Dear members and friends,

As I write this, Seattle is in the middle of a heat wave. Some of the recent evening sits have felt sweltering, a bit like a sauna, and by the end of an hour my thin kimono is soaked. I’ve also been doing a lot of psychological sweating the last few months, and have felt pretty thin-skinned. A lot has been going on, and I have returned to seeing my therapist after a long hiatus.

On July 28, our Dharma brother and Zen practice resident, Ralph Muzan Leach, passed from this incarnation. We were fortunate, with the help of many people, to bring Muzan home for hospice care for nearly two weeks, but even with the nearly herculean efforts of Rev. Seiho Morris, Muzan’s care exceeded our capacity to keep him here in his apartment. I was with Muzan as he rested each step on my knee departing from Chobo-Ji for the last time. His hospice care was transferred to the able hands of the caregivers at Providence Mt. St. Vincent in West Seattle eight days before his death. Two of his daughters and Michael Mukan Blome were with him as he passed at 8:17 pm and Carolyn Josen Stevens and I were there within 10 minutes to be a part of the transition. Muzan’s ashes have now returned to Chobo-Ji and currently rest under our Kannon in the zendo along with his picture ringing our kansho (temple bell) this past New Year’s Day. There will be a memorial and potluck on the 49th day following his bodily departure, which will be held here at the temple, 6 pm, Thursday, September 15. Please put this down in your calendar, and if at all possible join us for this celebration of Muzan’s unique character and contributions.

Summer Sesshin was a strong success and concluded with a Sensei Ceremony for Dee Seishun Endelman (more about this in her own words later in this issue). Seishun also served as our lead Tenzo (Chief Cook), with strong assistance from Anne Sendo Howells and Sally Zenka Metcalf. Our Shika (Host-Manager), Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik, did a fine job keeping us organized. Rev. Tendo Kirkpatrick marched us through our paces as Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) and Rev. Seiho Morris continued to stretch and improve his skills in the difficult post of Densu (Chant Leader). The demanding post of Jisha (Tea Server) was headed by Rev. Daikan Green and assisted by Rick Gendo Testa and Monika Jion Winkelmann. Edwin Kyosei Beatty and Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez served me well as my Injis (abbot assistants). We were also soothingly supported each day by doing medical qigong offered by two of the most talented teachers of this art in Seattle, Rev. Wu Wei Lin and Kimberly Ivy Sensei. If you wish, you can listen to every teisho from this sesshin at Chobo-Ji’s Podcast. Transcribed for this edition of Plum Mountain News, you can read the teisho from middle day, “The Old Woman, Zhaozhou, and the Tiger.”

After sesshin, on July 9, Jion gave her second workshop at Chobo-Ji on Writing from the Heart. She brought new skills and exercises for us to practice and I can tell you they brought out some amazing content for those who attended.

Continued on next page…
In addition to what has been mentioned above, you will find my closing Summer Incense Poem, two fascinating book reports, a brief Board report, Sally Zenka’s poem she wrote only an hour before Muzan’s death, Rev. Seiho’s essay on Muzan’s care, the announcement of new post assignments and the requirements for the Autumn Intensive, which starts on Sept. 11. Summer Odayaka sesshin is just around the corner, August 26-28, and Fall Sesshin begins September 23. Our autumn eight-week Zen Intro Series begins Tuesday, October 11. Carolyn and I will be spending a week in Hawaii for our 25th wedding anniversary beginning September 3. And I will be traveling to Nagaloka, Nagpur, India on October 8, with Rev. Hozan Alan Senauke to celebrate with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists the life of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who dedicated his life to bringing about a society without discrimination, and who was instrumental in improving the life of so-called untouchables. While in India I hope to also visit Bodhgaya.

May we all stay cool and continue to grow and unfold with the flow of the Dharma. Please make a strong effort be kind and patient with each other.

With gassho,

Genjo

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**Trust in Mind**

by Mu Soeng

Review by Rev. Rinzan Pechovnik

“The Great Way is not difficult to those unchained to preferences. When idealization and vilification are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised.”

Thus begins Sosan Ganchi Zenji’s the Xinxinming, or “Verses on the Faith Mind” or, as Mu Soeng prefers, “Trust in Mind.” It is a piece that stands out in the history of Buddhism as perhaps the first and clearest expression of the differentiation of Chan (Zen) Buddhism from Indian Buddhism. Some have gone so far as to regard the “Verses” as a direct response to or even attack against Buddhism, while others see it as an evolution and integration of Buddhist thought and China’s indigenous Taoist schools of practice. Mu Soeng argues convincingly for the latter, insisting that while Buddhism developed a revolutionary new form of thought, Chan introduced an equally revolutionary insistence on direct experience, “beyond words.”

Soeng breaks his examination of the poem into three parts, “The Dharma of Trust in Mind,” “The Tao of Trust in Mind,” and the “Chan of Trust in Mind.”

In the first, Soeng articulates the Indian Buddhist underpinnings of the Verses. He provides the basics of Buddhist philosophy: the Four Noble Truths, the twelve link chain of interdependent co-arising, issues of being vs. becoming, no-self, etc. Here, he lays down the basis of Buddhism as a form of thought directed not toward metaphysical understanding but toward a personal understanding of reality that frees one from dukkha (suffering). In all schools of Buddhism, dukkha is seen as the result of one being in a state of ignorance that leads one to clinging, the tensions and dissatisfaction of which create the tension or stress that robs one of ease and equanimity. The goal of Buddhism, then, is universally to see past our ignorance, to see how we get caught, to free ourselves from getting caught and experience the state of equanimity that arises from this direct perception of the nature of reality. There is no need for a higher metaphysical order. We need simply see reality as it is to experience freedom.

This very earthiness, the emphasis on reality, had a great appeal to the Chinese, whose own Taoist traditions emphasized intuitive thought and practical action over rational rigidity and metaphysical philosophizing. Here, in “The Tao of Trust in Mind,” Soeng explains the Taoist notion of wu-wei as unhindered action that is in accord with the way things are (reality). To function with wu-wei is to be in the Tao. It is to be non-self-conscious and non-self-referring. In a word, it is to be without preference. It is to simply be. The mind caught by preferences, bound by rules, caught in self-will, experiences tension, friction, suffering.

Moreover, the mind caught by preference becomes selfish. While wu-wei can be seen as in alignment with the equanimity that results from an investigation of dukkha, the outward looking nature of Chinese thought and practice distinguishes it from traditional Buddhism. While traditional Buddhism similarly emphasizes a freedom from selfishness, it also focuses primarily on individual freedom. Traditional Buddhist communities were inward looking in that they were there to support one another to attain freedom. In contrast, the Chinese collectivist emphasis supported practice as freeing us to be of service to others. To be in accord with the Tao not only frees us
So the introduction of Buddhism to China met fertile Taoist soil. The deconstruction of self and mind in Indian Buddhist practice found a willing symmetry with Taoist principles of no-mind (wu-shin), no-thought (wu-nien), and no-action (wu-wein.) As is common when one culture is introduced into another, there was a process of aligning like terms. Buddhism found a ready vocabulary in Taoism, but the Chinese of the Chan movement did not get caught in mere scholarship. Though philosophical Buddhism did plant itself in China, the Chan movement retained the essence of the Taoist principles of spontaneous and intuitive action, responsiveness, directness, and thusness. Words were helpful only in getting past words, and even then, they were hardly helpful at all. Bodhidharma’s meeting with emperor Wu is emblematic of this. Bodhidharma did not get caught in debate or philosophy. Indeed, his behavior (confronting the emperor and leaving abruptly) mirrors the freely absurdist activities of the Taoist sages themselves. This pinnacle moment would become repeated and expanded on in koan study (a unique Chan tradition) where a direct inspiration leads to an immediate action not mediated by thought.

Indeed, the amalgamation of Taoism and Buddhism created a form of meditation previously unheard of in Indian Buddhism. Meditation (zazen) was not only a means by which to investigate the mind, it was an expression of the enlightened mind itself. Still-sitting was the action of no-action. Investigating the mind was the mind of no-mind. Meditation became an experience. It became an expression of the Tao itself, not merely a means to an end.

In Sosan Genchi Zenji’s Verses, language is used to deconstruct itself. He speaks directly to the source of dukkha, the clinging, self-referential, deluded mind. Yet his use of language is Taoist in nature, replete with paradox and contradiction. There is no ultimate way to get a handhold on the poem. What does he mean when he says, “Consider movement stationary and the stationary in motion, and movement and rest cease to exist. When such dualities cease to exist, Oneness itself cannot exist. To this ultimate finality, no law or description applies”? How does one further explore this with words? Instead, Sosan Genchi Zenji points directly to the Tao. “Just let things be in their own way and there will be neither coming nor going. Obey the nature of things (your own nature), and you will walk freely and undisturbed.” This latter confidence in the Way cannot be found in Indian Buddhism. It is indeed the gift of Chan.

Mu Soeng closes his book with a commentary on the Verses and several Appendixes with various translation and other historical resources. While the commentary is helpful, these first three parts are the most powerful. Zen is often confused in the West with other forms of Buddhism. Moreover, the Western penchant for analytical thought and philosophical investigation runs counter to what the Taoist elements of Zen have to offer. While the different forms of Buddhism may be siblings, they are not twins. Indeed, Mu Soeng’s book might even suggest that Zen is more of a distant cousin. Personally, I find as much reflection of Zen in Taoist texts I read as in either Pali or Sanskrit Buddhist texts.

In the end, for me, this book helps enrich the complex and syncretistic nature of Buddhism while at the same time helping me to understand the historical, cultural and theoretical foundations of my own peculiar branch of Buddhism, Zen.

Hidden Lamp
The Old Woman, Zhaozhou, and the Tiger
Middle Day, Summer Sesshin, 2016
China, Ninth Century

One day when Master Zhaozhou Congshen was outside the monastery, he saw an old woman hoeing a field. He asks her, “What would you do if you suddenly met a fierce tiger?” She replied, “Nothing in this world frightens me.” and turned back to her hoeing. Zhaozhou roared like a tiger. She roared back at him. Zhaozhou said, “There’s still this.”

Study questions: What do you say to your fear? Did Zhaozhou and the old woman have the same roar? Where is the tiger right now?

What do we say to our fear? When we as children encounter the death of a grandparent, great grandparent, dog, cat or bird, we develop the existential fear that everyone we care for will die. It’s beyond obvious that many mammals and many other animals understand death. They mourn, and it’s really clear that they get it. However, I wonder whether dolphins or other very intelligent mammals such as elephants and primates get that they are going to die.

When we’re young, unless we’ve faced some terrible trauma or had a brush with mortality, many of us grow up feeling more or less immortal. We are perhaps afraid that our grandparents or parents might die, without really thinking that we will have to face our own mortality one day. That realization tends to get brushed aside for some time. However, after a number of decades, it becomes harder and harder to ignore that we too will perish. This aggregate, composite form called a human being is as impermanent as a leaf on a tree and, if we live so long, we will wither and fall. Our existential angst that arises with this realization increases as our false sense of immortality diminishes over time. Zen training is great for facing this existential truth. We are here to learn how to face our fear of losing absolutely everything; this is part of what we do. The zendo is a laboratory to investigate and explore our fear of losing everything. As we grow older, it also becomes clear that we may even lose our mental acuity and perhaps it is this which frightens us the most. We know that we may lose our ability to be ambulatory or continent and these thoughts, too, may frighten us a great deal. The process of dying can give us quite a fright because we realize that, should we live so long, all our faculties will fall away.

I’ve been doing Zen now, sesshin after sesshin, for over 40 years and we’ll have to see if it really allows me to face the truth that we are losing everything. So far, this practice has proved to be a good laboratory, and from time to time, as we all are, I’m tested in the real world of loss. I think I’ve
done pretty well so far. We’ll see how I face future losses. The proof will be in the pudding. When we have faced our fears about loss deeply and intimately we learn to accept that there’s nothing we can do about it. Sooner or later we realize that having higher walls and more money, will not prevent us from losing everything. There’s no safe haven that won’t crack with time, and there’s no amount of money that will do anything more than support the delusion that we’re secure or protected. Deep down, we know that everybody dies and that we too will lose everyone and every faculty should we live so long.

Concerning this fear of falling apart, losing everything, everyone and the certainty that this physical self will soon return to dust, Zen practice has served me pretty well. That doesn’t mean that I still don’t have some soft spots where fear gets the better of me. Zen’s reputation in the United States is dismal. We’ve had so many growing pains trying to figure out how to move this tradition from the East to the West and there’s been much idealization and vilification. There is some question about whether Zen as a tradition can, or even should, survive. If it is going to go forward, those in positions of leadership will need to have a great deal of transparency, integrity and, dare I say, humility. Priests must not be put up on pedestals; they will need to cultivate ordinariness and not be afraid to wear fancy robes, nor be attached to them. You all will have to be the judge of whether there are teachers, abbots, or roshis who serve in this way or not. One of my soft spots, more fearful to me than losing physical faculties, more scary than Alzheimer’s, or losing my daughter and my wife, is to lose my integrity. I think of myself as someone who is honest and transparent, willing and capable of looking at himself, and knowing that there’s always room for improvement. I know that none of us ever arrives; we’re always a work in progress. Nevertheless, to be exposed or accused as someone who is not honest, trustworthy, transparent or really caring is much more scary to me than death, loss of mental acuity or those closest to me. In this area, Zen hasn’t served me very well and I’m working on this fear so that if I am accused of something I need not panic or overreact.

This koan shows us how to face our fears, any fear, even our deepest, darkest fear. I have a friend who’s done Jukai with me, his name is Robert Burns and his dharma name is Heiwa (Peaceful Warrior). We have trained together for several decades and I go out to his place in Connecticut about once a year to do a three-day sesshin. His place is called Aiki Farms, and it’s where Gendo, who is sitting with us, and I met. Heiwa blends Zen, Aikido and organic farming. His farm is across the street from where he grew up. He’s got solar panels and indoor grow lights down in his basement where he grows sprouts. He sells this and other produce from the farm at the local organic markets. Heiwa has a bunch of children and two of his sons are living with him and working the farm. He teaches Aikido, leads daily zazen and teaches organic farming. He’s a salt-of-the-earth type of fellow, a warrior (ex-Marine), like an old Samurai, pretty tough. Certainly his Zen and Aikido training have given him a lot. He’s getting close to 80 and he’s still working the farm every day. When I go there to do sesshin I love that this zendo is in the basement, below the ground level, and that we’re sitting on a bamboo grass floor. Even though there’s some concrete between us and mother earth, we’re down in the earth. Zazen is a kind of spiritual hoeing, planting ourselves and cultivating a grounded connection to the earth. As soon as I can sit long enough, even sitting in the midst of my deepest darkest fear, I become calm and just breathe into any loss or fright without losing any peace of mind. I highly commend this practice of sitting in mother earth and cultivating realization. We are after all earthlings. We are all lumps of earth, extraordinary talking and listening lumps of earth, how weird is that?

We have a beautiful garden here. We’ve been working in it for the last three days. During our samu periods most of us have had a turn of working in the garden, pulling weeds, pruning the flowers, tending the vegetable garden and getting our hands and feet dirty. This kind of samu renews our connection to the earth and we are restored, maybe even humbled, over time exhausted, but exhausted in such a good way. When we are working in the earth it is difficult, if not impossible, to be afraid. When we feel connected and grounded in mother earth, this is the same thing as being connected to Muuuuuu. I think of communion with Mu as a seamless connection to the deep, dark, boundless mother earth.

To every sit I bring determination to just sit, breathe and listen. With each inhalation I draw up from deep down in mother earth some “chi,” life-energy. This energy comes in, circulates throughout my body and cleanses both physical and psychological knots of tension. With a little determination, all of us can become aware that each inhalation draws up this deep, dark, rich nurturing energy from mother earth and with each exhalation we exchange oxygen for carbon dioxide, and exchange weariness, anxiety, depression, sorrow, loss and anger for a lightness of being. Guess what? I take a lot of breaths on the cushion and so do you. Therefore, if just a little teeny layer of physical and psychological stickiness is relieved with each exhalation, then in the course of a day, wow, think of how much lighter we will be. This is not to say that our fear and discomfort doesn’t build up again with time, but know that sesshin is a time of release and restoration. At least, that’s how it always feels to me, this is what I want to
convey to you. This is my finger pointing at the moon, only in this case it is pointing at the ground.

Master Zhaozhou, who we know from our Japanese lineage as Master Joshu, is the same Joshu who, when asked if a dog has Buddha nature, responded “Mu.” Joshu was well familiar with the deep, dark, vast, infinite, formless, timeless origin that has no origin, that solves all riddles, grounds all fears and gives us the clarity and courage to do what’s right in front of us to do. When we are able to see exactly what needs doing, warranted by circumstances and within our capability, that’s known as wisdom. Well, actually, there is no thought of wisdom, when we are doing what needs doing. For example, this morning the toilet bowl was dirty, so I took some Comet and swished it around. This is just what needed doing. No thought of wisdom is Great wisdom! If you see some dust piling up in the corner, you get the broom and sweep it up. Great wisdom! If the lawn is looking lumpy and uneven, get the lawnmower! If the produce is getting ripe and bolting in the garden, then harvest! Great wisdom!

Joshu was outside the monastery. He saw an old woman working in the fields. Undoubtedly, he well knew this old woman. He probably saw this old woman every day and she too knew him. Oh, Joshu again! (laughter) She probably thought, “What’s he up to now? I’m hoeing, I’ve got work to do.” He saw her hoeing, doing what needed to be done, seamlessly connected to the earth. She was undoubtedly in deep samadhi (harmony with the activity at hand), at least until Joshu interrupted her hoeing (how rude!) with, “What do you do if you are suddenly met by a fierce tiger?” She rolled her eyes (laughter), “Nothing in this world frightens me, especially you!”

Why did nothing frighten this old woman? She’s been hoeing for as long as she had been alive; therefore, she was well grounded in mother earth, well grounded in deep, dark, vast Mu. She was as connected as Joshu practicing zazen up in his monastery. Perhaps farmers don’t need Zen. I think Zen practice and life of hoeing the ground are complimentary; they both keep us in communion with Mother Earth.

Joshu turned to her: ROOOOOOOAAR!!! She turned to him: ROOOOOOOOAAR!!!

And went back to her hoeing (laughter). This is so great! She was completely unimpressed by Joshu, one of the greatest Zen masters of all time. All those monks up in his zendo didn’t want to mess with Joshu; most were probably frightened of him, but not this old woman!

Joshu, being a guy, had to get in the last word, “There’s still This!” Okay, okay. Bye, bye (laughter). Joshu was of course pointing at the Absolute—there’s still this! —yeah, okay. The trees, flowers, moon, star, sunlight and morning dew, “There’s still this!” We don’t know this old woman’s name, although she was, as I read it, just as grounded, wise, spontaneous, and free as Zen Master Joshu.

Did Joshu and the old woman have the same roar? Yes and no. Really, a stupid question. Where is the tiger right now? I do hope in this sesshin that each of us is cultivating some of the spontaneity, fierceness, playfulness and simple clarity shown in this koan.

With gassho,
Genjo

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**Autumn Sesshin**

**Sept. 23 - 30**

Please help us get an accurate count by sending a deposit and application by Sept. 17, 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, 9/23, 5:30pm with informal supper, introductions and orientation. Sesshin from Saturday to the following Thursday runs from 5am - 10pm and concludes Friday, Sept. 30, around 11am.

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.

If you are departing by air, please don’t schedule your return flight before 3pm on Sept. 30.

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**Autumn Posts**

**Beginning Sept. 1st**

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

Anne Sendo Howells
Scott Ishin Stolnack
Chris Zenshin Jeffries
Sally Zenka Metcalf
Tenzo (Sesshin Cooks)

Rev. Tendo Kirkpatrick
Jikijitsu (Timekeeper)

Rev. Seiho Morris
Dee Seishun Endelman
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Rev. Daikan Green
Rick Gendo Testa
Gavin Ozan Mackay
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

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Continued on next page…
Edwin Kyosei Beatty  
Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez  
**Inji** (Abbot Assistants)

Carolyn Josen Stevens:  
**Fusu** (Accountant)

Steve Ganko Hanson, Sogetsu Hernandez,  
Anne Sendo Howells, Eddie Daichi Salazar,  
Chris Zenshin Jeffries, Rev. Tendo  
Kirkpatrick, Gavin Ozan Mackay  
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 at least once weekly between sesshins. **All unsui and prospective unsui are expected to participate.**

Chobo-Ji’s Autumn Intensive will start Sept. 11 with mini-sesshin, and conclude on Dec. 11. The purpose of the intensive is to give us the maximum opportunity to release entanglements by giving ourselves to the Dharma as fully as can day by day.

To participate we must commit to:

1) **ZAZEN:** A minimum of five hours of zazen per week, most, preferably attend all, mini-sesshins, and commit to attending both weekend sesshins full-time (or nearly full-time) during the intensive. This is the most important ingredient of the intensive.

2) **Doing 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 if you live in the Seattle area.

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.**

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**A Zen Pilgrim Reports**  
by Anne Sendo Howells

In chapter one of *Cypress Trees in the Garden: The Second Generation of Zen Teaching in America* (Sumeru Press, 2015), the author, Richard Bryan McDaniel, has sat down with three abbots of the San Francisco Zen Center for a wide-ranging conversation. Asked how they understand the purpose of Zen practice, one of the abbots, Blanche Hartman, brings up Shunryu Suzuki’s (and Dogen’s) notion of “beginner’s mind.” Beginner’s mind, Blanche says, is “always to be interested in ‘What is it?’ . . . . ‘What is this, I wonder?’ To meet everything with that kind of openness and inquiry, rather than, ‘Oh, I know what that is.’ Because everything changes. You might know what it is today, and tomorrow it’ll be different. So, stay awake.”

In this fourth of McDaniel’s volumes collecting stories from the history of Zen, he has shifted from putting together stories recorded by others to his own active questioning, listening, and observation. **Seeking an understanding of how contemporary Zen practice is evolving in North America, in 2013 and 2014 he undertook a pilgrimage, visiting Zen teachers from coast to coast and from Canada to the Mexican border. A triumph of the wonderfully alive book which resulted is the “beginner’s mind” McDaniel maintains from beginning to end. His questions are open-ended and for the most part evoke thoughtful, awake, open-ended responses in the teachers and students he meets. When he visited Chobo-Ji last fall, Rick told us he took care to write out his notes very soon after each of his conversations; the voices he captures are fresh and individual. It’s a long book, and I took my time with it, but whenever I picked it up again I felt engaged as Rick clearly was himself.**

Rick tells us that he approached each of his conversations with “only two prepared questions: ‘What do you say to someone who knocks on the door and asks about the function of Zen?’ and ‘How did you become engaged in practice?’ These questions began “a conversation which I could then allow to develop freely.” Other questions of course emerge. “Is Zen still a viable spiritual path?” is the big one for McDaniel himself. He undertook the journey hoping the answer would be “yes,” and—spoiler alert—it is. This doesn’t mean he ignores setbacks, the biggest of them being the proliferating sexual scandals which were coming into full public view as his journey began, and I think he gives due weight to these even though further investigation of them isn’t his primary purpose here.

Reading along, I loved encountering the many dedicated and creative Zen teachers Rick introduces us to, hearing their stories about their own spiritual journeys and their evolving ideas about possibilities for Zen practice. I found myself especially interested in their responses to Rick’s question about the function of Zen. Genjo Osho’s, coming near the beginning of the book, will be familiar to readers of this newsletter: “Zen points at our deep, true nature . . . . We usually have a very narrow, individualist perspective of ourselves and who we are and our place in the universe, and Zen points at an experience or a practice or a training that helps us transcend our ego identity and discover our deeper seamless nature with all beings great and small, animate and inanimate.” (p. 83) For Melissa Blacker and a number of others, a core element of Zen practice is the development of a perspective on suffering. “You know, since the first noble truth is the truth of suffering, there’s sometimes the feeling that it’s sequential; you have to suffer; then you have to see the truth of suffering, and then blah, blah, blah. But another way of looking at it is that suffering exists, and suffering itself—the truth of it—is ennobling. It is a noble truth of suffering. And suffering never goes away. But there is a there is a way to live with it in a more spacious manner. And so we don’t turn away from suffering.” (p.214)
A third take on this question comes from Bodhin Kjolhede in Rochester: "The function of Zen is to enable us to become fully present in everything we do. And in that way, to live out of what’s real rather than out of our thoughts. . . . When people sometimes ask, ‘Well, what’s our responsibility in Zen?’ It’s to respond to what needs to be done, to what’s called for, and that always means out of the present.” (p. 331) Joan Sutherland in New Mexico comes at “presentness” from a different angle. Connecting herself more with traditional Chinese Chan than with Japanese Zen, she says, beautifully, “. . . if I had to define [‘awakening’] really simply it would be by using one of the Chinese synonyms for enlightenment, which is ‘becoming intimate.’ So it’s a matter of becoming intimate with the world. The practice is a lot about clearing away what gets in the way of our intimacy with the world. That is the powerful deconstructive quality of the koan tradition. And when the clearing away has been done, and we stand on the bare ground, we’ve made ourselves fetchable by something else.” She continues, “I have this crazy notion that the whole universe is involved in a kind of large project of awakening, and really what the koans are about is allowing us to join most freely and most helpfully in that large process of the awakening of the universe.” (p. 176)

This last sentence from Sutherland will also sound very familiar to Genjo’s students; and despite their differences in emphasis the perspectives of all the speakers here are deeply connected. Letting readers sense this deep connection for themselves is one of the ways this book illuminates the vitality with which contemporary Zen is developing and renewing the wisdom of the masters evoked in the three earlier volumes of Rick’s series.

Vitality notwithstanding, cautionary notes about the fragility of today’s North American Zen are scattered through the book. Joan Sutherland, “in awe of the beauty of this tradition,” is “also concerned, because “I feel like it’s hanging by a very slender thread in the west. So I feel a sense of urgency.” (p. 175) Two with whom Rick discusses at length the strengths, weaknesses, and future of our joint enterprise are James Ford and Dosho Port, who appear in rather widely-separated chapters but have long-standing connections of training (Dosho did koan study with Ford and other teachers in the Boundless Way Zen which Ford founded) and friendship. They agree in foreseeing a “coming great contraction” in American Zen (p. 420) as teachers and sanghas age. Observing that “. . . pretty much all American Zen lineages collapse after their founder has gone,” Ford thinks what’s been happening results from bow to each other a little bit more.” (p. 202-03) Dosho Port, sharing Ford’s concern with a lack of rigor in some Zen training, observes a shift from an earlier period when Zen students in their widely separated centers seemed to compete about whose practice was most intense and difficult, to a situation where the competition seems to be over “whose center is the most accommodating” (p. 419).

A “Cambrian explosion of Dharma forms” is how Josh Bartok, another Ford student, sees American Zen right now, and that metaphor seems right for the kaleidoscope of practices we encounter in Cypress Trees. Taking any one of them as central, the whole spectrum looks different, though certain trends, such as a growing number of women teachers and socially engaged practices, are widespread. McDaniel’s solution for the book’s final perspective is interesting and effective. Off on the continental fringes (from a Seattle point of view) of Maine, he visits two small, struggling zendos, Great Tides Zen in Portland and Morgan Bay Zendo in Surry. Great Tides is struggling because it’s brand new, holding its first public workshop, in a rented space. It’s led by Dosho Port and his partner, Tesugan Zummach, who in the year since McDaniel first interviewed Port have relocated from Minnesota to Maine. They’ve felt welcomed but also are realizing they’re in a place where people “like to do their own thing, and so you might have a hard time getting a group together. They’re not joiners.” (p. 469) Morgan Bay Zendo has been there for a long time but has evolved from the Zen community which formed there between the 1960’s and 1980’s around Walter Nowick, a Japanese-trained and also quite eccentric American teacher who has a chapter in the third volume of McDaniel’s series. Morgan Bay is now “a center for meditation practice unaffiliated with any particular school of Buddhism.” Its leaders (resisting the word “teacher”) come from different traditions: Nowick’s Zen, Korean Kwan Um, Chinese Chan. They struggle with attracting participants, and they feel they need “to remain eclectic in order to remain viable.” It’s a “beautiful place,” McDaniel says, “but the reality remains that it is underutilized.” (p. 472)

For the Morgan Bay leaders, the future isn’t knowable, and right now they are
“caretakers,” offering space for a variety of styles of practice and retreats. The Great Tides workshop, in contrast, is an introduction to Zen, creating a formal environment with instruction in zazen, kinhin, prostration, liturgy, and the precepts. For Dosho Port, “the ‘way’ is both the practice and the tradition which maintains it.” Inviting a local yoga teacher to the workshop, Port had told him they would start at 5:30 a.m. “That’s kind of inconvenient,” said the yoga teacher. “And I said,” Port continues, “Yeah—you know—Zen is inconvenient, uncomfortable, repetitive, and uncompromising. Do you want to try it?” And he said, ‘Yeah. I think so.’” (p. 477)

Of course for all Zen centers, traditional and so determinedly not traditional as to have abandoned the name “Zen”, the future is unknowable, and every teacher McDaniels meets is experimenting in one way or another. Ryokan says, “What was right yesterday is wrong today! In what is right today, how do you know it was not wrong yesterday?” Zhaozhou’s Zen Buddhism was “the cypress tree in the garden.” McDaniels calls his book “Cypress Trees,” plural. What we’re seeing may indeed look less like branches of the same tree than like a grove of trees, or like a very patchy forest—no longer a garden—in which trees of altogether new species have evolved. In this review I’ve been able to follow only a few of the forest’s paths; they’re all fascinating.

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**Soon Gone**

by Sally Zenka Metcalf

Muzan, the Mountain Man, fell from a peak once. Crooked ever since, he stands now perched on the ridge of life and death, pale fingers trembling on red climbing rope.

How he loves his life! His favorite poets, his dog and his neighborhood cafes. Restaurantiers give him freebees—a favorite customer at the sumptuous table of living.

Ice-blue eyes glinting, he tells friends the story of his fall again... and again... flicking a grin from beneath his snowy, ale-flecked mustache.

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**No Mountain Top**

by Rev. Seiho Morris

One day while Muzan was in Ballard, I was sitting with him as he was going in and out of sleep, reading my koan from the Mumonkan. One time when he woke up, I asked him, “Out of curiosity, what koan are you working with Genjo Osho?” Muzan replied, “The next to last one... “Tosotsu’s Three Barriers.” I read it out loud to both of us.

To inquire after the Truth, grooping your way through the underbrush, is for the purpose of seeing into your nature. Here, now, where is your nature, Venerable Monk?

If you realize your own nature, you certainly are free from life and death. When your eyes are closed, how can you be free from life and death?

If you are free from life and death, you know where you will go. When the four elements are decomposed, where will you go?

In reading the koan, I realized that in that very moment, he was really, really, really deeply in it, working to answer this koan. I looked him in the eyes and told him, “Genjo Osho, our sangha, and your many friends will help you complete this koan.” Still holding our gaze with each other, tears growing in our eyes, Muzan replied “Yep.”

Five months before that moment, as I was sitting on the ferry on my way to Rohatsu Sesshin and looking out across the water at Mount Rainier, I was thinking of the two responsibilities I carried. The first was Jisha... do a solid job of helping to take care of those participating in the sesshin.

Rohatsu can be brutal. It’s not easy to face ourselves in such a deep way.

The second responsibility was to take care of my friend and Jisha-assistant Muzan. His name means “No Mountain,” yet the mountain of what he was facing and living through... “Stage IV” cancer was very present, evidenced by the bevy of medications which he was taking and which I had to regularly check that he remember to take. It was clear in my mind that this would be our last Rohatsu together. It was a miracle he was there.

Muzan wasn’t able to participate in Spring Sesshin, which came three months later. His body and time weren’t cooperating. His left arm was sore. He was thinking he had a pinched nerve or “tendonitis.” He was having a lot of difficulty navigating the health care system, which as the Buddhaverse would have it, is my specialty. I looked at him and told him, “Ummm you don’t play golf or tennis, and since you don’t have a medical degree let’s see a doctor. I’m going to help you get seen so you can find out what’s really going on.”

The result — learned after sitting in an emergency room for 11 hours — was that he had multiple tumors in his spine that were pressing nerves, causing his arm not to function. The metastasized cancer was spreading at an exponential rate and was unstoppable. Muzan’s choices and decisions were based on and measured by two factors... time and quality of life.

For the next four months, I had the privilege of being part of the Choho-Ji care committee, getting to help support and take care of Muzan daily. It turned into a very special “mission” for me. The mission? To be an unwavering friend, and to be part of a team of friends to help him let go of his life with as much dignity and grace as possible.

The term “mission” may seem odd, but the way I grew up, “missions” are big deals and something to be honored. This is especially so because when I was younger, I was so good at “not” honoring them. For a recovering person, the general mission is simple. Help yourself by staying clean, work the Twelve Steps, and help others to the best of your ability in the present moment. Not in the past... not in the
future… only in this moment, because that’s the only one that’s actually happening.

That said, I’m fortunate to have a job that affords me the ability to work anywhere that I have an internet connection, and also some amazingly mentally and emotionally supportive people in my life who don’t require me to do my relationships with them like it’s performance art, so I can always show up as myself. That can be a hard item to come by these days, based on observation.

As things unfolded with Muzan, the deal was just being around. Initially, helping him do what so many of us struggle with from time to time – advocating for ourselves, while simultaneously not wanting to be a so-called “burden” to others.

As time moved, circumstances necessitated more and more direct supportive care giving. It was going to be a difficult and challenging road, getting him to the other shore.

Over the months as things transpired in this journey, I got to see many, many, many amazing things. I was bearing witness to a lot of beauty within suffering. I got to see a young woman who had no experience in such things, be there for her dad in the hugest way possible. I got to watch, observe, listen, and be guided by my own teacher as we helped our friend, day by day, move through the remaining days of his life. I got to see his childhood friend, present like a heart-beat’s pulse, who gave him deep reassurance. I got to see people in the Chobo-Ji sangha sit in meditation for him, visit him wherever he was, read to him, bring him flowers, milkshakes, laughter, cards, pictures…and cook meals, clean his apartment, have talks to lessen anxieties and concerns. And be trusted to be honest with him, because there was nothing we could do to change the reality of what was happening – because the truth is, that in order to transition, to die, some disassembly prior to exhausting the breath is required so the body can let go.

Underpinning and supporting all these different activities was most of all friendship, floating on an Ocean of deep and abiding Love.

It was quite a journey – a mission of friendship that was worth doing. It was honorable, in the broadest sense of the word. I’m grateful to have had such trust and confidence not only from my dear friend, but from so many giving him care and support. That was very humbling…grounding.

As people, all of us exist with the forming of a wave of life and then that wave’s exhausting its energy, which we call death. What we do with the gift of that wave is a choice. We can treat it poorly and waste it, or be happy, venerating and esteeming its opportunities through acts of loving-kindness and friendliness. It’s a choice that only we can make. My encouragement is to be daring and soar.

On April 5, 2016, Muzan came over to my apartment. I invited him for dinner because he really, with his arm, couldn’t cook for himself. As we sat at the table he told me, “I have my death poem written.” I looked at him and said, “Oh? Please let me hear.” Looking clear and present he spoke…

The mountain has no top,
Still…
I climb.

Since hearing his voice speak those words, I have made several calligraphies to honor my friend. I cherish the gift of sharing those days with him. What comes to mind are the stories... recitations of poetry... his joy at hanging out with his beloved Kerouac, otherwise known as ‘Lil guy.’ The love and esteem he held for his children, family and friends.

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Photo by Steve Ganko Hanson

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Eight Week Zen Intro Series

Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9pm
Beginning 10/11 – Ending 11/29
(each Tuesday can stand alone, no reservation required.)

10/11 - Seated Meditation
10/18 - Mindfulness Practice
10/25 - Retreat Practice
11/1 - Deep Inquiry (koans)
11/8 - Four Noble Truths
11/15 - Noble Eightfold Path
11/22 - Four Great Vows
11/29 - Zen’s Progress West

Suggested Donation for all eight is $50, which includes fee for mini-sesshin on Nov. 13, 5-11:30 am
**Sensei Ceremony**

On the last day of Summer Sesshin, Friday, July 1, 2016, we celebrated Dee Seishun Endelman’s long years of Zen practice by giving her a brown rakusu at the end of the Sensei Ceremony. Here is what is required and expected of Chobo-Ji Sensei. As abbot, it is my hope that Senseis act as Dharma guardians, protecting the practice and the sangha, acting as a bridge between lay and ordained sangha members. I will seek their council in complicated circumstances.

**Sensei (先生 – Teacher)** candidates must be lay members in good standing that have completed at least 40 weeklong sesshins, served as the lead in every temple post at least once, done Jukai, attend at least two weeklong sesshins a year, and be prepared to renew and deepen their vows in the Sensei ceremony. Sensei may give dharma talks and in a pinch lead rituals in the absence of an unsui or Osho.

Some background for those who do not know about this relatively new Chobo-Ji tradition: about seven years ago, Genjo decided to start a tradition in which lay students would do, essentially, a second Jukai ceremony, reaffirming their commitment to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Lay students who have participated in at least 40 Sesshins and who have held all of the Temple Posts at least once would be eligible for this second ceremony during which they would receive a brown rakusu and the designation of “Sensei”. As I understood it, his purpose was to counter the sometimes overly-hierarchical nature of Zen form, where being an Unsui/Osho/Roshi was seen as the ultimate in rank. He wanted to establish a “lay track”, if you will.

And now to hear from Sensei Seishun her thoughts about this ceremony...

Genjo Osho has asked me to write a few words about the Sensei Ceremony on July 1st where I received a brown rakusu. I gave a dharma talk that morning and, frankly, I don’t remember most of it but I thought I would share a bit of my journey to accepting the new rakusu and the designation of Sensei.

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Time passed and the whole issue became unimportant. After all, what would it change? Not my practice. Sitting, chanting, chopping vegetables, doing my best to be a good friend to my fellow sentient beings, paying attention to life...all of these things depended on no particular color of rakusu or, in fact, on any rakusu at all. So I forgot about it and, when I did remember, it was

Shodo DeGroot; and Scott Ishin Stolnack. I always thought it was a good idea and, at first, really wanted that new rakusu! Fortunately, I was far enough along in my practice to realize that wanting the new rakusu meant that I clearly wasn’t ready for it ☺.

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only to ask whether I could even wear a new rakusu. Most of the time, the answer was a shrug, whatever!

When Genjo asked me, a week before Summer Sesshin, if I wanted to do a Sensei Ceremony, I was in great doubt. I was, in fact, going through a period where I was thinking of pulling back my commitment… not to the Three Treasures, but to my considerable involvement in the community life of Chobo-Ji. I asked him not to throw away the rakusu but to hold it as I wasn’t sure whether I wanted it.

Then two things happened at Summer Sesshin. The first was that being in Sesshin helped me to uncover and bring to the light the source of my distress and doubt about my commitment to Chobo-Ji. As so many of you have experienced, once we bring to light the sources of pain, we create the conditions for clarity to emerge.

The second was that, even though I was doing Sesshin very part-time (and cooking most of the time that I was there so sitting very little), I was feeling the benefits of the meditation intensive. I felt the layers surrounding my heart drop away as the week progressed and became imbued with a lightness of spirit that often occurs only after hours and hours of sitting. It struck me that all of the people sitting Sesshin—every one of those beautiful souls sweating in the summer heat on the cushion—were creating an energy together that I could see benefited all sentient beings in some way. It certainly benefited this one! Amazing!

With this realization, my commitment to Chobo-Ji deepened and I was able to accept joyfully the offer of a second Jukai. Its meaning became clear to me. It is no more (or less) than a deepening commitment to this community and, by extension, to all of the sentient beings we seek to care for. All doubt vanished.
Important Dates to Remember

Daily zazen:  M-F, 5:30-6:30 AM;  Sat. 7-8:30 AM;  M & W, 7:30-8:30 PM;  Sun. 6:30-7:30 PM

Dharma Talks, Sundays: 9/18, 10/2, 10/9, 10/16, 10/30, 11/6, 11/20, 11/27, 12/18

Zen Intro: Tuesdays, 7:30 ~ 8:45PM (except 9/27 & 12/6)

Summer Odayaka Sesshin ...
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Board Meeting ...
Autumn Sesshin ...
Eight Week Zen Intro Series begins ...
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Senior Dharma Talk by Daichi ...
Mini-Sesshin with meal, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Board Meeting ...
Eight Week Zen Intro Series ends ...
Rohatsu Sesshin ...
Zendo CLOSED ...
New Year’s Day, Chanting, Bell Ringing & Potluck ...

Aug. 26 - Aug. 28
Sept. 11, 5am - 11:15am
Sept. 11, 11:30am - 1:30pm
Sept. 23 - Sept. 30
Oct. 11, 7:30 - 9pm
Oct. 23, 5am - 11:15am
Oct. 30, 7:30pm
Nov. 13, 5am - 11:15am
Nov. 13, 11:30am - 1:30pm
Nov. 29, 7:30 - 9pm
Dec. 3 - Dec. 11
Dec. 25 - Dec. 31
Jan. 1, 2017, 10am - noon

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