commercial kitchen with a separate dining area, and the center is closer for folks from Oregon and only a little further for those coming from Canada. It doesn’t have the natural power offered by the shores of Puget Sound, but the new space may actually serve us better in many ways.

At Rohatsu we had one Jukai ceremony and two ordination ceremonies! I will share more about these celebrations later in this issue. Our Shika (Host/Manager) was John Daikan Green, and our operations were more organized and clearly managed than I have ever seen them. Daikan is a scientist and engineer, and he left nothing to chance. Our Dai-Tenzo (Chief Cook) was Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik, and our Jisha (Tea Server) was Rev. Seiho Morris. Between them and their capable assistants, we were served delicious meals, snacks, and copious coffee and tea. Anne Sendo Howells served as our Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) and Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick as our Densu (Chant Leader). Together they set the pace and managed the rhythm and beat of Rohatsu. My Inji (Abbot Assistant) was Eddie Daichi Salazar and he made sure that the dokusan line ran smoothly. In fact, we honed some new procedures at Rohatsu that should better guarantee equitable access for everyone, even in a large group. In this issue you will find a transcription of my 7th day Rohatsu Teisho that I think you will find informative. It covers how I see the parameters and usefulness of one-on-one Dharma dialogues. You will also find my Rohatsu closing incense poem.

Our Toya (post Rohatsu winter solstice party) on December 16th was a smashing success. Besides a delicious potluck, we had some great entertainment this year. Especially fine was a visit from Guido Roshi (Scott Ishin in disguise) who brought Little Joey (referring to Genjo) some souvenirs such as Nansen’s cat and Gutei’s attendant’s finger! Likewise, our New Year’s Day celebration was a fine potluck preceded by sutra chanting and 108 rings of our outdoor kansho bell to ward off all delusions.

Also in Mid-December we had a visit from Rick McDaniel, the Canadian author of four books on Zen, including his most recent release: Cypress Trees in the Garden. We had a delightful time hosting him, his wife and relatives here at the temple. Chobo-Ji helped sponsor a reading for him at Seattle University. He sat zazen with us and shared our coffee time. You will find reflections on two of his books later in this issue.

As mentioned in our last issue of Plum Mountain News, the Program and Practice Committee is sponsoring three workshops in the first half of this year on how all of us can deepen our communication savvy. We are

Continued on next page…
Sitting with students in Bonn, Germany, Carolyn and I traveled the second week in January to Blue Mountain Zendo in Pennsylvania for a four day sesshin with Joriki Osho. And soon Carolyn and I will be off to Bonn, Germany to do a five-day sesshin there with the Rinzai Zen Study Group that was started by Monica Jion Winkelmann. After sesshin, we will spend a few days in Amsterdam before returning to Seattle. Let’s enjoy these rainy days of winter, and I hope to see you all in the zendo soon.

With gassho. Genjo

Social Action Committee

Last May the Chobo-Ji Board identified Social Action as one of several priority “growth opportunity” areas for our sangha. Chobo-Ji members have been active for years in various outreach activities and have worked with social action-oriented organizations. Chobo-Ji has sponsored events, served as an umbrella for fundraising activities, and is officially a member congregation of the Faith Action Network. Thus far, these efforts and activities have happened ad hoc, sometimes publicized to the wider sangha, but without a centralized point of contact responsible for disseminating information and opportunities to participate to the sangha as a whole. A new Social Action Committee has now been formed to be that central resource for sangha members to share their outreach efforts and provide the wider sangha information on how to join or support them. Our first meeting was held on November 1 with six Chobo-Ji members present.

Thanks to Genjo Osho’s efforts, there is now an “Engaged Buddhism” page on the Chobo-Ji website, featuring links to several organizations and appeals with which Chobo-Ji or sangha members have a standing relationship. We are now in the process of collecting more specific information, to be added to the website, for the benefit of other members interested in learning more about the project/organization and how to participate or donate if moved to do so. All members are welcome to submit information about activities they are currently engaged in. Please provide what it is, how Chobo-Ji is affiliated (if at all), specific help requests, and contact info. This information will then be collected and posted by the Committee.

At the January Board meeting, the Board approved a new line item in the 2016 budget: a $1,000 Social Action Fund, to be allocated at the discretion of the Committee. All members are invited to submit proposals for use of these funds. The actual procedure for submitting outreach information, and spending proposals, has yet to be worked out, but for now, you are welcome to submit proposals or suggestions to the Committee by emailing Chris Zenshin Jeffries, committee chair, at chrisjeffries8@hotmail.com.

The Joy of Service

Inspired and supported by Patacara Community Services, members of our Sangha have embarked on the deeply satisfying task of feeding people. Patacara is a Buddhist-inspired nonprofit offering compassionate and respectful care to those who are suffering. For the past year, we have partnered with Patacara to participate in Teen Feed and our own project, which we call “One Hundred Meals”.

Throughout 2015, a team from Chobo-Ji gathered one Thursday night each month at the Atlantic Street Family Resources Center in Rainier Beach, Seattle, to provide the meal that we cooked to a group of young people gathered there for a Teen Feed (a city-wide program designed to serve homeless and underserved youth). Participants included: Genjo and Carolyn Josen; Edwin Kyosei Beatty; On Sogetsu Hernandez; Dee Seishun Endelman; Gavin Ozan McKay. This year, the Atlantic Street Center has closed its Teen Feed program so the team is taking a break before seeking another project to feed our young folks.

In the meantime, inspired by Polly Trout (Executive Director of Patacara), we developed our own project, “One Hundred Meals a Month.” With money for food from Patacara and additional donations from at least one Chobo-Ji sangha member, we are in our seventh month of cooking high quality vegetarian entrees for feeding programs throughout the City. Meeting on one Friday morning and one Saturday morning each month (see Chobo-Ji calendar for dates), we make some delicious stuff, like Curried Lentil Soup, Rattlesnake Stew (no meat involved!), Creole Red Beans and Rice, Tofu NY Times, Chili and Brown Rice Casserole. Anne Sendo Howells, Sally Zenka Metcalf and Dee Seishun Endelman
have done the majority of the shopping, chopping, cooking, bagging and freezing with recent help from Genjo Osho who made his famous Middle Day Pasta Marinello Sauce last month.

One of the most basic ways in which we can care for sentient beings is to feed them. And we are having a great deal of fun doing it! Come join us when you can.

Dee Seishun Endelman

Winter Board Report

by Scott Ishin Stolnack
President, Chobo-Ji Trustees

Here is a very brief list of some of the topics the board has been working on during late 2015 and early 2016:

Board retreat – priority work topics. The board had an all-day retreat last May, at which we identified three priority areas for the following year: social action, staffing and operations, and policies and procedures. A Social Action Committee has been formed, an Engaged Buddhism web page has been added to the Chobo-Ji website and the committee invites your ideas and participation. The policies and procedures group has created a draft job description for the post of Abbot as a first step, and the board has been discussing this. The staffing and operations group is learning how the various administrative and support duties are currently accomplished around the temple.

Temple finances. The board passed a 2016 budget at its January meeting. The temple continues to operate with a comfortable surplus. As a next step, we are commissioning a reserve study to ensure we continue to demonstrate proper stewardship of the Temple’s resources.

Rohatsu sesshin 2016 venue change. More than a year ago, the costs for renting our normal Rohatsu sesshin venue increased dramatically, causing the board to begin searching for an alternate site. In January the board voted unanimously to hold Rohatsu sesshin 2016 at a new site, Gwinwood Retreat Center. We believe this venue will be a great location for our annual ‘off-site’ sesshin, and hope you can join us.

December third to eleventh for Rohatsu sesshin 2016.

Annual meeting April 10. The 2016 annual Chobo-Ji membership meeting is on April 10. This is the meeting where members elect the board, and the board elects officers, reports on the work of the board, and listens to your feedback. It is important that we have a quorum of members, so if you are a member, please plan on joining us at 11:30 am after the mini sesshin. If you are not a member, please consider becoming one. Your contributions help support the health and good works of the Temple.

Your current board is: Scott Ishin Stolnack (President), Chris Zenshin Jeffries and Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez (co-Vice Presidents), Justin Myozan Wadland (Secretary), Daikan Green (Treasurer), Dee Seishun Endelman, Bob Daigan Timmer, Sally Zenka Metcalf, and Genjo Marinello (ex-officio). Board meetings occur quarterly (see the Chobo-Ji calendar) and are open to the public. If you would like more information regarding these or other board-related topics, please contact me or any of the other current board members.

Chobo-Ji Communication Skill-Building Workshops for 2016

Deepen Your Communication Savvy

Enrich your relationships in life and work. Build our collective communication skill to ensure a happy and healthy community. The Chobo-Ji Zendo’s Program and Practice Committee is sponsoring three separate communication workshops. The public is welcome! All sangha members are strongly encouraged to attend at least one workshop. Please mark your calendars for the following Saturdays: Finances are no bar, as your level of donation is gladly accepted. Scholarships are available. Pre-registration is recommended online at www.choboji.org.

Finding Beauty in Conflict:
A Non-Violent Communications Approach
Kathleen Macferran
Sat, Feb 27; 9:30am – 4:30pm
Suggested donation: $85

Explore bringing authenticity and courage into daily life by engaging with conflict in ways that are likely to inspire compassion. Transform blame into connection. Discover how to come back to center when upset. Explore systemic options for engaging with conflict. Develop the concrete skills of nonviolence leading to reconciliation with ourselves, our loved ones, and the community.

Kathleen Macferran holds the vision for a peaceful, just and sustainable world. She is a Certified Trainer and Assessor for the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNC) and owns Strength of Connection in Seattle. She enjoys exploring with communities life-saving ways to engage with conflict, including developing restorative justice systems and exploring Restorative Circles. Kathleen Macferran is currently the board chair of Seattle Academy.

Crucial Conversations
Donna Bellow
Sat, April 30; 9:30am – 1:00pm
Suggested donation: $60

Donna will guide us through dynamic communication techniques designed around real-life home and workplace situations. These techniques defuse difficult situations and conflicts where the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions are strong. Discover the path out of believing one has to make a choice between preserving a relationship, or telling the truth. Build skills to create an environment of safety and mutual purpose, where dialog and honesty are possible.

Donna Bellow has nearly 20 years of leadership and human resources experience in the business and non-profit community. She started her career at Microsoft where she provided executive coaching, organizational design, performance management and succession planning as a Senior HR manager. She is currently the chair board of Seattle Academy.

Gestalt Process
Leonard Shaw MSW
Sat, June 4; 9:30am – 5:00pm
Suggested donation: $85-$150

Sliding scale

At this workshop, learn how and why communication gets derailed, and through some core exercises, get it back on track. In addition, Leonard will offer fun and interesting communication tools we can all easily learn and practice. Also, we’ll explore two important ways to communicate with yourself that can facilitate powerful healing outcomes. Finally, discover how the very thing that drives you nuts in intimate relationships can be turned into a productive tool for healing.

Leonard Shaw, MSW, has been in private practice since 1986. Originally trained as a non-directive Freudian psychiatrist, he was heavily influenced by Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls. After 11 years of studying, practicing and teaching Gestalt therapy, he started practicing what he now refers to as “Love-and-Forgiveness-Ego-Death- and Surrender” therapy. Leonard has taught at training centers in the USA, Canada, Europe and the Canary Islands.

All three workshops are located in the Chobo-Ji Zendo, on North Beacon Hill at: 1733 S Horton St., Seattle, WA 98144. www.choboji.org For more info: zen@choboji.org
New Posts
Beginning March 1st

Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik
Eddie Daichi Salazar
Shika (Host - Manager)

Dee Seishun Endelman
Anne Sendo Howells
Sally Zenka Metcalf
Tenzo (Sesshin Cooks)

Rev. Tendo Kirkpatrick
Robin Fuji Capwell
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

Rev. Seiho Morris
Gavin Ozan Mackay
Chris Zenshin Jeffries
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Rev. Daikan Green
Kelli Shokei Hobi
Rick Gendo Testa
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Edwin Kyosei Beatty
Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez
Inji (Abbot Assistants)

Carolyn Josen Stevens:
Fusu (Accountant)

Steve Ganko Hanson, Rev. Daikan Green,
Sogetsu Hernandez, Anne Sendo Howells,
Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sally Zenka Metcalf
Introductory Zazen

Stepping East to Japan
by Anne Sendo Howells

On the front cover of Richard Bryan McDaniel’s Zen Masters of Japan: The Second Step East (Tuttle Publishing, 2013), is a small reproduction of Sesshu Toya’s well-known portrait of Bodhidharma and Huike. Bodhidharma sits facing the wall of his cave; Huike (Eka in Japanese) stands behind him, offering his severed arm “as evidence of the sincerity of his intention” in seeking Bodhidharma’s teaching. A full-page reproduction of the painting precedes the first segment of McDaniel’s book. The reproductions differ in more than size, however; they are reverse images of each other. On the cover, both figures face left; inside, they face right. Knowing that Japanese art is read right to left, I speculate that on the cover we see the Japanese version, Huike having entered from the open space on the right, the much larger Bodhidharma and his wall closing the space on the left. Inside the book, the painting invites a left-to-right reading, more comfortable for my Western eyes.

An error? As I write this, Rick McDaniel has just left Chobo-Ji after visiting us for several days. I didn’t ask him about the discrepancy, though, because I hadn’t noticed it yet. I’m just as glad I didn’t, because it so wonderfully suggests an accomplishment of this book: to provide an initial bridge between contemporary Zen students like me and North American Zen’s Japanese heritage, itself an inheritance from China and India. In which direction should I look, east or west? How can I tell where to look? I then notice that wherever my eyes start, I end at Bodhidharma’s single eye (face in profile), large, and though (I imagine) alert to Huike, gazing upward, and inward, matching the movement of the curves and swirling holes with which Sesshu has painted the walls of the cave. Nothing in the painting stops; space is at once exterior and interior. Time flows back and forth and around this December moment in Seattle and the known and unknown Zen masters and students of Japan, and I’m happy not knowing that one version of the painting is “right.”

I’ve come to this book with a very spotty historical knowledge of Japanese Zen—what I’ve picked up from remarks on the figures whose days we celebrate, from chanting Hakuin and Torei Enji, from a year of reading Dogen, from an acquaintance with Basho, from an enjoyment of Japanese art, from a decade of living in a house whose architect was inspired by visiting Japan. I’ve also come to it from McDaniel’s Zen Masters of China: the First Step East, which I reviewed in the fall 2015 issue of Plum Mountain News. That first book read like an anthology of old stories about the Chinese masters, many of them familiar to us from koans. This second book is constructed with a fuller narrative arc, possible because we have so much more information about the well-known Japanese masters and their historical context. This time McDaniel focusses on fewer masters, tells us more about their lives and work, and sketches the flows and ebbs of Zen in Japan between Dogen in the thirteenth century and Soyen Shaku at the beginning of the twentieth. McDaniel, as he says, isn’t an historian, and his historical framework is a sketch and leaves out a lot. I have questions and would like to learn more. But he has given me a good introduction—and how wonderful it is now also to have a more personal sense of him as a human being and fellow Zen student.

He describes how Rinzai Zen became the practice of the samurai class and of a number of emperors, and how this had both negative and positive effects. The negative: with a complex hierarchical organization, wealthy patrons and large temples, and expectations that they educate upper class boys, Rinzai practice became often deficient in rigor, monks lured by ambition, buying answers to koans, and vying for power. Soto Zen, spreading in the countryside and among the less elite and working classes,
also got spread too thin: many temples, a heavy demand for priests, less rigorous training for those priests. On the positive side, the elite Rinzai students were all expected to practice zazen (presumably with good effects), and the Rinzai monasteries and temples also became centers for the development of the arts—painting, calligraphy, martial arts, garden design, the tea ceremony, poetry—and for the aesthetic shaping of Japanese culture.

All the masters to whom Rick devotes his chapters seem to have been the real thing: reading about them, I feel inspired. I am struck by how a number of the masters urged their students to apply Zen to all aspects of their lives. This was particularly the case with masters who reached out to lay people. One of these was Hakuin, who "taught them how they could transform their daily activities into opportunities for practice." In one of his poems for the laity, "an old woman compares the process of becoming aware of true self to grinding corn." (p. 239) Many of the stories about women which Genjo Osho has been presenting in his teishos have this emphasis, and it is something he has talked about a lot. I'm now at a point where I want to be more conscious of this possibility.

I also enjoyed learning about Muso Soseki (thirteenth to fourteenth century), who loved solitude and tried to avoid administrative appointments, but became the abbot of several important temples. He "advocated that monks spend a minimum of four hours a day in meditation" (which tells us that in many monasteries, they did not), but he also stressed the importance of "mindfulness throughout one's normal activity, no matter how trivial." He himself found time for the nontrivial but quite mindful activity of garden design: among his great ones were the moss garden at Saihoji and a garden at a restored Tenryuji, both in Kyoto and places I intend to visit next fall. The connection Muso established between Zen temples and gardens is a significant part of the legacy... for which he is remembered in Japan" (p. 112) and which of course has helped make Chobo-Ji a beacon in our Beacon Hill neighborhood.

Later in the book, McDaniel writes about the 18th-19th century painter/Zen master Sengai Gibon. McDaniel says this:

"What Sengai demonstrated in his art, what continues to make his pieces so attractive, is the natural playfulness that follows the Zen experience of awakening. In spite of the rigorous training associated with the practice, it results in a joyous and irreverent sense of being at home in the world. (p. 272)"

I see this playfulness and irreverence, this style of being at home in the world, around me at Chobo-Ji.

Some of McDaniel's masters, like Muso, belonged to the establishment, but weren't corrupted by it. Others were mavericks—disgusted with the disparities they saw between, on the one hand, kensho experience and koan mastery, and on the other, lives seeking comfort and power. The mavericks are of course fascinating. One example is Bassui, in the fourteenth century, who as a young man refused robes and refused to chant sutras, and then later in life refused to call his temple (well away from cities, of course) "ji," and insisted that the book of his sayings that his monks insisted on publishing be titled Mud and Water.

Another interesting maverick is Ikkyu Sojun, according to McDaniel an enduringly "popular figure in Japanese folk culture." One of the things he's famous for is his libido—he kept a mistress, frequented brothels, and drank a lot. Yet he also had a "life-long sympathy for working people, in particular for the tribulations of the women of that era and culture." (p. 126) We're not going to make him a star at this moment in American Zen. But he lived during the 15th century—if one considers the behavior of "popular" European males then, he's certainly no worse. And periodically, as most of us know, mavericks became reformers; near the end of the book come strong chapters on Hakuin and Torei Enji.

Concerns about the lives of institutions and the pitfalls of institutional power, tensions between the desire for monastic separation and the compassionate drive to bring Zen into the lives of ordinary people—many of the issues arising in North American Zen today also came up during the centuries of Zen's evolution in Japan. And as there are striking differences among approaches to Zen—understandings of its fundamental purpose, some of its core practices, how best to teach it—in North America today, many similar differences are evident in the "traditional" Zen of Japan. But encounters between teachers and students continue, and though McDaniel's Japanese volume isn't as dominated by stories about these as his Chinese volume was, he still retells plenty of memorable ones. He also continues the traditional practice of stating what is known about the master's early life, how he (though this book includes one woman master) came to Zen, his kensho, his teaching practices, and his manner of death. One of McDaniel's subjects, the tea master Soeki Rikyu, condemned to death by the tyrannical Hideyoshi, was allowed the privilege of seppuku, so conducted a tea ceremony for his friends, composed a death poem (doubtless elegant), and slew himself. Then there was Ikkyu Sojun, who at 87 ended with this: "age eighty weak, I shit and offer it to Buddha." (p. 140) We'll all have our moment of death, but meanwhile we have this living tradition of Zen, kept living for so many centuries by all these masters who are remembered and the many more, masters and students, who are not.

Winter Odayaka Sesshin
Feb. 5th - 7th, Cost: $100
with Genko Ni-Osho

Friday 7am-8pm
Saturday 7am-8pm
Sunday 7am-4pm

Odayaka means peaceful and this Sesshin is a little less arduous with more dialogue than our weeklong Sesshins. It is especially suited for Dharma Dragons (practitioners over 60) and others looking for a more spacious daily schedule. Please fill out an application soon or at www.choboji.org.

A vegetarian breakfast, lunch and dinner will be served each day with zazen, kinhin (walking meditation) Dharma Dialogue (private interviews with the teacher), Dharma Talk, chanting, qigong, dialogue and personal time for reflection and integration.
Hidden Lamp
Sonin’s Shadeless Tree
Seventh Day, Rohatsu Sesshin, 2015
Japan, Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries

Master Keizan Jokin asked the nun Mokufu Sonin, “The winter is coming to an end and the springtime is arriving. There is an order to this. What is your understanding?”

Sonin replied, “In the branches of a tree without shade, how could there be any seasons?”

Keizan asked her, “What about right now?” Sonin bowed. Keizan then transmitted the Dharma robe to her.

Study Questions: Can we ever meet the present without the past and the future? When have you and another person truly met each other?

Can’t really top the sound of the rain falling or the flight of the eagle that I just saw when we were on break. It was skimming the water just outside the bay windows of the zendo. This multi-dimensional myriad-faceted Mu [infinite, unknowable source] is shouting at us all the time from every corner of existence. There’s nothing I can say that can top THIS song of nature. In fact, there’s a whole koan on this subject where Obaku says, “There are no teachers of Zen.” I fully abide by this statement because I can’t—nor can anyone else—teach Zen. (A cry of a bird is heard in the zendo followed by sangha laughter, and Genjo says, — Thank you.)

That doesn’t mean that there aren’t Zen teachers who conduct a useful sesshin. I hope that is what I’ve been doing, with excellent assistance from all those holding the posts. Together we are holding a strong Rohatsu sesshin. Those who hold the post of “Zen teacher” conduct and construct their particular form of Zen practice; that we can do, and are doing.

As we can examine encounters between teachers and students throughout the centuries we see sparks fly. Often something in these encounters sparks, intimates, or points at the cry of the bird, the sound of the rain or the flight of the eagle as evidence that all natural phenomena are manifestations of Muuuuuuuuuu. In fact over time our experience teaches us that everything seen and unseen is a manifestation of Mu, right? Not just the flight of the eagle, or the aspects we like. Someone can bring in an aspect of himself or herself that’s decidedly not likeable. Maybe within us is a sociopathic, suicidal bomber that’s not active right now, yet, this too is a manifestation of Muuuuu. Someone might ask, “Isn’t Buddha nature good, wholesome or beautiful? How is it that we have homicidal maniacs, sociopaths, despotict dictators and suicide bombers?” I’ve never met an orca, eagle, tree or rock that was a suicide bomber. On this planet the only suicide bombers are those aspects of Mu called human beings.

In his Rohatsu Exhortations, Hakuin talked about the Shinto perspective that the human form is a condensation of heaven and earth. Right now, we are seeing heaven commune with the earth through the condensation of rain. Human beings are a different kind of condensation; we are a wondrous concentration of a multi-dimensional, multi-faceted Mu, an amazing integration of heaven and earth. We are in fact condensations of stardust talking to each other and listening to each other. How strange is that? Miraculous things come out of this condensation, such as language, music, science and Zen, to name only a few. This condensation of heaven and earth also has the ability to be a caring, compassionate, insightful voice of the Dharma. At the same time, this strong concentration of Mu called a human being is just as likely to be so convoluted and knotted as to be corrupt or even despotic. None of the aggregate facets of our composition are intrinsically corrupt, but, in such a concentration entanglements are nearly unavoidable, and these convoluted complexes can manifest in horrific and sadistic ways. Nevertheless, no matter how convoluted this concentrated stardust becomes, it’s still all Mu; just knotted up Mu.

It’s our hope that disciplines such as psychology, Zen practice and many other modalities can help us untangle ourselves. Whether it’s yoga, Qigong, acupuncture, flower arranging, Aikido, playing an instrument, doing zazen, walking in the woods, seeing a psychotherapist, or coming to sesshin, these kinds of practices help us get untangled and help us to stay untangled. Without some sort of practice that assists us in untangling and grounding ourselves, we are likely to be seriously convoluted. In such a state, we regress to our limbic or lizard brain, and make a mess of the planet, not to mention our more immediate environment and relationships. So spending time at Rohatsu Sesshin and untangling the knots that arise from being a concentrated, complicated synthesis of heaven and earth is very useful and, for me, necessary; we need Zen. The trees don’t need Zen; they just are Zen. The eagle doesn’t need Zen; it is Zen flying and hunting. The rain doesn’t need Zen; it is the Zen of rain falling. And Zen—if American Zen is any indication—is not enough! We’d better be multi-disciplined in our approach to entanglements (laughter).

It is said that Zen Masters are great thieves. We’re supposed to be skilled at stealing delusions; in other words, helping practitioners untangle their knots. I don’t know how good we are at it. I do think that after decades of practice, we get pretty good at saying, “Look! Look!” (laughter) We take decades to get that good (laughter). After many years of practice we get reasonably skilled at saying, “Not yet…Is that all?…go a little deeper” and once in a while, “next koan.” This is nearly the full extent of a Zen Master’s vocabulary! (laughter)

Master Keizan Jokin says to the nun Mokufu Sonin, “The winter is coming to an end and the springtime is arriving. There is an order to this. What is your understanding?” Koans and turning questions are tools that help us untangle and deepen our awareness of our own
heartmind. It is appropriate for someone in the role of a Zen Master to ask these kinds of questions. Usually turning questions center on “What’s this? And who is asking?” This question of Master Jokin is one way of asking, “What is this?” All koans prompt us to “Look” and “investigate” this matter of life and death.

There are three ways to respond to these kinds of questions: from the absolute, from the relative and from the transcendent. Not one of them is right, not one of them is wrong. In the course of Zen training, we are to become fluent, spontaneous, creative and flexible in investigating and manifesting these three different approaches. The theory is that if we become fluid in answering fundamental questions from these three perspectives, then our brains will become less static, more dynamic and flexible. This skill set can greatly assist us in sorting through the many layers of complexes we often carry around with us, and with maturity in the Way, we can learn to remain relatively untangled. As I see it, this skill set is one of the most important assets of our way of practice.

Is this the only approach Zen training offers us? The best approach? No, it’s one approach to keeping us untangled. Another approach is to just chant, chant, chant…; in the chanting, we meld with the simple rhythm and beat. This melding is a catalyst for samadhi (harmonious awake action) and any kind of samadhi facilitates our untangling. Doing zazen, of course, is another approach. When we become skilled at entering samadhi by just sitting, breathing and listening, we find it very restorative. Zazen practice is definitely one of our principal tools to help us untangle ourselves. Walking kinhin, being in the elements…walking in the woods, walking on the beach or walking slowly inside—these are all ways to prompt samadhi. Who hasn’t felt less tangled after a walk in the woods or along the beach? These are the practices that train us to relax, let go and let be; in other words, these tools help us untangle our knots.

The most advanced Zen practice is chopping vegetables and sweeping floors. Samu (work meditation) requires that we are mindful of the task at hand. Through samu practice we learn to be attentive, efficient, and single-minded in completing the work to be done. Genki Takabayashi considered this the most important form of Zen practice, more important than zazen, chanting, kinhin, or koan work. The reason samu is so important is that it overlaps with the ordinary activity of everyday life, where we chop vegetables, cook and clean up afterwards.

Each form of Zen practice invites us to enter samadhi. Is Zen the best skill set out there? I don’t know. Is it a skill set? Yes. Does it work? Yes. Is it sufficient? Frankly, no. We’re more complex than even Zen practice can handle. Is it a good start? I think so. Do we sometimes take ourselves too seriously? You bet! Especially if we think that these robes or these skills are somehow special. They’re not special. These practices are all pretty damn simple, though not necessarily easy!

Koans prompt inquiry, like this one: “Winter is ending; springtime is arriving. There’s a certain order to this. What is your understanding?” In other words, “What is THIS?” Koans often have a hook to trick us into discriminating and dualistic thinking. Now why would they do that? (laughter) If we don’t learn how to recognize our discriminating or dualistic thinking, we’ll never get free of it. That doesn’t mean we are here to get rid of our discriminating mind; it is, in fact, one of our greatest assets. I don’t want to get rid of my rational mind. If I did, I could give myself a lobotomy. I want to keep my rational, discriminating mind but I don’t want it to be the only tool in my toolbox. Too often I feel run by it. I want to know when it is active and I want to know how to put it down to listen to the rain, see the flight of the eagle, enjoy the sun in my face, or feel the joy of sweeping or chopping vegetables.

Very often we’re caught in our rational, discriminating thinking. Oddly koans tempt us to get caught! Why? We need to develop the skill to recognize how and when dualistic thinking, especially our false belief in a separated selfhood, catches us. After enough jokes, we learn how to sidestep our dualistic rational mind. This skill gives us access to what we call true insight.

One thing Zen practice is always pointing at is the absolute; in our tradition we manifest the feeling of the absolute by vocalizing Mu. We think of the absolute as having two sides, positive and negative. The Positive Absolute is THIS, the multi-dimensional myriad manifestations of matter and energy, and the Negative Absolute is the nameless, boundless, bottomless, formless, timeless, beginningless emptiness that gives rise to this universe and perhaps infinite other universes. It is the Negative Absolute, sometimes called Shunyata, that the Heart Sutra points at. Most koans point at the absolute in some way, because when we get even a glimpse of this vital and dynamic infinity it cleanses our knotted being. It is often life changing and transformative. This is why the experience associated with vocalizing Mu is so central to our practice.

We know the experience of the absolute enough to untangle us completely and keep us untangled? No, we’re way too complex. That’s why other practices, such as Aikido, psychotherapy, kayaking or innumerable other offerings are important addendums. Each of us needs to put together some kind of package that works with the peculiar folds of our complexity. We need various disciplines to keep ourselves relatively untangled, and to free ourselves from being possessed by our deepest fears and most primitive instincts. If we are too often possessed by our fears and base instincts, inferiority or grandiosity complexes can develop that, left unchecked, become entrenched personality disorders, such as narcissists and sociopaths.

Psychology does not point at the absolute, so psychotherapy alone is insufficient. Nevertheless, psychology has all kinds of tools for untangling complexes. I’m both a psychotherapist and hold the post of Zen abbot so I make use of some of both of these modalities to assist others in developing their skill sets. I’m happy in the dokusan room to help people investigate both their entanglements and their innate capacity to experience Mu. With 40 years of Zen practice and 25 years of psychotherapy practice and training, I’m comfortable using both modalities. Of course many Zen teachers are not. Why should they be? They haven’t had training in psychology, or perhaps they haven’t had the same number of years exploring Zen.

I would never brought my personal problems to Genki Roshi, even though I
I think there is a genetic predisposition to establish rank and position in relationships, which must have been an evolutionary advantage for group cohesiveness. No doubt establishing and holding rank stimulates our primitive Monkey Mind predispositions. However, if we use awareness of this to help us investigate and transcend our finely discriminating small self that is dependent on rank and position, we will have more tools to grow beyond the Monkey Mind that often keeps us trapped in a static place. Without freedom from this kind of static state, we are bound to feel personally unfulfilled and our societies will fail to grow and adapt to a changing world.

In psychology we often use the terms “transference” and “counter-transference.” Transference occurs when the student, client or patient transfers, projects some of their earlier material —knotted-up mess— onto the authority figure who is in the role of teacher or therapist. Often this process is entirely unconscious. Counter-transference occurs when the person in the role of the teacher, therapist, or priest is projecting their unfinished business onto the student, client or sangha member. Psychotherapists are trained to recognize their own counter-transference, Zen priests have no such training. Transference and counter-transference nearly always arise whenever there is a disparity in rank. Although please remember that all rank is a joke. Between two people one is bound to be more mature or skilled. Nevertheless, we are all already primarily buddhas, we all have an inner sage, we’re all old souls. So, on that level no rank is possible. In any case, wherever there is outward differentiation of rank, transference and counter-transference are sure to follow. The very fact that some are ordained and others are not stirs up all kinds of shit. And that’s perfectly okay because one can’t turn psychological shit into fertilizer unless it is first brought to the surface; only then can it be turned over and composted. One of the reasons I don’t abandon robes, and I’m about to ordain two people, is that differentiation of rank stimulates very primitive material often entangled with early development. And that’s just fine if this material is investigated and handled properly, supported by a strong, healthy, ethical, aware container and the spaciousness offered by glimpses of Mu and true insight. Then this early, convoluted material can be examined and released.

We are always okay in the Dokusan Room as long as we come to a heart-to-heart connection. In a deep heart-to-heart connection we have the spaciousness to explore any opening or any shadowy knot. Zen teachers who have only been schooled in one discipline may only want to see things related to the openings accessible from of this type of training and that’s okay; that’s probably just right for them. I don’t know if it’s right or wrong, but I’m offering something different in the Dokusan Room. I want anyone visiting me there to have the freedom to approach any subject, including investigating transference or counter-transference that may be developing between us. Don’t worry, you don’t have to use these terms! But just know, that if you feel some tension in our relationship, you are welcome to examine it with me in the Dokusan Room, as long as your offering is concise and to the point. If it is not, I’ll let you know and ask that you give your inquiry or statement more time on the cushion, just as I do with any koan. Of course, in your mind, factor in some time for me to respond, so we can have at least a small exchange about it. (laughter)

By now everyone’s heard a lot of different shouts and screams coming from in there. What is the purpose of all those shouts and screams? It has no purpose. (laughter) But it’s fun! You know — (spotting an eagle out the window) oh, look, Hello, Mr. Eagle (after a pause)— a shout can serve in many different ways. It can be a scream of frustration. It can be a death scream. It can be a cleansing shout. It can be a break open shout. It can be a shout that intimates the absolute. It can be an inquisitive shout. It can be a shout of “shut up” or “stop!” or “go on!” but it has no intrinsic meaning. There’s something freeing and untangling about SHOUTING! Whether it comes out as Mu or something else, it can be a valuable cleansing agent and perhaps transformative. The kind of “Mu!!!” that we shout at the end of our early morning Kanzeon chanting has a cleaning effect. We can all feel this cleansing during the silence the follows. I think we are all moved by the transition from shouting to silence, and perhaps most if not all of us get a glimpse of what I sometimes refer to as the Presence found in the midst of the silence and stillness. So a shout can serve in many ways and might just be fun. A shout has no intrinsic meaning; so don’t worry about it.

Anyway, the Dokusan Room should be used for untangling knots, exploring openings and investigating conundrums such as koans. It might be used for untangling our restrictive sense of self. It might be used for untangling our psychological baggage. It might be used for untangling our relationship. Please don’t think that there’s some great purpose or expectation that needs to be met in the Dokusan Room. I certainly hope there’s no great expectation coming from me. If you feel some expectation coming from me, please tell me about it. I will make every effort to admit to whatever I feel and work to release it. At the very least, being courageous enough to share your feelings will allow me to become aware that something is amiss and I can work to be more sensitive to that. I am sure I don’t always succeed at having no expectations. It’s hard because I would like everyone to progress and discover that Zen is the Most
Wonderful Shit. (laughter) Please know that I work to keep my expectations to a minimum and make my best effort to dissolve them as soon as I am aware of them. I’ve learned that strong expectations actually inhibit progress. Strong expectations are one form of countertransference.

It’s also true that, though I have many years of practice under my belt and I think I’m pretty perceptive, sometimes I just read something completely wrong and this may possibly offend you. It’s okay to investigate any entanglement in our relationship if you are feeling one. By the way, you don’t need to create any! (laughter) We will naturally have plenty to work through. You don’t have to go looking for them. No need to seek, what am I missing about Genjo’s counter-transference? That’s all right! Just sit, breathe, listen! (laughter)

Sonin replied to this inquiry about “What is this?” “In the branches of a tree without shade, how can there be any seasons?” Part of learning Zen is how to translate Chinese and Japanese prose. In this case, it’s Japanese prose and there are coded messages in here. For example, what is a tree that never casts a shadow? First of all, obviously there is a reference to nature, because she’s talking about a tree. Then, she’s brought in the absolute by describing something that is impossible and unfathomable — a tree that never casts a shadow. The image of a tree that never offers shade is like a finger pointing at the moon, without saying, “In the absolute, how can there be any seasons?” But that’s exactly what she’s intimating. The Absolute has no coming or going, no self, no other, no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind… Just put “no” in front of everything and you have the Heart Sutra, which constantly points at the absolute. There is, in fact, no intrinsic hot or cold, no form, no coming or going, no excess and no lack. It is Everything and before Everything and it has no beginning.

So Keizan Jokin asks a follow-up question. This is a checking question. You’ve given me the Absolute, but what about right now, here in front of me? Sonin bows (Genjo bows reverently). What if she had bowed (Genjo bobs quickly)...there are many ways she could have responded. Is this the only way to respond? Her response transcends right or wrong. Did Keizan, in the role of the Master, see something genuine and whole and untangled in Mofuku’s bow? What about right now? (Genjo bows gently). What about right now? Shhhhhhh (sound of rain) What about right now? (loud clap) What about right now? MUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUU!!! What about right now? Muuuuuu (whispered).

There are a million ways to respond. You, as the observer, can discern whether it is genuine and untangled or not. Keizan Jokin, in the role of the Master, was satisfied and then transmitted the Dharma robe to her. One can transmit a Dharma robe. You cannot transmit understanding. You cannot transmit insight. You cannot transmit clarity. You cannot transmit Mind. But Keizan certainly felt that Mofuku shared One Mind and, because of the warmth and confidence of that sharing, “transmission” happened.

When have you and another person truly met each other? Whether it’s a teacher or a mentor or a lover or a life partner, I hope from time to time, we truly have the opportunity to meet one another and, in that moment, there’s a heart-mind transmission. It doesn’t need to be called that, does it? We certainly know when we’re sharing one Heart-Mind with another. Does it only happen in Zen? Not at all! Heaven forbid! Can we ever meet the present without the past and the future? That’s a nice koan. We could respond with the Absolute—KATTTZZZZ! A shout transcends. Or we could say simply “No.”

With gassho,

Genjo

Closing Incense Poem

Rohatsu Sesshin 2015

Heaven and Earth condense.
Rain falls in the midst of vast quiet.
Faith and Truth open the way of service.
Bald eagle soars, leaving no trace.

Starting this month, our sangha will have the opportunity to explore the precepts together via a new forum, Chobo-Ji Conversations, on Facebook. If you are already a Facebook member, you can search for this closed group and then hit the “+ Join Group” button. If you are not a Facebook member yet, it is easy to join and take part in this forum, as a number of sangha members have already done.

Two different translations of the monthly precept will always be given: the first will be from the Chobo-Ji sutra book, and the second will be from Norman Fischer’s book Taking Our Places. When we take up a precept, we begin by observing it in a straightforward way, by renouncing the behavior the precept addresses — this is the meaning of the line “do no harm,” in the Commandments of the Seven Buddhas. As we develop a sense of what that renunciation means, we begin to work on cultivating the positive quality related to the precept - the equivalent of “try to do good,” in those same Commandments. Finally we delve into deeper and more subtle understandings of the precept.

We look forward to this ongoing dialogue as a way to strengthen our own individual practice of the precepts, as well as our collective understanding.

This month we explore the first precept:

Continued on next page…
I will be reverential and mindful with all life; I will not kill or be ruled by violence.  
(Chobo-Ji version)

[I take up the precept] Not to kill but to nurture life.  
(Fischer version)

At first glance this may seem like a fairly straightforward precept, but we quickly see that it is impossible to keep in a literal sense. Just feeding ourselves involves making terrible choices every day. As we practice with this precept, let's consider a couple of questions:

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST PRECEPT

1. What sentient beings do we kill, directly and indirectly, simply by living our lives and fulfilling our needs? How might we mitigate that harm?

2. Beyond the obvious killing of sentient beings, what are some of the many ways in which we engage in killing in our daily lives? How do we find a way to honor this precept at those times?

3. What is our collective responsibility as Buddhists who have taken this precept, when killing is rampant in our world?

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Spring Sesshin
March 18th - 25th

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a deposit and application by March 13, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. Please drop it by or mail it.

The cost of sesshin is $250 (less monthly dues). Sesshin will start Friday evening, 3/18, 5:30PM with informal supper, introductions and orientation. Sesshin from Saturday to the following Friday runs from 5am-10pm. We provide sleeping accommodations for those traveling from out of town (an additional $10-$20 per night); please bring a sleeping bag, toiletries, sitting clothes, work clothes and a towel.

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Spring 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 is to my practice and highly recommend them."

Chobo-Ji's Spring Intensive will start March 13 with mini-sesshin, and conclude on July 1. 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 sesshins 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 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 to schedule a Skype video call with Genjo Osho. Skype calls can be short, 5-10 minutes maximum per week, or up to 20 minutes every two weeks, or 45 minutes once a month.

6) If local to Puget Sound, it is also expected that participants will attend the weekly Sunday night Dharma Dialogues.

Zen Oxherding Pictures

During the Spring Intensive, we will be examining the Ten Zen Ox Herding Pictures and the verses that go along with them from twelfth-century Chinese Zen master Ku-an, translated by Ryojun Victoria in the book *The Zen Life*. These pictures and verses examine how our Zen practice proceeds and matures over time. This exploration will take place after Sunday evening zazen during the following ten Dharma Dialogues: Feb. 28, March 27, April 17, April 24, May 15, May 22, May 29, June 5, June 19 and concluding July 3. Zazen is at 6:30 pm and the Dharma Dialogue starts 7:30 pm.

Jukai Ceremony

On the morning of Nov. 30th, 2015, the second day of Rohatsu Sesshin, John McDevitt formally accepted the Buddhist precepts and received a Dharma Name. John had his first encounter with Zen about a dozen years ago when he attended a three-day sesshin at Bucks County Dojo, across from Peace Valley Reservoir in Doylestown, PA. He sat ten sesshins with me there and also attended a two-week sesshin with me at Blue Mountain Zendo in Allentown, PA before petitioning to do Jukai. John is a wonderful sculpture artist and Aikido Sensei. John wrote in his Jukai petition:

As I think about my reasons for wanting to receive Jukai, I can’t stop hearing the voice of the airplane steward saying: “…Put your own oxygen mask on first, before assisting those around you…”!

My most recent sculpture has been about “potential energy.” As it develops in my studio I know that it is trying to teach me something. It sits there quietly and waits for me to get the message. I think the message is that in life we must learn to feel the potential of each moment and to put your ki [life force] where it needs to be. To do this we must be fully present with what is actually happening. We must be open, aware, sensitive, feeling and see what is. We have to let go of trying to shape what happens so it fits into our preconceived ideas of what should be. We do our best to meet what is and respond...

Will it ever be possible to get it right? Being in this moment, and putting your ki where you want it, is not about making life easier or getting it right. It is about making it real. I may never get it right, but I hope to someday make it real...

I like the idea of this being a life practice for myself and doing what I can to bring others along the path. Being a practitioner who is willing to meet other practitioners on their own terms. Taking responsibility to pass it on in a good and thoughtful way. Working on becoming the person I was meant to be and working for the maturity of others...

I look forward to deep diving into this practice and learning with you.

John gave me the following hints about a possible Dharma Name: The idea/principle that keeps coming up for me is “faithful servant.” In the years that I have known him, he has been the most sincere and faithful student of George Lyons Sensei at Bucks County Dojo; he was so faithful that he attended his first sesshins without having any idea about Zen or Zen training. He just did practice without any expectations.

John’s new Dharma Name is accordingly Sei-Jitsu (Faith & Truth, meaning sincere, honest and faithful).

Jukai candidates need to petition in writing at least one month prior to the ceremony. Jukai candidates usually have attended regular zazen at Chobo-Ji for a minimum of six months (including at least two week-long sesshins), must be regular financial supporters of the temple, feel ready to give themselves to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma & Sangha). They are expected to explore the Ten Precepts using Norman Fischer’s book *Taking Our Places* as a study guide.
Tokudo Ceremony

On December 6th, 2015 Genjo Osho ordained John Daikan Green and Robert Tendo Kirkpatrick as unsuis (cloud and water people – Zen monks). Daikan did Jukai in 1999 and is one of Chobo-Ji’s most senior members. Tendo did Jukai in 2014 and is one of our more recent members, but has given a lot to this practice and is a resident living at the temple. As unsuis, they now both have the authority to give introductory Dharma talks, lead zazen services, and marry couples. Both have recently completed four consecutive weeklong sesshins at Chobo-Ji and have committed to do four sesshins a year, until they become Oshos (full priests).

Daikan writes in his Tokudo application letter:

The first line of the Four Great Vows says it all: “However innumerable all beings are, we vow to care for them all.” Do I feel ready for this path? No, but it is the path that lies ahead and that is certain. It will require looking within for strength and resolve, to face these new opportunities and to explore new realms within, to turn this inner force outward for the care of others...

Little did I realize when I first began this practice how it would influence me over the next 15 years. Looking back, the changes have been subtle yet significant, enough to make clear this is the next step. This practice has provided the means to face and work through many challenges that I have had, whether they have been health, work relationships or parenting, to name a few.

The path of unsui as I see it, is one way to visibly give back to the sangha the means and support for others to pursue this practice in the hopes that they too may realize the benefits of this work...

By being a more public face to this practice I can provide others and example of how this path can unfold and the joy it will bring.

When it came time to consider the unsui extension to his dharma name, I chose Komon. Ko (広) means “Open,” Mon (門) “Gate.” So together with his Jukai name: Open Gate to Vast (大) Quiet (閑) – Daikan.

Tendo begins his Tokudo application letter with a quote from Zen Master Hakuin:

“A true commitment can only be made if one can generate the great faith, the great doubt, and the great perseverance necessary to sustain the practice of zen.”

For many years I have cultivated doubt, taking the skeptic’s approach to most things. Like most things this approach has its advantages and its limitations. Requiring evidence and sources, working through things on your own, double-checking facts and figures, all of this can help us through an uncertain and contradictory world. In the present age of information overload, media manipulation, spin and propaganda, it is incumbent on us all to trust but verify. However, skepticism can become dogmatic and is as prone to fundamentalism as anything else. Second-guessing everything, contradicting everyone, not trusting anyone can lead to cynicism, pessimism and nihilism...

The big breakthrough for me was encountering an article by Stephen Batchelor, which led me to his book Buddhism Without Beliefs. In this book he looks at Buddhism as a pragmatic system; a system for relief from suffering. It was a rational, step-by-step program that had testable results. The Buddha himself, while steeped in the culture of his time, stressed personal experience, in testing things out for yourself, that what he says works, that it is the truth. Trust but Verify. This I felt was at last a way in for me, how I could resume my long delayed seeking and to put aside the distractions which I was finding increasingly ineffective at staving off a growing sense of meaninglessness...

This evolution of my practice was slow and filled with doubts. My distrust of religious institutions was deep-seated and I also have a very strong aversion to the Western practice of adopting bits and pieces of other religions. New Age buffet style religion-ism at best and Orientalism at its worst. I took a critical stance even toward myself in this matter: am I just another westerner disaffected with the religion I was raised in? I knew that Zen as it moved from China to Japan, Korea and Vietnam adapted itself to each of these cultures and that as it came to the West it had to do the same. But it seemed to me there was a natural and organic way of doing this and a forced method, which could merely put eastern trappings on western beliefs.
I felt it was better to err on the side of traditionalism, to be cautious in adaptation so as not to lose anything vital in a rush to modernism. I felt as I started at Chobo-Ji, that it really was quite formal and traditional. It was a lot to take in with the chanting, bowing, tea, and the various rules and formalisms. I was pretty blasé about everything but zazen, but I felt for this reason that it was all worth doing. The evening sits were quite far from what I had experienced at churches and that was really important to my continued attendance. Many evenings I’d come in, sit down, go through the service and then leave all without saying a word to anyone. A far cry from the line exiting my parent’s church where the pastor would glad-hand everyone on their way out the door. My silence may not have been to everyone’s liking but for me it really met my needs at that point. These evenings had cracked open the door that over time would open wide.

As I learned more from Dharma Talks, Teishos, Sesshin and so on I began to understand and appreciate how Chobo-Ji did vary from the Zen of Feudal Japan, how Genjo Osho had so carefully selected what parts of the rituals aided and informed the practice. In one Dharma Talk he explained how the basic rituals of chanting, of taking tea together and bowing all were mindfulness practice; that these were simple tasks to learn to become effortless at doing along with others. This made complete sense to me and my initial indifference toward these practices evaporated and I endeavored to make them natural, to flow to inform my practice. Kinhin likewise flows into samu, which flows into our everyday lives. And it was mindfulness in everyday life that was the whole point as far I was concerned...

While I’m sure I’ll never be free of doubts, many of the ones I have had surrounding the practice and the form have receded. I’ve come to understand that much of the doubt was a barrier I threw up to protect myself. There is arrogance to the skeptic, an arrogance born out of fear. If one never believes anything one never takes a risk and one never fails. There was much that I had to come to grips with and I’m sure there is much more to learn and to wrestle with. I feel that I am just beginning to understand what the path ahead involves and I have no certainty on where it leads. But I have awakened the great faith in the process and I feel a great gratitude to the practice and the form.

These three questions have bedeviled me throughout my life:

What is this?
What does it mean?
What am I doing this for?

The answers to these questions can be found via the practice. I spent years trying to put aside these questions to no avail. I have reached a point where confronting these questions is of primary importance to me and I wish to dedicate myself to it. I am at a place where I can arrange my life around the practice and am striving to do so. Thus I humbly submit my petition for Tokudo.

When it came time to consider the unsui extension to Tendo’s dharma name, I chose Dairo. Dai (大) means “Vast or Great,” Ro ( 労) “Service” So together with his Jukai name: Great Service to Heaven’s (天) Way (道) – Tendo.

The book is structured loosely around lineage, starting with Shunryu Suzuki’s heirs, then Sasaki’s, Eido Shimano’s, Yasutani’s, Aitken’s, Maezumi’s, Kapleau’s, Katagiri’s, Seung Sahn’s and finally Thich Nhat Hahn’s. In none of these second generation of teachers were the forms maintained exactly as their predecessors conveyed them. At times, the forms are so nearly completely removed that the practitioners (such as those in Toni Packer’s lineage) no longer consider themselves Buddhist or even students of Zen. Others, (such as several Catholics) practice Zen but in a non-Buddhist orientation. For others, the forms remain intact but simplified to adjust to American temperaments. Some continue the tradition of the student-teacher relationship with all its hierarchical trappings and others have done without teachers altogether.

At times, the question of how can Zen meet American needs is overt, as in James Ford’s analysis and exploration of it. At other times, the forms are dropped but the core practices remain, as they do with John Tarrant and Joan Sutherland who continue to utilize classical koan study even while eschewing the roles of priests.

In the end, as contrast to the previous book which explored Zen’s entry into America where its essence was not questioned or explored but was simply and as directly as possible planted here, Cypress Trees is immersed in the question, “What is Zen and how does it function in America?” It appears that Zen, with its centuries of tradition in China and Japan, is going through a transition and a kind of adolescence. Indeed, with each of the 75 Zen teachers McDaniel’s interviews, questions regarding legitimacy, authority, tradition (including clothing and liturgy) are, if not immediately on the surface, just below it.

What is this peculiar institution called Zen? What is its function? Does it need teachers? What are teachers for and what do they really know? What structure is essential? Which structures are hold-overs from ancient Japanese culture? Who is authorized to teach? Can Zen become too watered down? Can it be so diluted as to be no longer Zen? Questions such as these abound throughout the book.

Continued on next page…
Happily, there are no answers, only questions.

Despite the presence (with, in my opinion, a few exceptions) of seasoned and healthy practitioners and teachers throughout the book, there appears to be an ongoing exploration of not only, “What is Zen?” but “Who am I?” that breaks down to something very similar to what teenagers go through when differentiating from their parents. There is a kind of anxiety in some parts of the book (not all of it) about legitimacy and authority. How can we call what we are doing Zen? Would the ancestors approve? Is my (or his or her) transmission legitimate? At other times, there is a bold confidence, perhaps befitting an American independent spirit. There is a creativity and a playfulness and a sense of cutting away from culture and getting to the heart of the practice that allows it to go deep even while, in my opinion, running the risk of losing its foundation and risking the loss of tradition. (Culture, after all, creates commonality and a place to return to independent of personality and individual strengths. Without it, what one brings to the practice runs the risk of disappearing with the leadership.)

While reading, I often imagined seeing the many teachers in a room together and it seeming like a high-school auditorium with different cliques and all the insecurities and questions surrounding them. Who wears what? Who does what? Will I be accepted by others? Do I accept them? Some seem nervous. Some arrogant. Some securely confident. Some seem to be having fun. Some are clinging. Some are rebelling. Most are exploring with integrity and seriousness and care about the human condition and how to help others.

The anxiety makes sense. Scandals in Zen have been widely reported of late, and given the harm some teachers have caused others, wondering “Why Zen?” and “Why maintain these traditions?” are relevant questions. McDaniel does a fair job of asking about these traditions?” are relevant questions. The reader will already sense this after having read the “Author’s Note” before the Prologue. “This book presents a snapshot - a description of Zen teaching, practice, and engagement at a particular time. The interviews on which these chapters are based were conducted between March 2013 and September 2014... So the book is already a portrait of how things were rather than how they are.”

Rick knows life, knows that there is no human being without light and without shadow, including Zen Masters, female and male, Zen teachers, and he knows about impermanence. He is self-confident and wise enough to offer some profound knowledge, in the prologue and between the lines, and humble enough to listen to the intimacy of open interviews. Already in the prologue he is pointing out what he considers one insight gleaned from many interviewed persons: "...that the attainment of spiritual insight does not in itself imply personal or emotional maturity.” I, the reader and Zen practitioner, student of one of the interviewed Zen Masters, and - in addition - German, am highly interested in meeting truth. Meeting true persons. Getting at least a little understanding of how things were rather than how things were. I share a concern with others that, in its transformation, it may become diluted and lose its ability to help people see into their own deep nature. Seeing the many ways that Zen is being explored in America, I can relax around my own concern and tend to it in my own garden following and honoring the tradition I’ve ordained in. I left the book feeling comfortable in knowing that a diversity is developing that will help others meet their needs and allow the Dharma to flourish in myriad ways.
flaws, but showing us how to master these shortcomings by looking from the teacher’s side and from sangha’s side.

Rick McDaniel commits himself to this difficult work, and he does it well, I find, because he is stepping out of the way. The book has almost 500 pages and is to be read in one piece, or you choose “your” chapter, “your” teacher you want to know more about. I started with “Genjo Marinello”, because I am studying with him, followed by Bernie Glassman, my Zen peacemaker teacher, followed by Eshu Martin, whom I joyfully met during a sesshin, and then I started my read from the beginning.

The list of “Acknowledgements” of assisting people is considerably long and the “Glossary” at the end helpful for the not so experienced Zen person. Richard Bryan McDaniel also wrote Zen Masters of China: the First Step East, Zen Masters of Japan: The Second Step East and the Third Step East: Zen Masters of America.

If you want to get true information about Zen teachings as they are and not as you wished they would be, then this book might be of high benefit for you.

When Things Get Messy
by Sally Zenka Metcalf

Lojong Slogan: Whatever you meet is the path. When life gets messy, it can feel so wrong, as if I’m failing in my practice; but with Lojong mind training, the mess is where it’s at. For decades I’ve sought mastery at being truly helpful, chagrinned by not understanding what true helpfulness really means. I’ve helped because I thought I knew best, or because I longed for recognition, or because, if I succeeded, I might not be eradicated (my deep, abiding fear); or because I felt guilty, or inadequate, or was arrogant. So, for me, true helpfulness is compelling, and I have a lot to learn. Subliminally, this need to understand helpfulness created a Zen cart-before-the-ox state in which mastery somehow should precede helpfulness. Actually, this ox-backward hitching of ideas is one of my ego’s favorite tricks to guarantee spiritual defeat.

Slogan: Abandon any hope of fruition. A couple of years ago, our Chobo-Ji Intensive book assignment was Training in Compassion by Norman Fisher. It’s a Zen take on Lojong, an ancient form of mind training brought to Tibet in the eleventh century by an Indian master named Atisha. It centers on three foundations: first, a set of fifty-nine slogans calling for deep reflection and application in life; second, tonglen, the technique (oversimplified) of breathing in the suffering of others, then breathing out happiness and well being for them; third, maitri, often translated as lovingkindness but, in the words of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, “unconditional friendliness toward oneself”—so essential to us self-disparaging Westerners. Genjo Osho has often said that Zen has its shortcomings. Lojong seems to provide in-depth guidance in territory where Zen is not explicit. The specific point of Lojong is to develop true compassion—bodhicitta—my long-sought-after true helpfulness.

About a year and a half ago, I asked Genjo Osho if we could temporarily set aside koan study to work with the Lojong slogans. Osho agreed, and we embarked on our investigation in dokusan. I’m so grateful and am doing the last slogans now. It’s been illuminating. Still having lots to learn, I go deeper with Lojong for our Spring Intensive. It’s a rededication with fresh study material, tightening up my practice for greater attention throughout my life.

These days, Pema Chodron’s book, Start Where You Are, guides me toward getting my ox in front of my cart. Our prevailing tendency is to escape from suffering, from the poisonous and the painful. We seek relief in denial, numbness, projection, distraction, all the while sipping daily at the poisons we covet: blame, addiction, anger, selfishness, self-righteousness. In Lojong practice, however, these poisons become our medicine as we courageously and honestly embrace the toxic mess within.

Slogan: Work with your strongest reactions first. Chodron says, “We shield our hearts with an armor woven out of very old habits of pushing away pain and grasping at pleasure. When we begin to breathe in the pain instead of pushing it away, we begin to open our hearts... When we relate directly in this way to the unwanted areas of our lives, the airless room of ego begins to be ventilated.” This sets us free to live each moment, freshly and responsively, naturally doing what needs doing.

After a year and a half of study, what do I have to show for it? I’m still pretty crazy (beset by fears, irritability, egotism) and may continue so; but there are improvements. After all, craziness hidden in the dark is far more destructive than craziness brought to light.

Slogan: All instructions have one aim, to tame ego-clinging. As a result of Lojong, there are times in daily life when my mind is empty. Breathing. There are times when the opportunity to be for-or-against arises and is simply passed by. What a relief. In cultivating unconditional friendliness toward myself, despite my craziness, there is growing appreciation and gratitude for the craziness of others—space for the messy.

Finally, two of Lojong’s training preliminaries are “the rarity and preciousness of human life”—my human life included; and “the awesome and indelible power of our actions,” my actions—every action. These two slogans overset my cart of ego treasures. Increasingly, the awareness of my deeply ingrained habit of separation dawns on me, exposing the conviction that my inner life is isolated from others and insignificant. Yet, as a rare and precious human whose every action is indelible, doesn’t it mean that each little creak of my cart, as I trundle along the Way, adds its irreplaceable note to the music of the Now?

Slogan: Keep to the precepts, even if your life is at risk. To unravel this habit of separation, I’ve been cultivating samadhis that are its antidote. My favorite is seeing my whole body as infinitely vast and filled—hive-like—with all sentience, animate and inanimate, buzzing, communing in life. How could this hive of All not be affected by my every thought, mood, action! Suddenly it all counts. If it counts, I’m determined to be present for it, all of it: the craziness and the peace, the communion and the mess.

Slogan: Always maintain only a joyful mind.
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: 2/7, 2/28, 3/6, 3/27, 4/3, 4/17, 4/24, 5/1, 5/15, 5/22, 5/29, 6/5, 6/19
Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30-8:45pm (except 3/22 & 16/28)

Precept Class (with Genko Ni-Osho) ... Feb. 4th, 7:30pm - 9pm
Winter Odayaka Sesshin (with Genko Ni-Osho) ... Feb. 5th - Feb. 7th
Shobogenzo Reading Group ... Feb. 11th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
100 Meals a Month cook fest ... Feb. 12th, 7am - 10am
100 Meals a Month cook fest ... Feb. 20th, 9am - noon
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ... Feb. 21st, 5am - 11:15am
Shobogenzo Reading Group ... Feb. 25th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Nonviolent communications with Kathleen MacFerren ... Feb. 27th, 9am - 4:30pm
Senior Dharma Talk (Dr. Steve Ganko Hanson) ... March 6th, 7:30pm - 8:30pm
100 Meals a Month cook fest ... March 10th, 7am - 10am
Shobogenzo Reading Group ... March 10th, 7:00pm - 8:30pm
Zen Post Workshop (all are welcome) ... March 12th, 9:30am - noon
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ... March 13th, 5am - 11:15am
Board Meeting ... March 13th, 11:30am - 1:30pm,
Spring Sesshin ... March 18th - March 25th

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