Dear members and friends,

The peak of the Omicron COVID-19 variant derailed my planned trip to Germany. I don’t worry much about getting any of the current versions of the virus because I am vaccinated and boosted, and I know it is highly unlikely I would have any symptoms worse than a cold. Nevertheless, it became clear to me that international travel involved too many potential complications. For the time being we are again not sharing meals together in the Zendo, and I don’t know if this will be the case for our upcoming Zazenkai or Winter Odayaka. Time will tell.

We had a strong Rohatsu in early December with twenty-one in-person participants. Rev. Gendo Testa, assisted by Jeremy Neff, was our Dai-Tenzo (Chief Cook) and kept things simple and delicious. Elijah Seigan Zupancic our Shika (Host Manager), worked to keep our samu work assignments equitable; he was assisted by Sally Zenka Sensei in coordinating garden work. Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares was our Jikijitsu (Time Keeper) and made sure we all followed our demanding schedule of zazen and kinhin (walking meditation). Our Densu (Chant Leader) was Sam KoU Tullman, who has really blossomed in this post. Felix Wazan Pekar has become a model Jisha (Tea Server) who ably cared for all our tea, coffee and snack needs. Charles Porter served as my Inji (Abbot assistant) and kept the dokusan (formal Dharma interview) line in order. At the end of Rohatsu, Jeremy Neff did Jukai (Dharma precept ceremony); more on this later in this issue. Felix Wazan Pekar has become a model Jisha (Tea Server) who ably cared for all our tea, coffee and snack needs. Charles Porter served as my Inji (Abbot assistant) and kept the dokusan (formal Dharma interview) line in order. At the end of Rohatsu, Jeremy Neff did Jukai (Dharma precept ceremony); more on this later in this issue. You will also find in this issue a transcript of my middle day Teisho (formal Dharma talk) and my closing incense poem.

Our Dec. 19, Toya (day to break all rules) party was delightful! Both our potluck and our entertainment offerings were scrumptious. I especially liked Ken Klettke’s guitar offering and Sally Zenka Sensei cat’s Teisho on “Deep Napping and Doing Nothing”, a reprise of which is included in this issue.

During our winter break between Christmas and New Year’s Day, Seattle had a significant snow storm. There was still plenty of snow on the ground for our annual New Year’s Day chanting and bell ringing ceremony, but because of COVID precautions we did not follow with our usual potluck. There were about twenty people in attendance that day.

Beyond what I have already mentioned, you will find announcements for our upcoming Chobo-Ji Book Group, Winter Odayaka, Burma Film Festival to benefit trusted civil society groups in Myanmar (co-sponsored by many groups including Chobo-Ji), Spring Posts, Spring Intensive, and Spring Sesshin. You will also find additional articles by George Kyoki Gibbs and Seifu along with a Board Report by Rev. Sendo Anne Howells. May we all be well in body and spirit.

With gassho,
Gathering on Zoom last April for our 2021 Annual Meeting, our sangha engaged in a “visioning” exercise, pasting virtual sticky notes on a virtual board to generate ideas about next steps for Chobo-Ji, what our sangha is especially interested in focussing on in the way of community building and social engagement during the next few years. Over its next several meetings, the Board of Trustees sifted through a wide array of suggestions to determine which concerns and interests were most widely shared and might be expressed and explored through Chobo-Ji activities.

At the top of the list for community events are feeding the homeless, the activities of Zen Peacemakers, and participation in interfaith advocacy around social issues. Chobo-Ji is already active, both as an organization and at the individual level, in Zen Peacemakers and the Faith Action Network, and our Hundred Meals program preparing meals for the homeless, though currently on hiatus because of the pandemic, will reappear in our Zendo kitchen when conditions allow. At the top of the list for Zendo-focussed events are group volunteer work, connecting with other sanghas/religious communities, and anti-black racism.

I’m happy to report that at the Board’s request, the Program and Practice Committee (a subcommittee of the Board, chaired by Eddie Daichi Salazar), has developed and set into motion several programs inspired by the sangha’s suggestions. This winter and spring a book group is meeting weekly to discuss Breesha Wade’s Grieving While Black: An Antiracist Take on Oppression and Sorrow. We’re initiating a Sunday evening series of guest speakers from other sanghas: Corey Ichigen Hess will be our first speaker, February 27. A neighborhood trash pick-up is being organized and will be announced soon. Along with these projects, we’re boosting our efforts to make sure new zazen participants and new sangha members feel welcome. The Sangha Relations Committee (another Board subcommittee) has been reactivated under the leadership of Sally Zenka Metcalf and Lynn Sogetsu Hernandez to make sure we’re reaching out to sangha members experiencing health and other challenges. We thank Zenka and Sogetsu for planning and leading Chobo-Ji’s distribution of festive gift bags as part of our New Year’s Day celebration.

The Board’s continuing responsibilities include continued monitoring of temple finances (we’re doing fine) and consulting with Genjo Roshi about ongoing adaptations to the challenges of the pandemic. Following the accident in September which left Carolyn Josen Stevens with serious spinal injuries, the Board devoted most of our September meeting, to planning how we might assist Genjo and Josen during her recovery. We’re grateful for the sangha’s generous contributions to the Medical Recovery Fund which we launched at that meeting.

This coming April 10, we’ll hold our 2022 Annual Meeting with the sangha. I’m hoping it can be an in-person potluck this year. As usual, we’ll be electing Board Members, for which we need a quorum (plan to be there whether or not you attend the Zazenkai that morning, and put the date on your calendars). Our discussion topic this year: sharing our experiences of Zen practice in troubling times.

Bhadda-Kundalakesa Cannot Answer

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

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

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

The Buddha recognized her spiritual maturity and said to her, “One phrase that brings peace is better than a thousand words that have no use.”

When she heard these words, she was freed and became an arahant. Then the Buddha ordained her, saying simply, “Bhadda. Come.”

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

We are at the height of our Rohatsu Sesshin 2021. We have a long way to go, but it’s also downhill from here. We must be careful not to coast our way through. Instead, we can use the energy, suffering and joy that we have...
cultivated up to now to propel us through the veil of our own conceptions. Without a doubt, most of the time we nearly drown in the slew of our conceptions of self, other, life, death, male, female, or our conceptions of what’s right, what’s wrong, what’s good and what’s bad.

Now we have the opportunity, having gotten ourselves this raw, exhausted and vulnerable, to dive through the veil of our conceptions and further enter samadhi. Deep samadhi usually cultivates at least a few moments of “aha.” Probably all of us have had many moments of aha. Sometimes these arise in sesshin, sometimes out of sesshin. Frankly, they don’t last all that long. However, even just a moment can feel like ten thousand years. Occasionally they will last a half-day or more. On a rare occasion, a breakthrough might last a week or even a month. But like everything, these times of clarity are impermanent; like every bubble in a stream, they eventually pop.

Today, December 8th, we celebrate the historical Buddha’s awakening under the bodhi tree. We’re led to believe that his aha under the bodhi tree lasted the rest of his life. That’s remarkable. The historical Buddha lived a long life, but I tell you truly even a massive breakthrough doesn’t last forever. On the other hand, even a relatively small breakthrough can forever change our perception of reality, and this shift to a broader, fuller perspective is invaluable.

Our discriminating mind is so attached and dependent on our conceptualizations of self and other, that in a relatively short time, we are once again swamped by our conceptualizations. Our own complex and competing needs and desires, especially around survival, having enough and a little more, soon degrade any clarity we have mustered. Once again, we become convoluted and conflicted.

Therefore, we come to a sesshin, or do some other kind of rigorous training and practice, to cultivate another manifestation of clarity and peace of mind. For the longest time, I kept waiting for this experience to last, and I’ve finally, joyfully given up on this. Yet, I know and treasure that with continued practice and training there will be these moments, some that last longer than others, of great peace, unity, open-heartedness, and caring attention.

The nice thing is that even if we’ve broken through only once, as long as we have some semblance of mental acuity, we never forget the experience. Of course, we may be a little melancholy about not being able to retain the clarity and peace of mind, but the memory still warms our heart, and spurs us to keep coming back to sesshin. I’ve been doing four or five weeklong sesshins every year for the last forty-five years.

Zen Master Rinzai, when asked about clarity, said “I have no such clarity.” I recognize immediately the truth of this. No one can hold onto it. Clarity comes and goes – much like the sun, sometimes you see it and sometimes you don’t. Yet, the sun’s always there. Rinzai said, “The true person beyond all attachment to rank and position is going in and out of your face all the time.” This is the truth of the human condition. All of us are the voice of the Dharma, sometimes this is easy to see, often it is not. There is no doubt in my mind that our practice cultivates clarity and peace of mind, and from time to time we feel it; however, honestly, most of the time we don’t. Together we go straight on, breath after breath, day after day, to face again the inconceivable.

From time to time, I deeply feel the oneness, but I don’t know what that oneness is. I do know that that oneness is not dependent on form or non-form. I know enough to say that what’s behind clarity and peace of mind is inconceivable. I know too that Shunyata (The Great Void – i.e., intimate infinite) has no beginning and no end. Whatever “it” is, I know it cannot be grasped or attained. I don’t know where it came from, or why it’s here. I can discern no meaning or purpose. There are so many unknowns, we just call it No Knowing. As I have often said, Zen is the religion of No Knowing.

Of course, I prefer feeling the oneness; moreover, I relish the feeling. But I’m also okay dancing with my busy mind and the hungry ghosts that often populate my world. We all carry a backpack of karmic dung, consisting of cultural and family of origin, generational madness. The main function of our practice is to slowly, very slowly, combust this karmic dung, or at the very least learn to live with it without being possessed by it. Over the course of a lifetime, some of this karmic dung can turn into fertilizer, rich dark soil from which to grow awareness, maturity and compassion.

Bhadda-Kundalakesa, in her early life came from a prosperous, middle-class family, and was kept secluded because of her willful, passionate nature. One day from her window, she saw a handsome, high-born thief being led to execution. Bhadda insisted on marrying him, therefore saving him from the gallows. Shortly thereafter, her new husband told Bhadda that he wanted to fulfill a promise to a mountain deity. He told her to come up with him and wear her most precious jewels. He then led her to the top of the cliff and tried to throw her off. She, having asked to make one last obeisance to him, threw him over the cliff instead. Repulsed at where her passion had led her, Bhadda turned away from the world and ordained as a Jain ascetic. And as a special penance, each hair on her head was pulled out individually by its roots. They grew back curly; hence she was given the name “Kundalakesa,” which means “curly-haired.”

Bhadda had fallen in love with this handsome thief, and obviously felt great passion for him. However, after they married, he tried to kill her, and instead she pushed him off the cliff. After such a betrayal and trauma, she denounced all passion and gave up on intimacy. Jain was one of the great religions in her day; she ordained, became an ascetic, and thoroughly learned the Jain philosophy.

By the time Bhadda encountered Shariputra, one of the chief disciples of the Buddha, she had spent many years in determined, impoverished, isolated mendicant practice. Debate, a form of conversation that in that era precluded intimacy, was her primary means of communication.

Continued on next page …
When there is great passion in sexual union, far beyond playfulness, there can be moments of oneness. And there’s a theory that our capacity to experience spiritual oneness is based in the same part of the brain that experiences sensual intimate oneness, and our capacity to feel oneness in sensual intimacy is the physiological foundation of spiritual oneness. I accept this interpretation or theory.

Bhadda had given up sensual intimacy because of this whole fiasco with her thief lover, and in a way, lacking this kind of intimacy, may have blocked her gateway to spiritual oneness. Shariputra came along and asked this one question. He asked, “One” – or he might have said, “Oneness – what is that?” Perhaps she could not answer because she had excluded all sensual intimacy from her life, and begged to become his disciple. And Shariputra passed her on to the Buddha.

The Buddha, recognizing Bhadda’s many years of dedicated training, study and deep disciplined practice, saw she was on the edge of a breakthrough. Her practice and sincerity and genuineness were ripe. He said to her, “One phrase that brings peace is better than a thousand words.” And this one phrase, said with such gentleness of heart, pushed her over the cliff back into a heart-to-heart connection. When she heard these words, she was freed and became at once an arahant, a postulant. The Buddha ordained her on the spot, by saying “Bhadda, come,” i.e., join the Sangha, be with fellow followers of the way. Together we will share this One Heart-Mind.

In many Zen teacher-student mondo (Dharma exchanges), the teacher is typically the host and the student the guest. The guest usually begins by asking a question, the host makes some response. The guest either gets it, has a realization, and feels deep intimacy and oneness with the host. Or the guest doesn’t get it. Many koans are about this vulnerable, ripe place, where if the student is ripe enough the fruit of realization falls.

There’s another group of koans where host meets host, and almost always, that involves a joke of some sort. When two hosts get together, they have fun, using their heart-mind intimacy, sense of oneness/emptiness, and their fundamental comfort in no knowing, to be very playful. In order to be in on the joke, you really must put away your desire to understand the philosophy, meaning, or purpose, and just watch for the joke. When you hear dharma laughter in the dokusan room, someone has gotten the joke. Alternatively, there is dharma laughter when someone has seen how simple something is, after looking very hard for some deep inscrutable meaning. Doing koan work requires us to let go of our dependence on philosophical understanding and any desire to impress upon me your understanding. Most koans are so simple, and when we see through the artificial difficulty, we are then in on the intrinsic joke.

We had oatmeal for breakfast today, and I’m about to go and cook my special Marinello marinara sauce, to be served with pasta, garlic bread, salad and soup. This meal and this teisho are two ways of sharing my heart-mind with the sangha. After our lunch break, we’ll be back at it, plowing through our karmic baggage, occasionally having moments of great peace, unity, and the intimacy and the comfort of not knowing anything.

Closing Incense Poem
Rohatsu Sesshin 2021

One long day, eight nights.
Followers of the Way endure.
A great wind howls.
The leafless maple sways.
Dharma always speaks frankly.
Who hears the falling rain?
Open hearts, lucid and clear.

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 (if Omicron infections decline precipitously). 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


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](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 salazar@seattleu.edu or Sally ZenKa Sensei at metcalf.sally@gmail.com.

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Spring Temple Posts
beginning March 11, 2022

Elijah Seigan Zupancic
Rev. Sendo Howells
Shika (Host - Manager)

Rev. Gendo Testa
Jeremy Shojiki Neff
George Kyoki Gibbs
Tenzo (Cook)

Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares
Rev. Sendo Howells
Sam Kōtō Tullman
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

Eddie Daichi Salazar
Felix Wazan Pekar
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Ali Horri
Charles Porter
Sally Zenka Sensei
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Randal Daigetsu Tanabe
Inji (Abbot Assistant)
Carolyn Josen Stevens Sensei
Fusu (Accountant)

Eddie Daichi Salazar
George Kyoki Gibbs
Sam Kōtō Tullman
Felix Wazan Pekar
Intro Instruction

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Spring Intensive

An intensive covers roughly the same time frame as the traditional temple kessei period, beginning with the first zazenkai for that season (March 13) ending with Summer Sesshin. It’s a time for concentrated study and practice. Please let Genjo know if you plan to participate before March 13. Chobo-Ji participants receive dokusan once weekly on Wednesday evenings. *All insui are strongly encouraged to participate fully.*

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, zazenkai, and full-time attendance at weeklong sesshins. 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. These hours can be in your own home, garden or community.

3) Read one book of your choosing from Chobo-Ji’s [Zen Bibliography page](#) (or consult with Genjo about an alternative selection) 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) Attend Dokusan Wednesdays in person or via Zoom at 8:30PM, or if this is impossible arrange a Zoom call with Genjo Osho. Zoom calls can be short, 5 minutes maximum per week, or up to 15 minutes every two weeks, or 30 minutes once a month.

6) Be of service to this sangha or the wider community through some direct manifestation of our Great Vow.

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Spring Sesshin
March 25 - April 1

This will be an in-person sesshin for only those fully vaccinated and boosted and able to attend all 7 days. If you are not able to attend in person or for all seven days you may attend by Zoom ([Zoom registration required](#)) for any portion that fits your schedule. Please help us get an accurate count by sending an application by March 15, earlier if you want to guarantee a reserved spot. The cost of sesshin is $300 (less dues for this month). If attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. Sesshin starts Friday evening, March 25, 5:30pm with informal supper, introductions and orientation.

Sesshin (from Saturday to the following Thursday) 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. The final Friday begins at 5am and concludes around 11am.

We offer limited partial scholarships for sesshin. For more information please email: registration@choboji.org.
seen in this way, shadows are not always harsh, and can be gentle, like those arising with the sun in the morning, or those in the evening, when it sets. At night, they comfort us as they become softly illuminated by candles and intertwine with wafting incense. And they encourage us as we start seeing beyond our hard edges, and move into the unknown with grace, acceptance and faith.

Those spiritual shadows, then, even as they usher in the often-necessary dark night of our souls, are also the ultimate harbingers of light. At the bottom of a well of darkness, they light up the top of the universe. If we let them, they can profoundly and astutely guide us through our discomfort and pain, helping us work through our losses and fears, and towards Love and Compassion. Into the bosom of however we might conceive our transcendent immanence.

The shadow is thus like compost to our spiritual flowering. It shows us what to process, and keeps pointing to what needs tending over and over again, as we slowly discern our way through heartbeat to growing insight and maturity. And as our healing takes root, our shadows turn into fertilizers for our spiritual journey and ascendency.

Like able spiritual companions, they mirror our progress, and continue to act as sentinels to our souls, always on the lookout for our relapses, and directing us to be honest on our paths.

And unlike most companions, and the things of this world, they never leave us, because we are them, beyond our arising. Our growing maturity, in fact, is a resolution into their essence, and a recognition that we are never separate. From them. Or anything. So much so that when we are gone, we are still truly here.

Our shadow remains forever. And it walks in our footsteps effortlessly and constantly. Why not embrace it? And move forward in its company with courage, determination, understanding and Love.

plant and traced those shoots that seemed woody and dead, those without evidence of the pink buds that soon will become the first blossoms of spring. I pulled at the dead wood from the understory of this tree-like vine. I began at the bottom of the

During our practice and retreats we almost always run into our shadows, often quite deliberately, sometimes unintentionally, and usually both. Indeed, it is a hallmark of our particular Zen path that however they come to us, our shadows are expected visitors.

We usually associate darkness and shadows with fear: of the unknown, of being lost and never finding the way home again, of getting swallowed up, of entering territories beyond redemption, the “dark night of the soul,” not seeing or being unable to see clearly, in a fog or a haze, and so on.

But if we allowed ourselves to lean in to our shadows, we might come to quickly regard them as our ultimate teachers. They show us our failings in their rawest, most unadulterated forms, without blink or solace. They are direct and revealing, exposing trauma, anger, fear, uncertainty, and many other shortcomings that we need to address. And it’s not as if we can avoid them in any event, because they don’t allow us to run away for long, despite our best efforts.

For all of us with strong, deep and undeniable spiritual longings, these traumas and fears can certainly be impediments to our flow and alignment with the Universe. But they are also powerful invitations to process that which ails us.

This past Thursday morning I noticed that the Quince tree growing against the neighbor’s garage in my backyard was beginning to bud, and that it was rather unruly. Under the cool fog of this late January morning, and facing an hour before my first engagement, I decided to prune the viny snarl of branches that give this plant a confused character, something between flowering fruit tree and shrub. Doing so, I recalled having read a Dharma talk given by the venerable Thich Nhat Hanh regarding life’s universal dimension. With that, I ventured out into the yard and began to pull the dead wood from the understory of this tree-like vine. I began at the bottom of the
Having no beginning and no end, transcending life and death, life itself is a miracle. This year’s blossoms have always been there, just not yet quite ready to appear. And here we are, if we are paying attention, ready to witness life’s flowering!

As I pulled at the dead wood, I noticed a snarl of leaves pinned between the supporting trellis armature behind the Quince tree and the wall of the garage. I pulled at the sticks and leaves and left them in the pile of clippings to be collected in the yard waste bin and set out for pick-up. A few moments later as I was collecting, consolidating, and loading the clippings I noticed that amid the branches and what I thought were decaying leaves were the remains of a rat. The rat appeared to have completely decayed. All that was left was the skin, the tail intact, and perhaps the skull and claws. It did look rather like a dried-out leaf, the remnants of autumn’s detritus after the first snow of winter has melted away. I was struck. From death, life. From decay, spring blossoms and new beginnings.

Reflecting on the experience just moments later I realized that I was grieving the loss of a human being who had touched my heart through his writings on the Buddha, peace, social engagement, and so much more. I noticed that tears had collected at the corners of my eyes. And while acknowledging that the world has lost one of history’s great sages, I felt the pain of loss of a human being who had personally impacted me through his writings on peace, healing, compassion, and engagement. While the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh remain, I mourned the loss of a loved one. I found the experience strange and without precedent in my life, for never had I been so personally touched by the death of somebody I’d never met.

I first discovered the writings of Master Nhat Hanh while I was perusing the stacks at the local bookstore and found a small manual of healing titled, How to Relax. The book explains, “When we are stressed, we are not only less happy and less productive, we make those around us unhappy as well.” This tiny book “shares techniques for bringing our lives back into balance.” The book includes “short meditations on healing, resting, solitude and being unbusy, offering the pleasure of relaxation no matter where you are.” I was captivated by this strange Vietnamese Zen master. It was my early exposure to Thich Nhat Hanh that led me to seek out Chobo-Ji, enter through the large wooden doors in the basement around back, and give zazen a try. Six years later, I count myself among the regular daily meditation practitioners, a precept holder, and a Zen faithful. In the writing of Thich Nhat Hanh I’d found the warm embrace of a teacher who understood my suffering, and in Buddhist practice I’d found something much deeper – a path of peace, freedom, and compassion, and a life dedicated to caring for the suffering of others. My peace, your peace, and the serenity of the space that we hold together, is the peace of our world, perhaps that of the entire universe. We are the hope for a future of reconciliation, and our joy in this moment is the path toward it.

The challenges that we face as people are as tall as the highest mountains. If you stand too close, you won’t be able to see the high peaks. But, once you step away from the currents of daily life, you are able to take in the full view. Through his poetry, teaching, and practice of social engagement, Master Nhat Hanh demonstrated that contemplative practice allows one to take the broader view of human suffering, the root causes of conflict, and exercise a profound wisdom born of insight, that of compassion. I recently came across words of wisdom shared by Master Nhat Hanh that I found particularly helpful as I contemplate the circumstances of my life. First is, “Be yourself. Be beautiful.” Second is the following: “Teaching is not done by talking alone. It is done by how you live your life. My life is my teaching. My life is my message.” May it be so.

Mr. Tibbs’ Toya Teisho
by Sally ZenKa Metcalf, Sensei

Many of you know me as Mr. Tibbs, or “Tibbsie” as I’m affectionately called by Sally ZenKa Sensei, my human. I’m a Maine Coon Cat. My pronouns are Me, MeNow, and Mine.

While sangha kitty allergies do not allow me to frequent ChewBone-Ji’s zendo, I was welcomed to the recent Toya celebration because temple rules are topsy-turvy anyway. Hierarchy is tossed, forms flaunted, and alcohol is allowed — so why not kitty dander!

By the way, ChewBone-Ji is the name Chobo-Ji is known by among neighborhood dogs. It is feline-approved due to our shared enthusiasm (canine, feline & Zennists) for bone picking.

I joined ChewBone-Ji’s Residential Program as ZenKa’s owner when her adventurous daughter (my former person) left for Australia. We rub along nicely together, despite minor pet peeves. This association lets me dig my claws into my Great Dharma mission.

But I should begin a little further back. 27,000 years ago, the Dharma gave humans the Dog. Canines exemplify Unconditional Love and Unbridled Joy, both sorely needed by humanity. Sadly, these all-important lessons were lost on most humans. So, 12,000 years ago, the

Continued on next page ...
Dharma gave humanity Felines. In concert with Canines, it was hoped that our special gifts of Doing Nothing and Deep Napping would foster homosapien awakening. You call Deep Napping “meditation,” though there are subtle differences.

My mission at this temple began with Introduction to Zen. This provoked concerns. First, I was directed to “sit” and to “stay.”

Really, do I look like a dog? Also, I was told NOT TO MOVE! (I ignored this.) I WAS NOT TO JOIN OTHERS ON THEIR ZABUTONS! (Humans are regrettably territorial, causing you no end of trouble.) I WAS NOT TO SCRATCH or trample lumpy zabutons, which sorely need treatment to be rendered comfy.

Which brings me to comfort — so essential to inspired Deep Napping.

What is this unfortunate Zen obsession with discomfort? It ranges from a freezing zendo to basic zazen postures. Your idealization of full lotus is a case in point. You tie yourselves into an agonizing knot and sit in a state of abject torture, single-mindedly longing for the jikijitsu to ring the bell. No wonder enlightenment eludes you!

Instead, you could comfortably rest in a yielding, furry curl, or spread long in a relaxed full-body stretch. In this state of ease, profound Deep Napping is readily entered. The whole self slips effortlessly into, and abides in, infinite tranquility — the Divine Purr — known in Zen as endless MEEEEWWWWW! (Not to be confused with MU — a mispronunciation that slipped into Zen via the Ox Herding Tales.)

To aid a paradigm shift toward the comfort needed for Deep Napping, why not give each meditator four zabutons (instead of one). Stack them two deep, side by side. This cushy, roomy arrangement allows the body full scope for transcendent relaxation into endless emptiness. Take heart, sangha friends, Roshi is considering these suggestions for a zendo redo. Comfy — the new Zen normal!

Lastly, I speak to Doing Nothing. ZenKa provides me with a window-seat zabuton beside her work desk. There I stretch out, languidly draped — exemplifying Doing Nothing. But, still, clickety-clack go ZenKa’s computer keys as she intently focuses on the eerie screen, shoulders gnarled. Now and then I gently pat her, calling her attention to my resplendent ease. “Not now, Tibbs,” she says. “Must work to earn our kibbles and keep a roof over our heads.” And clickety-clack she goes.

Consider the trees, harmonious planetary citizens for nearly half a billion years. All the while they’ve steadily evolved to be a beneficent force for good. After just 300,000 years in existence and committing wanton deforestation, humans are just discovering that trees speak to each other and maintain wholesome, diverse interspecies communities, free from war. Can humans boast such accomplishments? And then there are the kitties and dogs of your couches and bedrooms, exemplifying for you the precious practices of unconditional love, unbridled joy, deep napping, and doing nothing at all.

Will you listen?

Tibbsie’s closing admonitions: Nap often and deeply Purr more and hiss less

Burma Film Festival
Feb. 1-13

This is an encore edition of last June’s festival, with new films and panels added. One year after the coup, it aims to bring new attention to the suffering in the country and to raise more much needed money for trusted civil society groups which provide humanitarian assistance in poor, ethnic areas most severely impacted by food insecurity and emergency shelter needs. Support will also go to freelance media and non-violent human rights activists forced into Thailand. The festival is co-sponsored by many Buddhist and other groups, including Chobo-Ji. To donate and get an access pass to stream all the programs: https://bsbff.eventive.org/welcome.
Faith Action Network
Interfaith Advocacy Day
Thursday, February 10

Faith Action Network’s Interfaith Advocacy Day, to be held virtually this year as it was in 2021, brings voices of compassion and justice to Washington’s elected leaders. We partner with people of faith and conscience to learn about and advance bills that support economic justice, fair taxation, police accountability and criminal justice reform, affordable housing and homelessness prevention, immigrant and refugee rights, gun safety, civil rights, racial justice, and access to healthcare.

On Interfaith Advocacy Day, you will be able to

- Join workshops that break down the issues on FAN's 2022 Legislative Agenda.
- Learn how to advocate effectively in today's legislature.
- Meet with advocates from your legislative district to prepare for your legislative visits. Once you register, FAN will work to set up an appointment for you and others from your district.

Register: https://fanwa.ourpowerbase.net/civicrm/event/info?id=218&reset=1

Guest Speaker:
Corey Ichigen Hess
Sunday, February 27
7:30 p.m. (following Sunday evening zazen)

Chobo-Ji is launching a quarterly series of guest speakers who will follow Sunday evening zazen. We're delighted to welcome our first guest, Corey Ichigen Hess, who trained at Sogengi monastery in Okayama, Japan, for most of his twenties and was ordained in 2005 under Shodo Harada Roshi. He now lives with his partner, Shojun, and three daughters on Whidbey Island, where he writes the popular Zen Embodiment blog, teaches workshops on movement and meditation, leads a community of practitioners, and sees clients in person or online for healing sessions. You can follow him on his blog or check out his YouTube videos.

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 weeklong 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 Rohatsu Sesshin, Dec. 12, 2021, Jeremy Neff did Jukai. Here are some of Jeremy's own words on why he wanted to do this ceremony:

I am applying for Jukai to deepen my practice and to learn how to help those I care about and those I don’t know yet.

Now is a good time for me to take Jukai because I am willingly taking the risk of failing, being rejected, and entering vulnerability. I have processed enough of my religious past and feel comfortable being a part of Chobo-Ji. I need to change the way I am interacting with the universe to get different results. I know that Zen will cause me to change the way I interact with the universe. It will challenge me. It will push my boundaries. It will equip me to better interact with others, and the universe I am in. I wanted to join the Chobo-Ji sangha back 2019, but I got locked out by my own fears and delusions. Now, I am resolving my fears and willing to take the risk and responsibility of being a part of a sangha. I stepped through my fears and expressed what is in my heart. I want to understand what it means to be enlightened. I want what Eckhart Tolle talks about. I am also seeking the knowledge to help others as well as myself. As I start a serious journey into becoming a martial arts instructor, I cannot see myself doing it without having a Zen/meditation program
alongside it. I see how needed it is to truly understand the philosophy and background of budo. It would feel like only teaching a small part of the puzzle to my students without Zen. I want to make people’s lives better through improved relationships, training and interactions …

After sitting for a while, I started to interact with those around me differently. I started to venture outside of my internal fears and express myself to others. I vowed to myself to be completely honest with people for a time. I met a good friend and was/am making many more good friends. Sitting has improved the way I interacted in the world. I noticed that if I take a break from sitting my interactions with others diminish. I feel that Zen practice has improved my relations with others. I feel it will continue to improve my relationships and give me the tools to build more and better relations with all the people I interact with.

I don’t want to hide this gift I have received. I want others to be able to relate deeper and be free to express themselves openly. I started recommending sitting to people I talk with. I want to help others to gain clarity and be happier. I feel that the more I study the more people I will be able to help. I feel deeper Zen training will make me into the kind of person I want to become.

All participants must be fully vaccinated. Please bring your card or email a photo of it to zen@choboji.org

A 6-week, in-person, exploration of Rinzai Zen practice
Tuesdays, April 5-May 10 | 7:30pm-8:45pm | www.choboji.org

Bring your curiosity and your questions to our Introduction to Zen class. This 6-week, in-person course, will cover everything you need to develop a meditation practice and teaches the fundamentals of Zen Buddhism. Each class is taught by a different, experienced, Zen practitioner. Classes start with introductions, a 15 minute sit, followed by a presentation, and ample time to ask questions. Recommended donation is $5 per class. Please register at intro@choboji.org for the zoom link.

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>5 APRIL</td>
<td>ORIENTATION TO ZEN What is Zen all about?</td>
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| 12 APRIL | FORMS OF RINZAI ZEN PRACTICE    
Is there more than seated meditation? Learn about mindfulness practices, such as chanting, walking, bowing and work (samu). |
| 19 APRIL | FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS Explore the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha’s radical teaching on liberation from suffering. |
| 26 APRIL | EIGHT FOLD PATH Embark on the the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddha’s way to gradually unravel suffering in our lives. |
| 3 MAY | KOAN STUDY Dive into the use of koans (Zen parables) to investigate our own deep nature. |
| 10 MAY | FOUR GREAT VOWS Reflect on our Four Great Vows – the fundamental context for our whole Buddhist practice. |

Located on North Beacon Hill, just 5 blocks from the Beacon Hill light rail stop at: 1733 S Horton St., Seattle, WA 98144
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 Tuesdays 7-8:15PM, Tuesdays 7:30-8:45 PM beginning in March

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.)

**Thursday night Winter Book Group begins (Grieving While Black) ...**
Feb. 3, 7pm to 8:30pm (ends March 17)

**Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...**
Feb. 13, 5am - 11:15am
Feb. 18 - 20

**Winter Odayaka (three-day Zen intensive) ...**
Feb. 26, 10:30am - 4:30pm
March 13, 5am - 11:15am
March 13, noon - 1:30pm
March 19, 10:30am - 4:30pm
March 25 - April 1

**Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...**
April 5 - May 10, 7:30 to 8:45pm
April 10, 5am - 11:15am
April 10, noon - 2pm
May 22, 5am - 11:15am
May 22, noon - 1:30pm
June 12, 5am - 11:15am
June 24 - July 1

**Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...**

**Board Meeting ...**

**Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...**

**Spring Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...**

**6-Week Intro to Zen Series Tuesday nights ...**

**Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...**

**Annual Meeting (please attend, a quorum is needed) ...**

**Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...**

**Board Meeting ...**

**Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...**

**Summer Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...**