Dear members and friends,

A wet and windy autumn is upon us. Carolyn (Josen) Stevens, my life partner, is home from the rehabilitation hospital in Hawaii, and recovering slowly but steadily from the spinal cord injury incurred when she was slammed into the beach by a wave on September 13. We both share great gratitude for the many cards, flowers, meals, transport and funds that have been given to support us both through this trauma. Carolyn can now mostly dress herself, feed herself, respond to text, phone and emails, and has even begun to walk around our apartment without her walker.

About two and one-half weeks after Carolyn’s accident, Chobo-Ji’s weeklong Autumn Sesshin, 2021, concluded on October 1st. This was our first weeklong sesshin since Rohatsu 2019. Rev. Gendo Testa served as our Dai-Tenzo (chief cook) and kept the meals simple, nutritious and delicious. Elijah Seigan Zupancic was our Shika (host manager) and worked hard with Rev. Sendo’s help to rotate work assignments equitably. Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares served as our Jikijitsu (time keeper) and kept us all on track. Sam KoU Tullman served as our Densu (chant leader) and kept the beat. Daichi served me as my Inji (abbot attendant) and helped coordinate the dokusan line for our 21 participants. Felix Pekar, assisted by Sally Zenka Sensei, served as Jisha (tea servers) and did an excellent job caring for our needs.

Our Autumn Sesshin was surely smaller than it would have been, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not everyone who wanted to attend did so because of continued concern of transmission in tight indoor spaces. We mitigated these concerns as much as possible by requiring everyone to be tested shortly before attendance and having only fully vaccinated attendees. Furthermore, we wore masks throughout sesshin, except while eating or drinking and allowed anyone with further concerns to not participate in group meals. We also asked anyone who was having any cold- or flu-like symptoms to stay home. With over 750,000 deaths in the USA alone, over five million deaths worldwide, and more waves of high infection rates expected, there is ample reason for concern. The COVID-19 vaccines, though far from perfect, are clearly preventing deaths and lowering the chance that breakthrough infections will require hospitalization. Therefore, for the time being, Chobo-Ji will continue to require that all sangha members attending events in person be fully vaccinated and wear masks while indoors. Happily, no one attending Autumn Sesshin became ill.

At the conclusion of sesshin two sangha members, Adam Feuer and Felix Pekar, did Jukai and received rakusus. There will be more on this later in this issue. Beyond this you will find a transcription of my Teisho from the fifth day of Autumn Sesshin, the closing incense poem, offerings by Sally Zenka Sensei and Rev. Seifu, and announcements for upcoming Rohatsu Sesshin, Toya, Holiday break, New Year’s Day, upcoming winter book group and Winter Odayaka. It is my hope that Carolyn will be well enough for me to make my planned trip to Germany the last week of January to lead a sesshin with the Bonn Sangha. I hope everyone is able to enjoy the upcoming holiday season. Take care.

With gassho,

Genjo

Our First Weeklong Sesshin During Pandemic
Darkness
by Sally Zenka Metcalf Sensei

Recently I revisited Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* for the first time since the 1970s. Forgotten was the full quote in which her mysterious title lay embedded. I listened for it throughout the audiobook, sometimes dozing off to sleep.

I woke after such a nap beneath the sun from my big, blue-sky window. To the south drifted a black-bellied cloud, brightly luminous around its edges. That’s so like our zazen! We sit, hoping for the luminous. Sometimes we bask in it. Or instead, we fall into the dark underbelly of our mind, inundated by emotion and obsession, clouded by confusion or dullness. Wanting out.

Struggling against darkness is a koan for me. With winter setting in, the swiftly waxing night sniffs out precious seconds of sunlight. Even during daylight, low-hanging rain clouds dim the garden. Beneath the lowering shadow, my inner child cries, “Noooooooo!” This is one way I resist what is. Into my lamps go full spectrum light bulbs!

And yet. . .

Another name for darkness can be suffering. The Buddha taught us to transform suffering by changing our mind. When I suffer, I count on this teaching and enter the fixed, dark point of my distress, asking “What is This?” again and again. Out of the dark might come an awakening. Perhaps it’s the discovery of a hidden, toxic bulb!

My grade school teacher once described the workings of rain clouds: the gathering of dust turning white clouds gray; water vapor condensing around these dark motes until, suddenly—too heavy to remain aloft—rain bursts into the bright sky!

Falling! Falling! Falling!

Down in the thirsty world below, raindrops splash into bright dahlia blossoms, stream along striated stems. Spill from the blushing leaves of Grandmother Maple, flow along her branches and trunk into the waiting earth. Myriad roots and tiny creatures guzzle the moisture and stir the soil to life. A miracle! So, out of the roiling darkness of the cloud springs drenching, life-giving rain.

Whether ours is a category five inner storm, or we’re adrift in foggy doldrums, might we enter our distress, looking deeply? Without the dark mote gathering moisture there is no rain. Without the rain the luminous waits to bloom.

Last night, just before falling asleep to Ursula Le Guin, I heard.

Light is the left hand of darkness
And darkness is the right hand of light

The call is the turning word to answer.

Mumon’s Commentary:
If you can give the exact turning word to this koan, you will see that the meeting at Mount Grdhrakuta is definitely present here. If not, then know that Vipasyin Buddha is still unable to get the Truth even though he began his seeking in remote antiquity.

Mumon’s Poem:
The calling out is good,
but even better is the answering.
How many are there who have opened their true eyes?
The elder brother calling out,
the younger brother replying,
the family shame is revealed.
This is the spring that does not belong to Yin and Yang.

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According to Zen Buddhist lore, Kasho was the dharma heir of the historical Buddha. When Shakyamuni held up a flower, only Kasho smiled amongst the assembly. Remember, the entirety of the Buddha’s teisho was holding up a flower. And something about that moment fully penetrated Kasho’s heart-mind, and he smiled warmheartedly. Ananda was the historical Buddha’s chief attendant; he probably had a kind of photographic memory, and was able to recall everything the Buddha said and pass it on to the next generation. However, during the life of the Buddha, Ananda did not deeply penetrate his own nature sufficiently to awaken to the vast, alive, intimate infinite. Ananda knew about it, but knowing about it is not the same as feeling it on a cellular level. This story is about that moment when Ananda finally broke through, and felt the intimate infinite in every fiber of his being.

There are lots of stories in Zen literature that involve a kind of call and response, such as we find in this story. Therefore, this kind of call and response exchange is very important in understanding the Zen perspective of the world. You’ve probably heard me describe this sort of exchange as “two mirrors perfectly reflecting each other.” If you stick your head between them, you see reflection after reflection out to infinity. An infinite depth is revealed when two mirrors look at each other. It’s that kind of depth, clarity and intimacy that is being pointed at here.
Genki Takabayashi, our founding abbot, often said that one of the benefits of our practice is that we learn to cultivate “vacation-mind.” At other times he called this “blue-sky-mind” or “big-sky-mind.” It’s easy to have big-sky-mind when we’re on vacation, because there are few complications and everything’s mostly taken care of. On vacation, usually our agenda is small, and we have set ourselves up to have an enjoyable time. Therefore, it’s easy to find vacation-mind on vacation. It’s not so easy to find vacation-mind when sitting tired and exhausted on the cushion, and in a way that’s the point. If we can manage to find intimate, real vacation-mind during sesshin, when we’re vulnerable, exhausted, raw, and hurting, that’s a powerful asset that we can bring out of the zendo and back into our daily life. It makes daily life, after sesshin, more like a knife through warm butter.

I’ve been keeping you updated on Carolyn’s recovery process after her September 13 spinal cord injury in Hawaii. Last night’s telephone call, at around ten o’clock, seven o’clock her time, was so different from the night before. She was not grimacing in pain, and could look forward, in a strange way, to the next six months of intense recovery work. She said she was feeling everyone’s love and good wishes, and is very much looking forward to my arrival this coming Sunday, October 3.

Backing up to the moment when we were both in the ocean together, on the middle day of our ten-day, thirtieth anniversary trip to Hawaii, we were standing in the ocean meeting relatively small three or four-foot waves, the kind of waves that if you’re in the ocean close to the shore, you’re standing on the sand. If you don’t want to get knocked over you just turn to your side and let the wave pass around you. If it was a bigger wave you might dive under it, but these were so small that you could just hold your ground by turning to the side, letting the warm water wash over you. We had done that a couple of times, and playfully caught a couple of these very small waves, going the very short distance to the shore. Not a very big ride, but still fun.

Carolyn, instead of having a nice little ride, got picked up three or four feet by the wave, and with tons of water behind her, slammed into the beach sand, nearly breaking her neck. She drifted a few more feet to the shore, completely paralyzed. I found her face down in three inches of water, unable to move. After realizing that she couldn’t move, let alone stand, the rescue began by turning her over, and starting to drag her further onto shore. Other beach goers came to help, along with lifeguards and soon she was on a stretcher being whisked away by an ambulance to the only hospital on Maui, about an hour away. As desperate as that situation was, not knowing whether she was going to be a quadriplegic, neither one of us panicked. Fortunately, at the time of the accident, all we had for each other was love. Therefore, there was no interference with our intimacy because of this tragedy. What a blessing that we hadn’t had a fight that day, or that we hadn’t been even a little grumpy with each other. How wonderful that when this happened, we were in a deep, blissful, warm-water intimacy with each other. We were like two mirrors lost in our reflection. These infinitely deep reflections are not at all cold, they are in fact a warm, rich intimacy that dissolves all concepts of self and other.

Annada knew what he was missing. And he was jealous of Kasho. Not envious, like “Why did he get it and not me! Because, you know, I’ve got the photographic memory and I’ve been keeping the oral tradition. I’ve been his attendant all along!” It was not at all that kind of envy. Nevertheless, Annada knew intellectually what he was missing, but couldn’t quite feel. So, Annada says to Kasho, “The World-Honored One transmitted to you the brocade robe. What else did he give you?” Genki Takabayashi gave me this kesa I’m wearing; something intimate that he passed to me. Kasho, seeing this depth of Annada’s yearning, instantly met Annada’s query by brightly calling out his name, “Annada!” That loud call cracked the artificial barrier that was separating Annada from his depth. There was no anger in that call but enough oomph to disintegrate Annada’s defenses and penetrate his artificial ego barriers. Annada at once, when hearing his name, said “YES!” Tears streaming down his face. I wasn’t there, and this may be a myth, but in such circumstances, I’m certain tears were streaming down his face.

Kasho said, “Pull down the flagpole at the gate.” Kasho was getting ready to give a teisho. In China, Japan, Korea, and supposedly back in India, when a sage was going to give a talk, a flag would be raised at the temple or the meeting place, to symbolize come one come all, take a seat and have a listen. Kasho was saying, “well, no need for a talk today.” Mumon states in his commentary, “If you can give an exact turning word to this koan, you’ll be meeting yourself at the sacred mount.”

In other words, if you haven’t had this experience and aren’t able to express it to our mutual satisfaction, then let’s wait until you can. If you don’t yet know this experience intimately and fully, then do not pass go. Instead, return to the zendo, face your own depth, combust your own barriers, realize fully your own intimacy with the

Continued on next page ...
There were two other ocean related near-fatal accidents in my life. In the first, I was swimming in the Pacific near San Diego with my daughter Adrienne, who was about seven or eight. Even at this age she was already a good swimmer. I took her out into the waves to where I was still standing on the sand, but she was not. We were both enjoying the ocean. She grew up in Seattle, so the ocean was a new experience for her. Carolyn and I grew up in Southern California and so knew the ocean well. It was a pure delight as a father to share this ocean experience with my daughter. She was swimming beautifully, and we were very much enjoying each other’s company in the warm water. However, after a bit I noticed that Adrienne could not swim against the tow of the water back to shore. The distance was not that far from the shore, I could swim or walk it easily, but Adrienne could not on her own or with my help make progress towards the shore. The waves were not big, and we were riding them easily going up and down with the swells. However, at the top to each swell, I would lose my footing.

Now I’m starting to seriously worry that soon my daughter would become exhausted, and then potentially she could drown. I quickly realized that I was in a life and death situation. Even though we’re at a crowded beach and there are lifeguards, maybe no one would see that we are in trouble, because we were not actually yet in trouble, we just couldn’t get to shore. Who would see that we couldn’t get in? Adrienne saw that I was starting to get frightened about not being able to move back towards the shore. And she said this most intimate thing, “Don’t worry Daddy, see, I’m swimming fine, we’re okay.” Though I was consoled by her swimming strength, I started waving my arms to attract attention. Without my glasses, the distance to the shore felt like a million miles because I couldn’t see if anybody was seeing us. I could see the shore, but everyone beyond a short distance was a complete blur. There was no way to tell if my distress was being seen by a lifeguard or others. Then out of nowhere comes a lifeguard with a float and says to my daughter, “can you hold onto this,” and then proceeds to swim to shore pulling her from the line connected to the float. The lifeguard asked me, “Are you okay?” and I assured him that I could easily get myself back to shore and soon everyone was safe.

How strange, in the first incident, Carolyn could have died. In the second case, with Adrienne, she could have died. In the third case, which I’ll tell you now, I could have died. This time I think it was our 25th anniversary trip to Maui, and I decided to swim with my fins on, a snorkel and a mask, a half-mile. My destination was a cove called Black Rock, where I knew lots of tropical fish gathered. I decided to swim rather than walk along the beach because – I could. After a time, I arrived and enjoyed the sights. At one point I was swimming above a school of rays “flying” in formation. When I began my swim back, the weather had changed, the sun was obscured by dark clouds, and the current had substantially shifted out to sea. Weather changes quickly in Hawaii; a storm was brewing overhead and even though the shore was less than a hundred feet away, I was making little progress. Then one of my fins broke and fell off my foot, now I was making no progress at all. Fortunately, I was next to the rock cliff on the north side of Black Rock and occasionally I could grab on for a few moments of respite before attempting to once more make it shore. Now more than a little tired, I was clinging to a rock face, seemingly unable to make any progress.

There’s a big hotel perched atop the rocks, but no one saw me struggling below. Moreover, there was no one left on the beach in front of me, because everyone had left the beach. This beach had no lifeguard, as only two beaches on Maui have a lifeguard. Clinging to the rocks from time to time and then swimming a few feet at a time, I eventually dragged myself up onto the beach. Then I walked the half-mile further north to where Carolyn was waiting for me. I came back like a wet noodle and she said, “Where have you been? I didn’t really expect you to come from over there.” And I told her the whole story.

We are always on the brink of life and death whether we know it or not. It’s hard to let this truth in. It’s kind of easy to see in the three instances I have just related. However, it is not easy to let in that this very breath may be our last, or the last of anyone we love and treasure. The most essential point of Zen practice is this matter of life and death. If this is our last day in physical form as a human being, how do we want to live it? If you happen to die on this cushion, how do you want to take your last breath? How do you eat your last meal, or walk this last kinhin, or make this last bow? I should like to meet the moment of death intimately, which means I work to meet each moment intimately. I don’t always succeed, but I make the effort, because indeed, this moment could be my last.

The calling out is good. Even better is the awakening that came with the response. How many are there who have opened their true eyes at this level of intimacy and depth? The elder brother calling out, the younger brother replying, the family shame is revealed. They are both completely naked. This is the spring that does not belong to Yin and Yang, right and wrong. These kinds of moments transcend life and death. This is the spring of beyond the beyond, this is the spring of intimate, infinite muuuuuuu...
Closing Incense Poem

Autumn Sesshin 2021

This was a test of the emergency zazen system.

In the midst of a pandemic, Strong winds descend from Mt. Tahoma.
Who heard Charlie howl and the maple leaves rustle?
– No one –
From the middle of the Pacific Josen is witness, Heart-Mind awakens to the intimate infinite.

Rohatsu Sesshin
Dec. 4 - 12

Rohatsu Sesshin, to be held this year in our own Zendo, is the culminating sesshin of our year of Zen practice. It is the longest of our sesshins – “one long day” which will begin with the striking of the Han Saturday evening, December 4, and conclude with the striking of the Han Sunday morning, December 12. The sesshin will be in-person only; participants must be fully vaccinated and be willing to take a COVID-19 test at or just before the start of Rohatsu. Everyone coming is expected to attend all 8 days. If you haven’t already done so, please help us get an accurate count by sending an application and deposit ($75). The cost of sesshin is $350 (less dues for this month): payments may be made by check or PayPal. Rohatsu starts at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, December 4, with an informal supper, introductions, and orientation. From Sunday to the following Saturday, sesshin runs from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. We begin the final Sunday at 5:00 a.m. and conclude around 11:00 a.m.

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.) We offer limited scholarships to sesshin. For more information, please email: registration@choboji.org

Winter Odayaka
Feb. 18 - 20

Odayaka means “peaceful,” and these sesshins are a little less arduous with more dialogue than our weeklong sesshins. You may choose to attend in person if you have been fully vaccinated. We will be offering traditional meals for those attending in person. On Friday and Saturday the beginning time will be either 5:30 (optional) or 7:00 a.m., and we’ll close after the Closing Sutras at 8:30 p.m. On Sunday we’ll begin at 5:00 a.m. and close at noon, following Council. Please fill out this application if attending in person.

Registration for Zoom attendance is required for each day. The Zoom invitations and registration links are below. Requested donations are $50 for Friday, $50 for Saturday, and $30 for Sunday. Please note that if you are attending all three days, you may make a single payment of $130. You can send your donations to PayPal.

Please indicate the purpose of your donation in the note/memo field.

Day 1 – Friday, Feb. 18, 7:00 am
Register in advance for this meeting using this link.

Day 2 – Saturday, Feb. 19, 5:30 am
Register in advance for this meeting using this link.

Day 3 – Sunday, Feb. 20, 5:00 am
Register in advance for this meeting using this link.

Winter Book Group
Feb. 3 to March 17
Thursday evenings, 7 - 8:30 PM

The book: Grieving While Black: An Anti Racist Take On Oppression and Sorrow by Breeshia Wade (North Atlantic Books, 2021). Breeshia Wade encourages those who are not Black to consider how their own unexplored grief amplifies the suffering of Black people. Wade uses her practice as an end-of-life caregiver to encourage those who are not facing illness, death, or dying to be open to what grief can teach them about relationship, life, failure, sex, and desire. Reading it together is part of Chobo-Ji’s ongoing commitment to wake up to racism in ourselves and in our community, country, and world. We’ll gather weekly in Chobo-Ji’s lounge for 7 discussions covering the 7 chapters, Zoomers are also welcome! Join us for any evening, but please read the chapter. Reading for February 3: Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1: Grief as Spiritual Death.

To attend in person, please verify Covid vaccination status by sending a photo of your card (if you haven't already done so) to zen@choboji.org.

To join by Zoom, use this link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86013946415
Meeting ID: 860 1394 6415
Book group is free, though we're always grateful for your kind $5 donations in the bowl at the entrance to the Zendo.

Questions? Contact CBJ book group organizers: Eddie Daichi Salazar at salazare@seattleu.edu or Sally Zenka Metcalf Sensei at metcalf.sally@gmail.com.
A Short History of Mind
by Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares

In our western world, rational discourse still rules, a legacy of the profoundly influential René Descartes, he of “I think therefore I am” fame, or infamy perhaps, depending on your perspective. Monsieur Descartes argued that being was to be identified primarily with the thought and logical discernment that he felt only human beings were capable of, as our defining and most significant characteristic. As he got older and moved away from mathematics into metaphysics, he went so far as to define God as “pure thought.” With this framing, unique as it was in the western world of its day, little room was left for much else.

In the cultures where Buddhism originated and first spread, starting with the Indian subcontinent, and then China, Tibet and beyond, “Mind” had broader connotations. The Indians, no mathematical slouches themselves, gave us highly elaborate explanations for “Mind,” encompassing the manas, ahramka, citta, and buddhi of the Vedas, and resolving into the Atman (“Great Self”) of the Upanishads and beyond, but always with a reverence far beyond their complicated constructs. That is, Atman referred to the animating spiritual principle of the entire universe, such that it became inseparable from Brahman, or the Absolute. And therefore encompassed feelings, thoughts, intuitions, psychologies and philosophies, and much more.

The Indian Buddhist incorporation and reaction to these Hindu strands, encapsulated variously in Shankara’s “Anatman” (formlessness) or Nagarjuna’s corollary “Sunya” (voidness) become increasingly important as they resolve via negativa style into “No-Mind.” And all this before we even truly leave India!

By the time we get to China, Buddhist notions and practices receive a warm welcome as the Confucians celebrate the morality precepts (the Vinaya), while Taoists revel in Buddhist meditative and contemplative practices.

Which is how we get “Xin,” (Shin or kokoro in its Japanese renderings) originally heart, but then “heart-mind” with the reinforcement of Indian influences, with attendant resulting meanings of soul, wisdom, and essence in the Taoist direction, and sincerity and faithfulness, in the Confucian one. These all then get blended together to produce an ever expanding palette of “Mind,” with cascading overlays of varying Indian and Chinese perspectives, marinating in contemplative, meditative experiences.

All of which is a bit of a contrast with Descartes, struggling with his finger instead of the moon. In René’s defense, however, his outlook wasn’t completely foreign to Ch’an Buddhists many centuries before him (or to us for that matter), which is why in the school of Lin-Chi we get so many kung-ans (koans) encouraging us to put our reasoning faculty into proper perspective!

In any event, when Dogen walks into 13th Century China this is the Ch’an he encounters, that is, one focused principally on “directly pointing to mind,” in all its facets. By the time he returns to Japan, we find him stating with apparent nonchalance in the aptly named Shobogenzo Sokushinzebutsu (The Mind Itself is Buddha): “The mind that has been correctly transmitted is the one mind… and all dharmas are one mind. The mind is mountains, rivers, and the great earth; the sun, the moon, and stars are nothing other than the mind.”

Nowadays, we are finding the notion of Xin applied to all sorts of disparate endeavors beyond the now traditional domain of Zen, and its pervasive influence on culture, literature, spirituality, martial arts etc. These more esoteric forays include astronomy, where kokoro is helping us to better understand our expanding universe, and, quite interestingly, to artificial intelligence, where it is allowing researchers to enhance the capabilities of otherwise “Cartesian” supercomputers, so they might encompass the breadth and depth of “Mind” we humans are privileged to experience.

And now on to the next topic: mindfulness anyone?

Jukai Ceremony

Jukai (受戒 – Precept Receiver) candidates need to petition in writing to the Abbot at least one month prior to the ceremony. Jukai candidates usually have attended regular zazen at Chobo-Ji, or an affiliated temple, for a minimum of six months (including at least two weekend sesshins), taken our precept classes or completed a course of equivalent study, must be regular financial supporters of the temple, and feel ready to give themselves to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma & Sangha), working to live our Great Vow to care for all beings great and small, animate and inanimate. At the ceremony, candidates take the Precepts and Four Bodhisattva Vows, and receive a rakusu and a dharma name.

On the last day of Autumn Sesshin, Oct. 1, 2021, Felix Pekar and Adam Feuer did Jukai. Here are some of Felix’s own words on why he wanted to do this ceremony:

I used to do grad school homework at Victrola many years ago in the early morning hours, while Chobo-Ji members would gather for post-meditation coffee. I always observed with curiosity, never guessing that I would one day sit amongst you all as a regular...

I write, petitioning to receive Jukai, because I am nourished by the support and direction of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Receiving Jukai is an acknowledgement that, “This Dharma, incomparably profound, and minutely subtle, is hardly met with even in hundreds of thousands of eons.” I recognize the rarity of this opportunity, this consciousness, this form. I sense the vigilance required to grow this seedling, but even more pressing, the vigilance required to fully take my place in the forest, interdependent - nourishing and nourished.

To best do this, guidance is required. As an example, in a wilderness setting there are infinite ways to cross a landscape. One can strike out blindly into the dizzying chaos of a forest, or perhaps find a game trail, or perhaps find a well-established clearly marked trail. To me, receiving Jukai offers this sense of a trail, even though I realize Zen would probably say the path is pathless – I know what bushwhacking is like – and I’ll gladly take a worn path where I can.
A path to me is a tactful reduction of options. Structures like the precepts provide me with more mental space for contemplative pursuits, which ultimately allow me to be of greater service to others. If not on a path, the world’s options for behavior and ways of being are too oceanic.

A path, beautifully, is formed by many and by frequent use. If a path doesn’t serve a purpose it falls into disuse. Well-worn paths are lovingly kept and tended by those who use them. Receiving Jukai, to me, is being received into this community of path keepers, specifically the community at Chobo-Ji, where I can benefit from the guidance and clear seeing of a teacher and I’m further nurtured by my role of fellowship with the Sangha.

...I’m not certain of the mechanism, but somehow for me, this act of vowing to walk this path, or follow this way somehow enables me to transcend my allegiance to my worries, anxieties, and weakness to meet a visceral sense of my innate kindness and goodwill...

Most importantly, I wish to receive Jukai as an affirmation that I feel strongly this path nourishes me for the purpose of being a sturdy tree in the forest; thus, nourishing others. Providing shade, shelter, oxygen, etc. Strangely, I think it nourishes me because it challenges me. Zazen, the Great Vows, the Precepts, the Sangha, they are all opportunities for friction. Catalysts to potentially light other fires.

To summarize, Jukai is my vowing to nourish a precious something that I have found. By receiving Jukai I vow to more fully orient myself to a rigorous path that provides me guidance, while simultaneously entering into communion with other people who tend and keep that same path. Somehow, this vowing path enables me to transcend my limited sense of self that wishes to hold me back. All of this brought together is incredibly nourishing and serves to make me strong for the purpose of nourishing others.


Before Jukai, Adam did three weeklong sesshins and three Odayaka sesshins at Chobo-Ji. Here are some of Adam’s words on why he felt ready to do Jukai:

To me Jukai marks a step on the bodhisattva path: to vow to live and be lived for the benefit of all beings. I know that means taking care of myself so that I can take care of others. Meditation has helped me find balance, stability, and meaning in life, inner strength that helped me be present for my own pain, be gentle to it, and start healing my trauma. Meditation helped me be optimistic about life and be more able to help others. It also helped me be willing to become a parent; helped me show up for my son Martin, and be present for him through his difficulties and joys as he grew up. It helped me lean into the difficulty and pain that life presents, and grow from it. In Buddhism and in Zen, I find a well-spring of strength, kindness, and connection to other beings. The Four Great Vows are wildly optimistic and ambitious and at the same time down to earth – how else is there to live? Somehow I have come to love and connect with that outrageousness.

To me the refuges and precepts are guidance, gateways and paths that help structure some of the ways of deep kindness. They are practices that bring awareness to problems I can encounter as a human, and help me avoid them...

It’s been almost two years since I have been thinking of Jukai, and since then I have been through some very hard times – the loneliness of COVID-19 and the pain of an important relationship ending. The path has seemed dark at times. Through it I practiced zazen daily. No matter what, I would get onto my cushion right after I got out of bed every morning. And often before I went to bed at night. It’s been a beacon of light for me, helping me connect with self-love and openness to whatever experience comes, even when that is confusing, sad, fearful, angry, or painful. Or what’s sometimes harder for me, joy and happiness. Practicing alone I have really missed the physical presence of people who are also on a path of mindfulness, growth, and service to others. And I’ve missed getting help in traveling a path of growth.

I felt overwhelmed by grief this past year. I didn’t know if I would just be doing Jukai to soothe, escape, or cover up my pain. I didn’t have much capacity to connect with others. And in that grief I also didn’t have clarity – the clarity to make a decision from a grounded and intuitive knowing. I am not sure what changed. I tended to the grief instead of pushing it away. I sat with it. I still feel grief about the loneliness, and from my own personal losses. But now I do feel that I am doing this from my own intuitive knowing, because this is my path, because I want to grow, because the Chobo-Ji community are my people, because I want to help others. And even though I take steps on the path imperfectly, small steps, and not always consistently, I do know that I can help.

Thoughts about my dharma name: a text that is meaningful to me is the Heart Sutra, because prajnaparamita is so much a part of the bodhisattva path.

Genjo Roshi gave Adam the Dharma name: Shinkaku - “Shin” = Heart-Mind (心) – “Kaku” = Awakened (覚).
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

Intro to zazen most Thursdays 7-8:15PM, Tuesday evenings beginning in January.

Dharma Council, most Saturdays at 8:30 AM – Dharma Dialogue, most 1st & 3rd Sundays at 7:30 PM
(See Google Calendar at https://choboji.org/schedule/ for more detail and Zoom links.)

Rohatsu Sesshin (eight-day Zen intensive) ... Dec. 4 - 12.
Sangha Hike (meet at zendo at 10:30am - returning 3pm) ... Dec. 18, 10:30am departure
Toya (Day to break all rules - Year end potluck and party) ... Dec. 19, Potluck at noon, fun at 1pm

Zendo Closed for the holidays ...

New Year’s Day Chanting, bell ringing, potluck ...
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Board Meeting ...
Thursday night Winter Book Group begins (Grieving While Black) ...
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Winter Odayaka (three-day Zen intensive) ...
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...
Board Meeting ...
Spring Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...

Jan. 1, 10am to noon
Jan. 16, 5am - 11:15am
Jan. 16, noon - 1:30pm
Feb. 3, 7pm to 8:30pm (ends March 17)
Feb. 13, 5am - 11:15am
Feb. 18 - 20
March 13, 5am - 11:15am
March. 13, noon - 1:30pm
March 25 - April 1