



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

It is the first week of September and there are hints of autumn in the air, yet yesterday it was over 80 degrees and I rode out to Alki Beach Park for lunch in the sun. Our Fall Intensive is about to start on September 10, and if you are planning on attending both our Autumn Sesshin and Rohatsu Sesshin, please consider joining. You can read all about this opportunity a little further in this newsletter.

Summer Sesshin, the last week of June, was outstanding. On the second day, we had two people do Jukai (Precept and Dharma Name ceremony), and on the final day two unsui (Zen priests in training) became Oshos (ordained priests - no longer novice priests). You will read much more about the ceremonies later in this issue. There were 24 participants. Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares continued to serve as our Dai-Tenzo (Chief Cook). Rev. Gendo Testa was our Shika (Host/Manager). Rev. Sendo Howells served as our principal Jikijitsu (Time Keeper). Felix Wazan Pekar was our Densu (Chant Leader). Charles Porter and Ezra Conklin did a fine job keeping us hydrated and nurtured as our Jisha (Tea Servers). Sally Metcalf Zenka, Sensei, served as my Inji (Abbot Assistant) and Randal Daigetsu Tanabe and Zenka oversaw garden samu (work meditation) projects. Rinzan Osho gave a Teisho (Formal Dharma Talk) on "Joshu Saw Through the Old Woman" which is now a podcast on [Chobo-Ji's Podcast page](#). Also, in this issue you will find my Teisho from middle day, and my closing incense poem.

In early July, Carolyn (Josen) and I traveled to Montana and Wyoming to participate in the sixth annual Native American Bearing Witness Retreat sponsored by [Zen Peacemakers](#). We spent five days with native elders and two of their children exploring the far Western expanse of Lakota peoples. We



listened to stories of cultural genocide and stories of great determination and courage. One site we visited was an ancient medicine wheel used by many tribes for personal and collective healing. We all offered prayers for our troubled lives and world.

Summer Odayaka Sesshin (August 18-20) was small but strong. There were only 15 participants (two of whom attended from a distance via Zoom).



Perhaps next year if there are not more people who sign up, we may drop Summer Odayaka from our schedule. Elijah Seigan Zupancic did a great job in his first role as Dai-Tenzo. Charles Porter

was again our Jisha. Randal Daigetsu Tanabe served as our Jikijitsu and amazingly Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sensei served as the Shika, Densu, Inji and part-time Jiki! It was truly an amazing performance! Three participants wrote poems that they shared with me, and you can read them later in this issue.

Also, in this issue you will find updates from No-Rank Zendo in Portland, Fox Forest Zendo in Ledyard, CT, announcements for Fall Posts, Fall Book Group, and the Fall Intro Series. In other news, Charles Porter after several years has moved out of Chobo-Ji's residential practice center, and a new couple, Dana and Marko have moved in. They have written, "Greetings from Dana and Marko, the new residents at Chobo-Ji! We're so excited to be a part of the Sangha. We are both writers and animal lovers who enjoy volunteering, eating, and being in nature. We look forward to meeting all of you and spending time in sweet silence together!" I hope you enjoy all the offerings in this issue and I look forward to sitting with everyone in the Zendo this autumn. Take care.

With gassho,

Genjo

No-Rank Zendo News

Rinzan Pechovnik, Osho

A lot has happened at No-Rank Zendo in the last few years. As Covid settled in, our community actually deepened and our practice schedule intensified. I had created Cloud Zendo years earlier as a means of supporting morning sits; it became much more important as social distancing kept us all out of the zendo. Many people actually stabilized their practice with the increase in offerings so that, when we returned to meeting in person, our community had actually grown.

We had held a few sesshins before Covid, and I led a few on-line retreats during lockdown. As restrictions diminished, we found we had enough interest to hold four sesshins a year. Summer sesshin is held in the city, but the other four are held at Gwinwood, where Chobo-Ji held a few of its own Rohatsu sesshins. We were sad to learn that the main lodge was recently gutted by a Fourth of July fire, but we have been assured that we can continue to hold sesshin at the Westwood Retreat Center (tucked further back in the woods) while the main lodge is being rebuilt.

In addition to having a larger and more stable sangha with many activities and retreats to support our practice, we also have two unsui training at No-Rank: Rev. Keizan Shaffer and Rev. Yuen Houk. Given their earnestness and commitment, I could not count myself more fortunate than to have them training with me. I feel truly blessed to be in relationships with such a committed and caring group of Zen practitioners.

Of most immediate and exciting news is that, after practicing in a rental space for the last ten years, we are now in the process of buying a temple of our own.

The search began about two or three years ago when I planted the seed and suggested we start looking. Of course, at the time, we were nowhere near ready to purchase a building. But I wanted to start germinating the idea, trusting that it would blossom at the right time. As is so often the case, once an intention is put forth, things start to fall into place. Sure enough, after numerous viewing of temples that were too big, too expensive, too dilapidated, too funky, we have stumbled upon, almost as by accident,



a right-sized church at the right price. It will need a lot of TLC, but we have a strong community committed to working together and have made big dents into fundraising to help pay for needed improvements. If things go well, we will close in the middle of September and then spend the remainder of this calendar year getting it ready for a grand opening at the beginning of 2024.

I hope many of you reading this will come to join us at some point, perhaps even for the opening ceremony.

Fox Forest Zendo News

Gendo Testa, Osho

Our zendo here in Connecticut is beginning to take root and grow. Our core membership is stepping up to hold posts and positions on our board. Our temple recently received a generous



donation which allowed us to purchase the instruments needed for the densu. So we now have two temple sized bells and mokugyo fish drum. What a difference this has made! I look forward to working with the sangha to expand our sutra chanting

beyond our daily morning service. We've also been holding monthly zazenkais which has allowed for more time for us to train together, emphasizing holding noble silence and deepening our zazen. I especially enjoy sharing the meal procedure and my love for Okayu! Our upcoming September zazenkai will be the first time we will include Dharma Interview and a Dharma Talk. The foundation of our holding the form together is becoming solid and strong. May that foundation become a powerful dispeller of delusions!

Zhaozhou and the Old Woman's Obstacles

The Hidden Lamp

Genjo's Middle Day Teisho

Case: An old woman asked Master Zhaozhou Congshan, "I have a body that contains the five obstacles. How can I be free of the world of suffering?" Zhaozhou said, "Pray that all beings are born in heaven and that you yourself suffer forever in a sea of hardships."

Study Questions: Is it possible to relieve the suffering of others by taking that suffering into yourself? Can you imagine taking the medicine that Zhaozhou offered to the old woman?

As is often the case, we don't know the name of the woman who is questioning Zhaozhou. In our Japanese Zen tradition, we know Zhaozhou as Zen Master Joshu who was a student of Nansen.

The old woman asked a question that we have all wondered about in one way or another. We all have various forms of hindrances and obstacles. How do we swim amid these hindrances and become free of suffering? This is the very same question the historical Buddha asked himself. He had already done many different yogic practices and had already found a very deep sense of peace and groundedness well before he sat under the Bodhi tree. However, before his big breakthrough under the Bodhi tree, his mind was still confronted and disturbed by

personal and collective obstacles and hindrances. I'm thinking of the collective hindrances that are still out there today, such as systemic racism, pandemics, and environmental disasters brought on by humans mistreating the environment.

Moreover, just think about your personal history and karmic baggage from your family of origin. Most of us are burdened by gaps in our development or wounds from the past that we carry into the present. There are five hindrances in Buddhism that we all share: desire, anger, sloth, restlessness, and doubt. We all suffer in some measure from these maladies. I think this was what the woman was referring to when she said "five

Rizzetto is the contributing teacher. She resides in San Francisco and is a Dharma heir of Joko Beck, who was a Dharma heir of Maezumi Roshi. At some point Joko Beck became so disgruntled and disgusted with Maezumi's behavior that she separated from him. Today Maezumi is still highly thought of, but there is no question that like most Japanese Zen teachers who settled in the USA, he had many shortcomings and major problems.

Eshin in her commentary says, "The old woman has a body, she laments, that contains the five obstacles. There are several ways to view these 'obstacles'. One is that they refer to the traditional list of

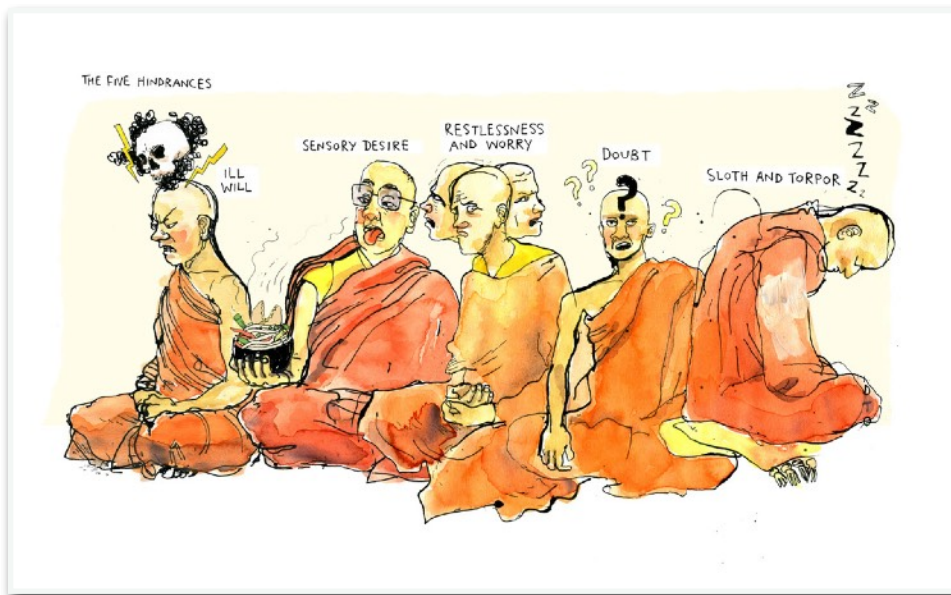
by women, and taught by women – I need to share these different perspectives in this teisho today.

Eshin goes on to say, about these sufferings that are particular to the female side of our species, "Who is this you, yourself that Joshu speaks of? Can he be asking, who is this self that has obstacles? He challenges the old woman, and all of us, into the marrow of Zen practice. He says, allow yourself to suffer in the very ways that you see as obstacles, and by entering deeply that very suffering, through the suffering [in this case] of a woman's body, the suffering of being a mother, or the suffering of giving birth, you will find a way to help others. Don't waste one hot flash, one pang of childbirth, one tear of sadness, one wonderful opportunity in this woman's body."

Eshin's take on this koan is that no matter what your obstacles are, whether they are general to humanity or those that you face as a female – make use of these obstacles and hindrances to get beyond who is suffering. Who is suffering? Who has these hindrances? Who has this karmic baggage? Who is facing these obstacles? When we examine who, we may be thinking, oh, I feel wronged, or I did wrong, or I am suffering, or I am mad, or I am full of regret. Or, I am in pain. Or, I am tired. Or, this is too hard. Or, I'm not getting what I want, or need. All those sentences start with "I." Who is this I?

When we use our trials and tribulations and struggles of being a human being to really examine this question, "Who is suffering?" there is eventually a breakthrough. And in a way, sesshin is a controlled hothouse of suffering. I hear some laughter. Here at sesshin we all face both our individual and collective suffering together. In the readiness of time, we will occasionally transcend who is suffering. Who is growing old? Who is tired? Who is in pain? Who is stuck in fantasies? Who is feeling obsessive or compulsive? Who is feeling regret? Who is feeling childish? Who is feeling anxious? Who is feeling afraid? Who is feeling depressed? Even, who is feeling grounded? Who is feeling open hearted? Who is feeling peace of mind? Who is having confusion? Who is having clarity?

By examining these questions of what is this and who is suffering the five or



obstacles," but as we shall see there are other possibilities. Whatever she may be referring to we all feel the weight of our collective suffering – what a mess. Is there any hope of redemption or salvation?

The promise, or good news, of Buddhism is that we can transcend these obstacles and discover a level of peace of mind and open-heartedness that meets this world of suffering with ease. Well, that sounds good; however, it's not easy to meet the world of suffering with ease. We all know this. One reason is that even transcendence is impermanent. The real work of meeting personal and collective suffering is to combust, digest or compost our own karmic baggage, which is the hardest work there is.

The people offering commentary in *The Hidden Lamp* are all women teachers in the Zen lineage. And in this case, Diane Eshin

hindrances [which I just named]. Another is that they refer to an early Buddhist teaching that no woman could become a god Brahma, the god Sakra, the tempter Mara, a wheel-turning king, or a Buddha." What malarkey. But anyway, it was evidently an early prejudiced teaching in Buddhism. "Finally, the reference could be to the five obstacles particular to women: the necessity of leaving her own family to be married into another's, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and the obligation to wait on a man." And these are considered historically as the bane of being a woman.

Maybe the woman questioning Joshu was coming from any of these angles or maybe all these angles. When I've given a teisho on this story before, I just concentrated on the five hindrances and I could go on about those at some length. But, as this is in a collection of stories about women, compiled

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innumerable obstacles, hindrances, shortcomings and limitations, we eventually pass through them. They either temporarily dissolve, or they metamorphose – like a caterpillar into a butterfly. However, this metamorphosis just gives a peek around the corner, the real work of combusting, digesting and composting most of our karmic baggage will likely take decades.



Here we are at the pinnacle of our Summer Sesshin. It's kind of downhill from here. Perhaps you would hope that I would pick something better than this story to give at the peak of sesshin. Zen master Joshu from the ninth century tells us to "Pray that all beings are born in heaven." That part is easy to deal with. I think we all want to nurture sufficient peace of mind, joy of spirit and a loving countenance with an open heart, so that it becomes easy to pray for and care for all beings. But the second exhortation – "that you, yourself suffer forever in a sea of hardships" – is much harder to accept.

All of you know that I trained long and hard for about a dozen years with Eido Shimano at Dai Bosatsu Zendo (DBZ) in New York. And those who knew him well actually learned a lot by being in his presence. A lot about what? A lot about how to be present, grounded and free of spirit. And a lot about how not to be in the world and how not to be a Roshi with a Sangha.

Anyway, one of the positive things that I learned from training at DBZ was to more gracefully suffer pain, doubt, fatigue, anger, restlessness, obsessive fantasies and desire. One of the things that Eido Shimano said that impressed me was, "When I'm sitting on the cushion, and I'm feeling pain, or the pain of others, I open my heart, and invite it all in." Invite the world's pain to your lap when you are sitting. Bring it on! Implying that when we are deeply sitting on the cushion, our lap is big enough to hold it all.

After 9/11, I remember, as soon as we were allowed to fly again, I went to the 2001 DBZ Rohatsu Sesshin. Before arriving at DBZ, I spent a few hours in New York City and visited ground zero close to where the twin towers collapsed. Carolyn was with me and we could still smell remnants of jet fuel and body parts. It looked like an atom bomb had gone off. Truck after truck, dump truck after dump truck, were taking away parts of the buildings that had collapsed and all the people crushed in them. That Rohatsu Sesshin was solemn because we were all feeling the sting and the pain of the tragedy.

I think all of us who watched the drama unfold on our televisions were fixated on the people who chose to jump out of windows of the twin towers rather than burn to death. What must have been going through their minds as they fell, usually silently, from a great height to their death? I suspect they were thinking of their families and their own mortality.

That year, those of us in DBZ's Rohatsu Sesshin felt as if we were able to help the people who died in the Twin Towers breathe their last breaths. And, through our silent sitting, to also help those who had lost loved ones to grieve and breathe. How real was that? I don't know. I do know it felt very real.

From the height of this or any sesshin, we can feel the power of how grounded we are, and how quiet we have become. I feel that we are holding those of us who are aging and hurting. We have the power to hold those of us who are grieving, anxious, full of doubt, or feeling hopeless and restless. As we sit, we can make a lap for our many unmet desires. We can make a lap for our own inner wounded children. And by doing so, we've begun to commune with our own inner sage. Please know that our inner sage can genuinely embrace it all. It is able to hold our many regrets, doubts, and unmet desires. To hold our own wounded inner children, and our aging bodies. To hold this beautiful world – and the damage that we as a species are doing to it – with a caring heart.

Does this solve or fix anything? I don't know. Is it helpful? I think so. My inner kid is cradled. My aging body is cradled. Our heart-mind, when it is recognized, has the capacity to love and embrace this planet with all its beauty and horror. This is our task at sesshin. Let's go straight on.

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 second day of Summer Sesshin, June 25, 2023, Ezra Conklin and Dan Beck did Jukai. Ezra has explored Buddhism for some years but is a relative newcomer to Chobo-Ji. Nevertheless, he has dived deep into this practice. He has recently gone off to graduate school at Columbia University in NYC and hopes to come back regularly to Chobo-Ji to do sesshin and visit family. Here are some of Ezra's own words on why he wanted to do this ceremony:

I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in something which, in many ways, feels like a gift. This is not just regarding the possibility of Jukai, but more in reference to the experience of having been able to become a part of the Chobo-Ji community. I am challenged by how supported and inspired I feel by this Sangha, knowing that I will soon be so physically distant from it.

In August, I will move out of Seattle to pursue an educational journey in New York. While so much is changing I think it will be both helpful and auspicious to be formally accountable to the precepts. This accountability may serve as a kind of way to bring my home with me as I leave it. I would like the beginning of my new journey to be marked with responsibility. In social work, we have a list of core competencies and values we are expected to take seriously, all of which align in many ways with the precepts. Publicly stating my intention to be accountable to the precepts feels like a way for me to continue grounding my work (both personal and professional) in the Dharma.

Part of what led me down this path is that I want to live with a sense of responsibility and helpfulness. Knowing how to be helpful and actually being helpful, have both proven more difficult than I had initially assumed.

Last year, when I was more actively involved with the Seattle Insight Meditation Society, we used the Ox-Herding tales as a locus of practice, which helped me deepen in a way I had not experienced before. It is one of my many experiences that pointed me toward the Zen tradition. They offered an analogy to my journey of confusion and seeking. Receiving the precepts now feels like a natural progression of my quest to learn how to conduct myself in a helpful way, even when that path feels elusive or unknown to me.

Right – or helpful – speech is one aspect of the eightfold path which has felt particularly pertinent to me over the last two years as I navigate when and how to speak amongst those I love and learn with. So much of this has involved learning through my mistakes about the times my words – or even silence – caused discomfort, and perhaps gaining a sensitivity to when that discomfort was helpful or unhelpful. It has required the ongoing cultivation of some groundedness so that I may try to discern (before I speak unwisely) in each moment whether what I am saying is true, necessary or timely, and kind. A lie by omission can still be a lie which can cause suffering. However, the way in which a truth is told can cause suffering too.

I have learned to view anger as a compass that points to my hurt, and my values, but is not the only compass I have. Sometimes I feel angry about the ways I or my loved ones are treated, and the anger that I can really struggle with is anger about how the world is. A world where my friends suffer at the hands of police, or protesters in the Philippines are rolled over with cars. I learned anger and the expression of anger are not necessarily the same things.

Recently I read a story about Suzuki Roshi serving tea – as told in Norman Fischer's Taking Our Places – where he learns, "Skill is the sensitivity and readiness to discern what's right in the circumstances that are arising just now." My ability to develop this skill feels essential in my navigation of anger and peace. It is very much something I am just at the beginning of learning to cultivate, and I intend to continue this journey of cultivation in my practice of all the precepts.

When I asked Ezra about what he was looking for in a Dharma name he said that water has always been important to him. In the Philippines his father was a fisherman and his mother grew up on an archipelago. Ezra told me that for him "ocean" represents some greater cosmic connection with reality. Therefore, I chose to give Ezra the Dharma name: KaiGen "Kai" = Ocean (海) – "Gen" = Source (源).



Here is an update from Kaigen after arriving in NYC: "August in Brooklyn welcomed me with heat and humidity, but this week offered a cool reprieve, with a glimpse of what the autumn will bring. Fall is my favorite time of year, and I'm currently enjoying the shift from the high energy of Summer to the cooler clarity of the approaching season. Classes started this week. I sat on a street bench with my lunch the first day on campus. A truck across the street had 'Find your zen' scrawled across it in big, bold letters. This made me pause and smile, then laugh when I realized it was

only an advertisement for yogurt. The new environment brings new routines. One of my favorites is drinking tea with my brother in the morning, as we walk through Herbert Von King park. Of course, I miss Seattle, the Sangha, and the bountiful gardens of Beacon Hill. If I use my headphones on Zoom, I can listen to the sounds of the zendo and feel the familiar silence. It has been a challenging transition, but I am feeling loved from both near and far!"

Dan Beck has been training on and off with the Chobo-Ji Sangha for the past 17 years. Dan is now a professor emeritus in biology at Central Washington University. Here are excerpts from Dan's Jukai letter to me:

Let me explain why now may be a good time for me to do Jukai with you at Chobo-Ji. First, I have been practicing in one form or another for most of my 65 years, although my formal Zen practice did not begin until I met you at age 48. Now that I have retired, I have been able to sit with the Chobo-Ji Sangha in 2022 through summer Odayaka, fall Sesshin, and winter Rohatsu. This has allowed my practice to mature to a point where the precepts seem as natural and right to me as the air I breathe.

As I learned to truly LISTEN to the wind, at times there became both nothing and everything else; words, explanations, judgements, interpretations were simply irrelevant. I remember an early experience, in the spring of 2007, sitting in the forest where the whole world just sparkled with the breeze. There is nothing more "aaaah" than just listening to the wind. With more practice at Chobo-Ji, in Fall Sesshin 2022, I even BECAME the wind. But there also came a period, after my mother died in 2010, when you guided me through feeling sorrow with the same attention as listening to the wind. That was the hardest thing I have ever done. Learning to sit with, even dive into, the sorrows of my youth, the sorrows of others, and the sorrows of Mother Nature cracked me open like the sky. This is my greatest challenge, and Jukai

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reaffirms my commitment to continue dancing with pain and sorrow so that they may someday be as welcome in my consciousness as the joy I feel.

You have shown me what I always hoped to show my parents: that despite the pain, or perhaps because of it, life and the universe is wonderful and powerful because it is not just part of us; it IS us. So, at this tender age of 65, I think this version of me is ready for Jukai. To me, Jukai means a maturation of my commitment to listen to the wind, to become the wind, to celebrate my inseparable connection to my fellow humans along with everything that has ever existed.

Taking the sixteen Bodhisattva precepts is a formal affirmation of behaviors I have aspired and committed to follow for many years. By formalizing my commitment through taking the precepts, I recognize that my conduct – the way I treat others and myself – will be wholly anchored in my buddha nature. I regard the precepts as a roadmap for conduct inspired by my evolving understanding of the absence of separation between others and myself – a natural consequence of listening to the wind. Yet, the precepts are not simple rules to follow. They are full of contradictions, nuances, and paradoxes, as are all the concepts we use to describe the indescribable. When I stumble, I can take my mistakes to the cushion and transform them into being kinder, listening better, etc. As Norman Fischer said: “When you pick up one piece of dust, the entire world comes with it.” As I continue to grow in my experience of the dharma, so too will my relationship to the precepts continue to mature.

I chose ecology and evolutionary biology as a career; and had the good fortune to travel to amazing wild places in the southwest, Mexico, and Latin America, to conduct research with wonderful colleagues, and to work with many amazing students to help them achieve their dreams. I am also a father, husband, woodworker, explorer, naturalist, and friend. My Dan Beck self is all of these, but perhaps the truest version is “one who listens to the wind.”

Reading this it was easy to select ChoFu as Dan’s new Dharma Name. “Cho” = Listening (聽) – “Fu” = Wind (風) or Careful Inquiry of the Wind.

Osho Ceremony

Osho candidates are unsui (priests in training) who have served in every temple post, made substantial progress in the Rinzai koan curriculum, and have done many sesshins in the course of about ten years of dedicated training. Oshos have the authority to run temples of their own, give Dharma talks, offer Dharma interviews, do Jukai and even ordain new unsui. However, an Osho is not necessarily a Dharma Heir. Only Dharma heirs can give teishos or offer official dokusan. As of this writing, Rinzan, Osho is my only Dharma Heir. During the Osho ceremony candidates renew their commitment to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma & Sangha), and their Great Vow to care for all beings great and small, animate and inanimate. At the ceremony, candidates re-affirm the [Precepts and Four Bodhisattva Vows](#), and receive the title Zenji (Dharma Teacher).

On the final day of Summer Sesshin, June 20, 2023, Rev. Ryonen Sendo Anne Howells and Rev. Koji Gendo Rick Testa became full Chobo-Ji priests (Osho). At the conclusion of ceremony I asked each of them to give a brief Dharma talk. Here is a transcript of Sendo, Osho’s Dharma talk:

“Apprentice yourself to the curve of your own disappearance.”

This line, by the Irish poet/philosopher David Whyte, came to me some time ago as a FaceBook post by Eric Massanari, a good friend to this sangha and a close associate, in Spiritual Directors International, of Reverend Seifu. I was so dazzled by the line that I copied it and eventually wrote it on the inside cover of my Zen journal for 2023.

Why does the line strike me so powerfully? It’s a call to action: this is something you can do. It appeals strongly to the student in me: an action which takes the form of learning, absorbing, being absorbed. And it sweeps me into this great matter of life and death, coming and going: the core enigma, or a core enigma, of Zen.

*So let’s feel ourselves into the words, one or two at a time: **Curve, Disappearance, Apprentice, Yourself and Your.***

***Curve:** It’s a beautiful shape. It’s a natural shape – in nature there are far more curves than straight lines. As a shape, it implies a*



circle, or a spiral. It can evoke the curve of space/time, or the orbiting motions spread throughout the cosmos, and specifically the Earth’s orbits which measure our years. As a shape which can seem to rise and then decline, it suggests a traditional metaphor for life, rising from the horizon with the sun, then declining into sunset, an arc with a beginning and end. However, “curve” both is more abstract and needn’t imply rising or declining. Or, rather, at any point, it is doing both at once, and thus it seems especially resonant with our Zen understanding, Zen practice, around life and death. On the cushion, Dogen says, we are born and die again and again, with each in-breath and out-breath, with each moment. An intense awareness of this, for Dogen, is actualization. And as the brush-stroke forming the enso shape, the curve continues to represent the absolute – you can see an example of this circle in the calligraphy behind me on your left.

Disappearance: “Disappearance,” not “death.” What’s the difference? “Disappearance” significantly does not suggest non-existence. Whatever disappears is gone, can no longer be seen – but where is it? What is it, now? It’s a mystery. On ancient maps, sailing beyond the edge of the map, beyond any known horizon, is sailing into the unknown. There’s a well-known story about Hakuin: A samurai asks Hakuin, “Where will you go after you die?” Hakuin responds, “How am I supposed to know?” The samurai says, “You’re a Zen Master.” Hakuin says, “Yes, but not a dead one.”

Apprentice: Apprentices learn by observing and imitating, they do assigned tasks. Their efforts are intentional and build on what they’ve done before. They are getting ready for something, the work that lies ahead of them, and when they’re ready, they become a Master. Traditional apprentices, however, work with a master. Actually Chobo-Ji’s

unsui are apprentices of this sort: we work with, observe and imitate Genjo Roshi. But in the sentence we're examining, we're talking about apprenticing ourselves to a Curve, the Curve of our own disappearance. In this case, who is the teacher, the master-teacher? It's the Curve, our own trajectory. It's ourselves.

*This brings me to the remaining significant words: **Yourselves, Your.** Who is apprenticing? Who is disappearing? And are "you" alone in this process? For the Zen practitioner, these questions are familiar territory. On the cushion, our ego-self, and the broader consciousness that arises from our body, disappear all the time, drop away, moment by moment, with each out-breath. We discover, again and again that there is no fixed "you" or "yourself". We realize that the trajectory of our Curve is the continuing disappearance of our highly impermanent selves, even as we also sense repeatedly the unknowable depths from which these selves arise.*

Finally, now, off the cushion and in the relative, I ask myself, where am I on the Curve of my own disappearance? What is my trajectory looking like? Though much of the time I feel ageless, increasingly I'm feeling my age, now 81. I'm in good health, and feeling more than ever grateful for my life, but sesshin reveals my decreasing stamina. All of us, young and old, hurt – together, which is comforting. But it's been visible to all that as the day wears on and my feet swell from sitting in a chair, I walk with increasing difficulty.

And, as I've long planned, I'm soon to move from my Chobo-Ji residency, which I've loved for the past five years, and into an independent living apartment at a retirement residence downtown, Horizon House. Awaiting me there is a spacious, light-filled ninth-floor apartment, where I'll be able to look out big windows at sky and clouds and seagulls, and also down to Freeway Park with its canopy of trees. But also, right by the elevator I use, is a large glass case in which are posted announcements of residents' deaths. Names and dates appear right away; obituaries are soon added; candles burn below the case and there's always a vase of fresh flowers. I take special note of the dates and am reassured to see that most people there die in their 90's; I'll start out among the younger end of the community. The most important thing about this move is that while I'll continue to be firmly rooted in the

Chobo-Ji sangha, I'll be adding a second, large and vibrant community, of the older aging. Horizon House (the metaphor in the name leaps out) is a place where I can share the apprentice work on my Curve, including the work's Zen perspectives, with companions who support each other through the trials of increasing disabilities, health emergencies, and mortal illness.

Here is a transcript of Gendo, Oshos's Dharma talk which examined *The Mumonkan*, Case 16, "Bell Sound and Priest's Robe." In this koan Zen Master Ummon said, "Look! This world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your priest's robes at the sound of the bell?"

The world is vast and wide. Why do you meditate at the sound of the bell? Does your ear go to the sound? Or does the sound come to your ear? We've had seven days together responding to bells and clappers. I've grown to love all the temple sounds. The striking of the han (wooden block used to announce time in a Zen temple), the rich low oscillating sound of the big bell while we chant the sutras. As Shika I've had an opportunity to befriend the han and our temple's big bell outside. How wonderful! Oh! And of course, the Tenzo's meal bell! Everyone is happy to hear that gong! Then we have the sounds of the outer world. Wind chimes and the wind. Our little Fox Forest Zen Temple is upstairs in a small cabin in the forest. It's wonderful to have the windows open and hear the wind from far away move across the treetops. Whooshing towards us as we meditate. On occasion it enters through one side of the zendo and exits the other taking us with it. The early morning birdsongs and trickling of the fountain all call out! Oh, and the crows! I really enjoy the crows. We don't have as many where I live, so I've grown fond of hearing the crows each time I return to Chobo-Ji. Yesterday I had communion with a crow on one of my brisk walks during a break. It flew right at me from a distance and landed at my feet. We checked each other out and after a few minutes it gracefully flew off into the sky leaving me behind. Then we have the sounds created by human beings. Industrious sounds of cars, traffic, and trains in the distance, sirens and the ships horns blasting in the harbor. And planes! Lots and lots of planes flying overhead. Do the sounds come to your ear or does your ear go to the sound? I'd like to share something about a thing that's developed in my practice. I've become



relatively skillful at not identifying the sounds surrounding me during Zazen. I sort of listen like an infant with no possibility of knowing what sounds are. Then it all becomes one big world song. Sort of what Genjo Roshi refers to as the symphony of now.

*No...what's that?
No subject.
No object.*

The world is vast and wide. Why do you put on robes at the sound of bell? I believe this is referring to the monk who was tasked with walking through the sleeping quarters to awaken all the other monks before dawn. Sort of a human alarm clock. If you've ever held the post of Jisha during Rohatsu this would be something you would be tasked with. Ok, so let's talk about robes. Now I will tell you all about how I met Genjo Roshi. In 2011 my family and I moved to CT.

Some of you may know that I have a long history with martial arts training. I am the regional director for our Aikido organization on the east coast and maintained my own dojo for many years. Nearby our new home was Aiki Farms, an organic farm and aikido dojo created by Robert Heiwa Burns. His dharma name translates to warrior of peace. I liked Heiwa immediately; he was passionate and fiery. Fire attracts fire so we got along just fine. He was pretty much a one-man operation with his students required to sit Zazen, train in aikido and work on the farm. Thing is he really didn't have enough students to make it work during harvest time. So I arranged for our aikido organization to have our summer training

Continued on next page ...

intensive at Aiki farms to get more people there to help harvest.

Heiwa was the first Zen practitioner that I met that I wanted to sit with. His Zen had an intensity that I really liked. Heiwa loved the idea of hosting the camp and we scheduled it for mid-July. A few days later Heiwa told me that he asked Genjo if he would come out to run us through a full day's sitting on the last day of the camp. Genjo agreed and Heiwa said, "You will love Genjo he's a general for the Buddha!!!"

We had a very strong group arrive, many of whom were camping out in tents or sleeping on the dojo's matted floor. It was insanely hot that week. A thick muggy heat that taps your strength. Our days consisted of zazen, aikido training and working outside on the farm. By the last day all of us were quite close to exhaustion.

Then Genjo who I'm pretty sure was instructed by Heiwa to show us no mercy, ran us through sit after sit. Now none of us were prepared for that much sitting, never mind the condition we were all in at that point after six days of hard training in the summer heat! What a terrible terrible idea! This was a minimal presentation of what we do here at sesshin. Just a Jisha and a Tenzo everything else was handled by the general. I'd never seen anyone sit like him, he seemed to immediately become inanimate before the bell stopped ringing. The zendo was much like ours is now with Genjo where I am right now in front facing the two rows. My row slightly closer to him with myself in front.

Sit sit sit

Well, eventually things were getting a bit ugly. A particularly strong young man in our group stood up after a sit and didn't know where he was. Disoriented and unable to walk without assistance. We got him water and a cold damp towel for his head and put him in a bed to rest. Now we all silently looked at one another thinking Oh shit! Ron's down! If he can't make it how can we? Now remember I'm their Sensei. I'm the one who strives to be best example for them. I can't fail! This isn't because I'm afraid to fail; it's I because I would be heartbroken to let their belief in me go to waste. Sitting and sitting and sitting until there's too much movement during zazen for the general to ignore and he lets a booming don't move! That's it. I vow to not move even if it kills me.

Then something fell on my head. Yup... something is crawling around the top of my head. Ok it's definitely an insect, but what? It proceeds to crawl down the back of my head into my right ear! Then after awhile out it comes down my neck into my gi! It explored quite thoroughly up and my back across my belly into my sleeve and almost out onto my hand... What is it!?! Then it goes back up my sleeve and onto my neck again!

I will not move!
I will not move!
I will not move!

Then it wanders all over my head pausing for moments in various places. Then back down the left sleeve. I was certain the general knew what was happening. How couldn't he? Finally, it crawls out onto my hand and then out onto the mat where I can see that it's a very large ant! It continues its journey across the mat and heads left and disappears. Right then right at that moment the general rings the bell.

The world is vast and wide. Why do put your priest robes at the sound of the bell?

My first weeklong sesshin was in the winter of 2013. It was a requirement for my Integral Bodywork training. Ogawa Sensei insisted that he couldn't take me further in my training unless I attended a week long sesshin.

That's when I first saw the form of Zen training. The Sangha at Blue Mountain Zendo was small with just enough members to cover posts. I think there were ten of us in total. It was the first time I experienced post holders beyond a Jisha and tenzo. The temple was properly equipped with a particularly beautiful sounding big bell. So lots of new stuff for me. I had never seen the meal kits and didn't know the procedure. I had never chanted with a Densu. Even the striking of the han was all new.

That's when I met Rinzan Osho. I was seated to his right in the third seat. My first sesshin in the third seat! I immediately noticed Rinzan as the guy to pay attention to if you were unsure about what to do. He wasn't ordained at that time. Imagine that! There he was sitting full lotus and upright like a mountain! He was very kind to me, silently providing subtle hints when needed. As a result, he will always be a beloved dharma brother. That sesshin was very powerful for me. I was ripe to combust some

longtime carried baggage and I did. I left that sesshin with Genjo's words, "You don't necessarily need Zen training but it could be just the thing to bring you to great maturity."

Driving home I said aloud, "Oh no! I'm going to do that again!" Two years later I ordain. I step into the stream. It's a slow steady stream. Then over time it gets deeper and becomes a river. I can still touch the bottom and reach the sides. But the current becomes stronger and after a while I can't touch the bottom and can no longer see the sides. I'm still afloat but the current becomes so strong that it is hopeless to do anything but surrender.

There's no way back, there's no getting out. There's no leading this any direction, I'm much too small compared to its vastness. The world is vast and wide! So, I will awaken each day before dawn. Put on priest robes, take my seat, and accept the bell's invitation into the silence and stillness.

Closing Incense Poem

Summer Sesshin 2023

Who hears the wind blowing?
Who senses the oceans rising?
Who feels the ice melting?
Who flows with the bursting rivers?
Awareness brings joy and sorrow.

Summer Odayaka

Poems

Dan Chofu Beck

Late summer breeze mingles
with Bells, Bowls and Bows
as our Sangha returns to swim together
in eternal unconditional Love.

Sonja deWit

The ocean is flat calm.
A thin mist obscures the mountains
on the other side.
At the still dark centre of the trees
a fern frond is doing
slow graceful bows
lit by a single ray of sun.

Michelle Shannon Lewis Kim

*Wind sings through the chimes
intermittently today
Listen! It will come.*

*My ancestors call, through the playful
bird twitterings, comforting my soul.
Suddenly I grasp
in billions of shimmers
They are I, all the way back to the sun
And we are The Beloved.*

Temple Posts

beginning Sept. 10, 2023

Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares
Shika (Host - Manager)

Elijah Seigan Zupancic
Tenzo (Cook)

Felix Wazan Pekar
Sendo Howells, Osho
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

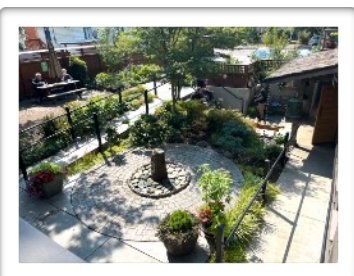
Eddie Daichi Salazar
Charles Porter
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Dan Chofu Beck
Michelle Kim
Dana (new resident)
Andrew Johnson
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Sally Zenka Metcalf, Sensei
Ken Daien Iwata
Inji (Abbot Assistant)

Carolyn Josen Stevens, Sensei
Fusu (Accountant)

Eddie Daichi Salazar, Sensei
Felix Wazan Pekar
Sally Zenka Metcalf, Sensei
Intro Instruction



Fall Intensive

An intensive covers roughly the same time frame as the traditional temple *kessei* period, beginning with the first zazenkaï for that season (Sept. 10) and ending with Rohatsu Sesshin. It's a time for concentrated study and practice. *Please let Genjo know if you plan to participate ASAP.* Chobo-Ji participants receive dokusan once weekly on Wednesday evenings. *All ordained 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, zazenkaï, 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.

Autumn Sesshin

Sept. 22 - 29

We welcome both in-person and Zoom participation in our seven day Autumn Sesshin. Full-time participation is expected unless special permission has been granted by the Abbot.

Zoom participation requires [Zoom Registration](#). Zoom participation will also be available for those who wish to attend morning (5:30 - 6:30 AM) and/or evening (7:30 - 8:30 PM) zazen Saturday through Thursday: use this [link](#).

The cost of the sesshin is \$300 (less dues for September). If attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. You can use PayPal or leave a check in the bowl at the entrance to the zendo. (Using [PayPal](#), please make your donation to zen@choboji.org, and note that your payment is for Autumn Sesshin.)

We begin at 5:30 p.m. Friday, September 22, with informal supper, introductions, and orientation. From Saturday to the following Thursday, sesshin runs from 5:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The final Friday begins at 5:00 a.m. and concludes 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, work clothes, and a towel.**

Please help us get an accurate count by sending an [application](#) by September 15, and let us know if you would like to attend in person.

We offer limited partial scholarships for sesshin. For more information, please email registration@choboji.org.

Participants in the zendo are required to test themselves sometime during the 24-hour period before sesshin begins, and again 72 hours after the start. Participants flying to Seattle, please test yourselves on arrival. We will serve shared meals, but those who wish to may supply their own food and eat separately from the group. Anyone experiencing flu or cold-like symptoms should not attend in person.

Gregory Wonderwheel

Alan Gregory Wonderwheel, Water Dragon Sensei, died on August 11th at home in Santa Rosa, California, at age 73. He was a self-taught translator of classical Chinese Buddhist texts including the Gateless Checkpoint of the Zen Lineage (J. Mumonkan), the Sutra of Queen Srimala's Lion's Roar, and the Treatise on the Great-Vehicle's Arousing of Faith. He began practicing Rinzaï Zen Buddhism at age 19 with Joshu Sasaki Roshi in Los Angeles.



He was given teaching authority and the Dharma name "Water Dragon" by Roshi Daniel Terragno of the Diamond Sangha Zen lineage in 2022. He sat sesshin here at Chobo-ji a few times in 2008-2009, helping with some of the remodeling of our S. Horton property when it was first purchased. He remained in communication with Genjo Osho over the years, returning again last year for July Zazenkaï along with his wife, Carol Spooner, who is a Chobo-ji practitioner.

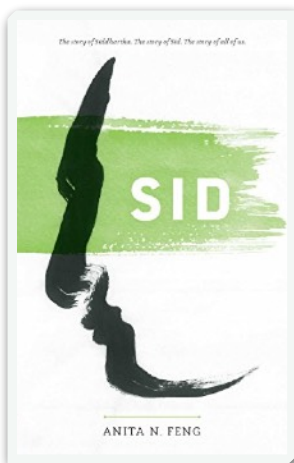


Fall Book Group

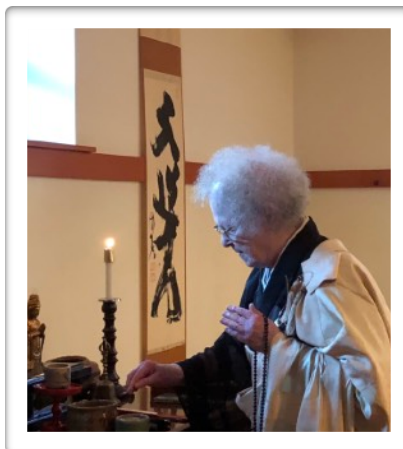
Thursdays, Oct. 5 - Nov. 16
7:30- 8:45 PM

Chobo-Ji Lounge & via [Zoom](#)

Our book: *Sid* (Wisdom Publications, 2015). The author, who visited us early this summer to give a much-appreciated Dharma Talk, is Anita N. Feng, a Zen master teaching at the Blue Heron Zen Community, Seattle, in the Korean lineage of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Her astonishing and beautiful book is, as described on its cover, "The story of Siddhartha. The story of Sid. The story of all of us." It's available on Amazon both new and used, and on Kindle.



We'll meet weekly in the Chobo-Ji lounge beginning Thursday, October 5, moving slowly through the book in short segments. All are welcome to any of the meetings, provided you have done that week's reading. Reading for October 5: "Cast of Characters" and "Birth."



Mental Health and Spiritual Development Workshop

Sept. 23 - 24, 9AM - 4PM
Dumas Bay Retreat Center

Dear Sangha members,

If you're not planning to attend Chobo-Ji's Autumn Sesshin, I invite you to a 2-day weekend workshop a colleague and I are giving September 23-24. It's both a Chobo-Ji fundraising opportunity, and a chance to learn what I believe is an extremely useful and perhaps fascinating new way to understand mental health and spiritual development I created. It's called the SatoriWest Method.

Putting together my background as a psychiatrist, 43-year Zen practitioner, former brain researcher, and natural health doctor, the SatoriWest Method is a deep dive into the 4 Noble Truths (+1 more), explained by what happens in the brain to create the spectrum of human experience from crisis to enlightenment. And how to move up the spectrum.

It's been successfully used by many therapists with hundreds of psychiatric patients! Yet, it's relevant to everyone—especially if you are stressed and struggling emotionally and/or are a seeker of higher states of experience.

For this first attempt at a 2-day workshop, we've lowered the tuition to just cover costs. However, because we want people to attend who relate to the material and can offer feedback, we've dropped the price by another 20% (\$460, which includes lunch), and then will donate 20% of that (\$90) to Chobo-Ji for each attendee from Chobo-Ji. It's a rare opportunity.

You can find the original flyer at satoriwest.com/retreat/ and you can sign up at this site. I'm excited about the possibility of leading this exploration into your mind, brain, and life. I'd love see you there.

In gassho,

Chozen Jeff Skolnick

DAI BAI ZAN CHO BO ZEN TEMPLE
Introduction to
ZEN

A 6-week, in-person, exploration of Rinzai Zen practice
 Tuesdays, October 3-November 7 | 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.

3 OCT	ORIENTATION TO ZEN What is Zen all about?
10 OCT	FORMS OF RINZAI ZEN PRACTICE Is there more than seated meditation? Learn about mindfulness practices, such as chanting, walking, bowing and work (samu).
17 OCT	FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS Explore the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha’s radical teaching on liberation from suffering.
24 OCT	EIGHT FOLD PATH Embark on the the Noble Eightfold Path, Buddha’s way to gradually unravel suffering in our lives.
31 OCT	KOAN STUDY Dive into the use of koans (Zen parables) to investigate our own deep nature.
7 NOV	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 7:30-8:45PM,

Dharma Council, most Saturdays at 8:30 AM – Dharma Dialogue, some Sundays at 7:30 PM

(See Google Calendar at <https://choboji.org/schedule/> for more detail and Zoom links.)

Zen Sangha Hike (to Margaret Lake) ...	Sep. 9, 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Sep. 10, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	Sep. 10, noon - 1:30 p.m.
100 Sandwiches prep ...	Sep. 16, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
Autumn Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...	Sep. 22 - 29
Start of six week Zen Intro Series, Tuesdays	Oct. 3, 7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Start of Fall Book Group (seven Thursdays)	Oct. 5, 7:30 - 8:45 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Oct. 8, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (to be announced) ...	Oct. 14 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
100 Sandwiches prep ...	Oct. 21, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
100 Sandwiches prep ...	Nov. 4, 9:30 - 11:00 a.m.
Precepts Class (Zoom only), Part One	Nov. 7, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	Nov. 12, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	Nov. 12, noon - 1:30 p.m.
Precepts Class, (Zoom only), Part two	Nov. 14, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (to be announced) ...	Nov. 18 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

Plum Mountain News
1733 S. Horton St., unit 7
Seattle, WA 98144

