



Plum Mountain News

Dear members and friends,

It has been a mild winter without much snow this year. There are now early signs of spring popping up around the Zendo. Since the last issue we have had our Rohatsu Sesshin, Toya party, Christmas break, New Year's celebration, and our first couple of Zazenkais of 2024, and I led a five-day sesshin in Bonn, Germany.



Very recently we had our first Sangha hike of 2024, an evening of meditation and music and our second 100 Sandwiches prep meeting of the year and we just concluded our three-day Odayaka Sesshin.



At our Rohatsu Sesshin, we had a full house (26 participants), with people coming from all over – England, Germany, California, Oregon, Arizona, Connecticut, Utah, North Carolina, Vancouver BC, and of course Washington. We couldn't house all the out-of-towners so we rented a nearby Airbnb to handle the overflow. Rev. Seifu Singh-Molares served as our Shika (host/manager) and kept us organized. Elijah Seigan Zupancic was our Dai-Tenzo (chief cook) and served many meals with a Japanese sensibility that I hadn't had at a sesshin since the time our



Rohatsu Sesshin 2023

founding abbot Genki Takabayashi cooked meals. Seigan was assisted by Jeffery Jones. Felix Wazan Pekar was our Jikijitsu (time keeper) who kept us quiet and on time. Eddie Daichi Salazar and Charles Porter together served as our Densu (chant leader) and the beat went on. Dan Chofu Beck was our principal Jisha (tea server) and was ably assisted by several other Sangha members. Finally, Reiner Bleil, who came all the way from Germany, served as my Inji (abbot assistant) and judiciously kept the dokusan line moving. In this issue you will find the transcript of my Teisho from the fourth day. Rev. Sendo Anne Howells gave a wonderful Dharma Talk on the fifth day, and a reconstructed transcript is also included here. On the final day we all did a Jukai ceremony for Alex Gheorghiu, more on this later.

Our recent Odayaka Sesshin was well attended (25 participants), and again for the most part all the posts were ably executed by the same folks as at Rohatsu. These Zen sesshins would be impossible without great people fulfilling every post, and with Carolyn Josen Stevens doing

the behind-the-scenes caretaking of registration.

On January 6, Dr. Glenn Kangan Webb, Sensei, who founded the Seattle Zen Center, which was the antecedent of Chobo-Ji, died at his home in Palm Desert, CA, with his wife Carol and his son Reggie at his side. He was born in Lawton, Oklahoma in 1935. At the age of three, he started learning classical piano, which he continued, reaching the highest level of national competition. He studied in New York with Juilliard teachers and gave recitals around the country until the age of 17. During one of his recitals in New York, he met Daisetsu Suzuki, who first brought Zen Buddhism from Japan to the West. Dr. Suzuki's world view inspired Webb's interest in Japanese and religious studies. It was Kangan who invited Genki Takabayashi to come to Seattle and be the Seattle Zen Center's resident Zen priest.

Kangan was an early mentor of mine and we stayed in touch throughout his life. Kangan was



ordained in Japan (1970) in the Obaku/Rinzai lineage and was acknowledged as a Dharma Heir of Miyauchi Kanko Roshi of Kanko-Ji. Kangan was also a scholar and earned his Ph.D. in East Asian studies from the University of Chicago in 1966. I met him when he was a professor at the University of Washington in 1977. Both he and his wife, Carol, were Japanese tea masters in the Urasenke School of *chanoyu*. In 1987 Kangan went on to be head of the Art Department at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. In 2011 Kangan received from the Emperor of Japan the Order of the Rising Sun for his work in sharing Japanese art and culture with the West. Coincidentally, Kangan's 49th Memorial Day celebration turned out to be Genki Takabayashi's annual ancestor day, so the



two of them shared the main altar here at Chobo-Ji on February 24, during our Winter Odayaka Sesshin. Dr. Webb's picture will be added to the collection of ancestors in the dokusan room, and each January 6th Kangan will be celebrated as one of Chobo-Ji's most important ancestors.

In addition to the items already mentioned, you will find Spring Posts, several poems submitted by Sangha members, including some great Toya haiku, along with announcements for the Spring Intensive and other upcoming events. Please enjoy these offerings and I hope to see you all in the Zendo.

With gassho,
Genjo



Hekiganroku ~ Case 46

Kyosei's "Voice of the Raindrops"

Genjo's 4th Day Rohatsu Teisho

Enjo's Introduction: In a single action he transcends both the ordinary and the holy. With a single word, he cuts away all complications and encumbrances. He walks on the ridge of an iceberg, he treads the edge of a sword. Seated amid the totality of form and sound, he rises above them. Leaving aside the freedom of such subtle activity, tell me, what about finishing it in a moment? See the following.

Main Subject: : Kyosei asked a monk, "What is the noise outside?" The monk said, "That is the voice of the raindrops." Kyosei said, "People's thinking is topsy-turvy. Deluded by their own selves, they pursue things." The monk asked, "What about yourself?" Kyosei said, "I was near it, but am not deluded." The monk asked, "What do you mean by 'near it but not deluded?'" Kyosei said, "To say it in the sphere of realization may be easy, but to say it in the sphere of transcendence is difficult."

Setcho's Verse:

*The empty hall resounds
with the voice of the raindrops.
Even a master fails to answer.
If you say you have turned the current,
You have no true understanding.
Understanding? No understanding?
Misty with rain, the northern and
southern mountains.*

In our tradition, we say that through koan practice we learn to dynamically juggle three different lenses for viewing reality. One lens is the relative. So when Kyosei asked the monk, "What is the noise outside," and the monk said, "Why, that is the voice of the raindrops," the monk answered quite naturally in the relative.

The second lens is the absolute. Here in the Zendo we've created a laboratory to dip deeply, from time to time, into the absolute, the vast bottomless ocean of multi-dimensional reality where each one of us

and everything that we name is just the tip of the iceberg of what is here. The absolute is a vast ocean of reality that has no bounds and infinite depth; it includes all dimensions we can measure and all the unseen dimensions we have no ability yet to measure or even deduce.

When we investigate this intimate infinite depth of reality, we quickly realize that we are but a mere drop of a vast bottomless ocean. We may try to name this intimate infinite multi-dimensional reality as shunyata, or mu, or Dharma, or the absolute, but whatever words we try to use to explain it or name it will always be completely inadequate because it's fundamentally inconceivable. It is something we can partially feel, but it cannot be reduced to a name or any adequate formalization. We can understand this truth with our head relatively easily, but only occasionally do we feel it at a cellular level. Our Rohatsu Sesshin is one opportunity where we are getting raw enough, exhausted enough, exposed, and vulnerable enough, to sink below and beyond what I sometimes call our crazy core of conflicted thoughts and feelings.

We're juggling three balls: the relative, the absolute and the transcendent. We can't even approach the transcendent until we have at least dipped into the absolute deeply enough to feel it cellularly. As I look around the Zendo, I think everyone in this room has felt it – at least had a glimpse of it. To respond to a koan from the absolute, we must, at the very least, have felt the absolute cellularly at some point in our training or life experience.

You may think speaking on a koan from the perspective of the absolute based on a memory is insufficient. And that's not true. We're not always going to be cellularly in communion with our own depth. That's just unrealistic. We're too complicated. We're too crazy to be constantly, freshly, clearly, – with every chakra aligned – open all the time. I know there are people waiting for this to happen. It's not going to happen.

Operating from our memory of openness and clarity is often sufficient. But we must experience this openness often enough to be confident and have faith in our own experience of the bottomless absolute. Doubt is a wonderful thing, but if there's excessive doubt, it pollutes the confidence. And if there's excessive faith without sufficient doubt, that's a different kind of

pollution. In this case our confidence shows up as a kind of arrogance and puffed-up-ness that will get shut down regularly by a good teacher in Zen koan practice.

In fact, there are a lot of koans that are all about shutting down the student who has genuinely entered and felt their own depth, and now is operating from the place of – I've got it, or I'm the Buddha, or I'm the true person beyond all rank and post, or I'm the king deer, or I'm the dragon, or something like that. And the student hints at their magnificent experience, and the teacher says, "Not even close."

As I have said, the third ball or lens that we're learning to juggle in our tradition is the transcendent. And in some ways the transcendent is by far the easiest, and in other ways, is by far the most difficult.

The transcendent takes something ordinary and playfully reflects the inconceivable. We can manifest the transcendent by making use of something ordinary – very ordinary – and playfully, delightfully, reflecting the beyond the beyond. And the way that we're instructed to do this is by first calling on our inner seven-year-old and asking them how they might playfully respond to this circumstance, situation, or question.

Second, we then temper or mature the seven-year-old response by consulting and synthesizing advice from our own inner sage. Now, these are my words, but I heard something like this said to me. We learn to temper our response with a sage beyond our chronological years. We all know that inner sage voice, because it sounds like us, but it refers to us almost always in the third person. So, my deep inner sage channel might say, "Genjo" – or whatever your name is – and then follow with some advice. Someone close to me had a kind of near-death experience some years ago. They had a fall and ended up impaling their gut. This was a life-or-death situation, where they could have easily bled out. And they heard their inner sage say, get up, move, address this, and used their name. It was their voice using their name, saying something like, "Genjo, get up, deal with this."

That's the inner sage. It's always there. However, we're not always listening. Our inner sage has no beginning, and no end.

It's not based on this lifetime, yet informs this lifetime. For the inner sage there is no time, only now. And yet, because we are all different manifestations of the absolute, we all have access to it. Part of our training is learning how to listen to our own inner sage. When our seven-year-old response is blended with the wisdom of our inner sage, then responding to the transcendent part of any koan is like a knife cutting through warm butter.

Engo talks about the inner sage. In a single action, he or she "transcends both the ordinary and the holy." In other words, the

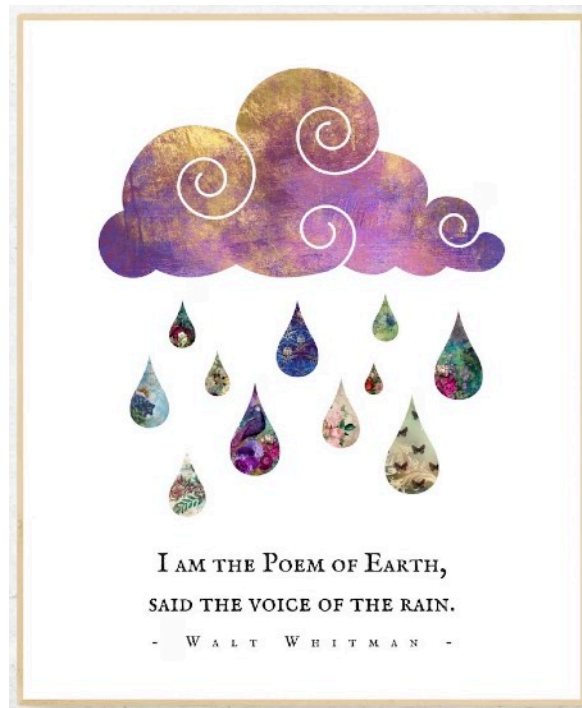
time. The inner sage sits amid the totality of form and non-form and rises above them. The inner sage transcends any form, sound, color, smell, or the lack of any of those things, and easily makes use of any manifestation to hint at the absolute.

And then, Engo says, would you like an example of that? Here you go. Kyosei lived from 868 to 937, and he's in two other cases of the *Hekiganroku* and was one of many Dharma heirs of Seppo. And he is testing his monk when he says, "Oh – what is that noise outside?" Kyosei already knows it's raining.

The monk answers entirely from the relative, and there's nothing wrong with that. The relative use of language is essential for communicating and negotiating life as a human being. The ability to conceptualize and use complex language to communicate is one of the greatest assets of our species. However, no matter how accurate or beautiful our words are, they take us further away from a more direct and intuitive communion with reality. And Kyosei, gently – I would say very gently and kindly – pokes the monk after he gives this relative response.

I remember a time, when I was training at Ryutaku-Ji in 1981. The Roshi at that time was Sochu Roshi, who was Abbot of the temple. His Dharma father, Soen Roshi, was still around and I got to hang with him. It was amazing. Anyway, Sochu Roshi and I had an encounter in dokusan when – let's put it this way – I made him happy. And there was some Dharma laughter coming out of the dokusan room, and the monks outside of dokusan hearing this were in awe. The foreigner, the *gaijin* (foreigner, outsider) made the Roshi happy. A day or two later, Sochu Roshi and I met each other on the temple grounds. Sochu Roshi knew that I had recently gone off to town, but asked, "Where did you go?" And I gave him a totally relative answer. "Oh, I went to such and such." And suddenly, he looked disappointed. It took me a moment, but after a bit of confusion, I said to myself, "damn!", understanding that that had been an opportunity to see where I was at.

Of course, today I know exactly how I would respond in such a situation, and it just rolls off my tongue like a knife through



inner sage easily transcends the relative and the absolute. With a single word, she or he cuts away all complications. The word doesn't even have to mean anything: *Muuuuuuuuuuuu!* Or, *Katsu!* A shout can sometimes cut through all complications!

The inner sage is always walking on a ridge of an iceberg and treading the edge of a sword. It's always on the edge of life and death, because the inner sage – or, "That one, shining alone" (one way that Rinzai referred to the inner sage) – doesn't know anything about time. For the inner sage, life and death are just surface ripples on an infinite expanse of ocean with an infinite depth.

It's transcendent of life and death because, for the inner sage, there is no such thing as

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warm butter. But I was young, and quite inexperienced at juggling the three balls. Of course, Sochu Roshi was hoping that I would respond from either the absolute or the transcendent.

Kyosei said to the monk, "People's thinking is topsy-turvy. Deluded by their own selves, they pursue things." Topsy-turvy means kind of upside down. People's view is upside down. When we're stuck in our relative view, from a Zen perspective, that's an upside-down view. The relative should be the background view, not the foreground view. And because we're so often stuck in the relative view, we say, from a Zen perspective, that's topsy-turvy.

People's thinking is so often topsy-turvy. We're so often stuck in our relative view of things. When we are stuck in the relative perspective, we are often dominated by thoughts of getting ahead, having enough, protecting our sensitive egos, wanting to be special, wanting to get it right, and fears of getting it wrong. We are often worried or frightened and offended as if we had been poked or confronted in some way. We all worry when we haven't pleased someone. There's nothing wrong with the relative view; however, when we are stuck or limited to this view, we are also likely dominated by our own narrow egoistic perspective.

Kyosei again says all of what I just said, by saying we're deluded by our own selves, pursuing things, whether it's riches, or security, or being better, or being pleasing, or having enough and then a little more.

The monk says, "Oh, what about yourself?" And then Kyosei says this beautiful sentence – wow! – "I was near it, but am not deluded." Kyosei is saying that at the very least, I remember what it was like to be so intimate with a vastness that knows no bounds and is beyond time. But I'm not so deluded as to think that I got it. That I've attained it. That it's mine to keep.

The monk didn't get that and asked, "What do you mean by 'near it but not deluded?'" And Kyosei says, you know, at this point to say it in the sphere of realization or the absolute is easy, but to say it in the sphere of transcendence is often – not always – difficult.

To say it in the sphere of realization is relatively easy. *Muuuuuuuuuu . . .* is one way to hint at it. Or, when asked what's the noise

outside, to say something like, "It's the beyond the beyond, speaking as raindrops" is not too difficult.

The transcendent is a little bit trickier and must be both profound and playful at the same time. So, applying the rule here, for the playful part we must ask our inner seven-year-old. If we're asked, "What is the noise outside right now?" – without any dependence on words or letters or explanation – no words, no description, no translation – how will the inner seven-year-old respond? If we are in touch with our inner seven-year-old he or she will at once come up with a playful – beyond words response. Then we must merge this response with, at the very least, a memory of being near to the intimate infinite. How will our inner sage and inner seven-year-old respond together to "What is the sound outside?" "Shhhhh just listen. . ." becomes the start of the transcendent.

Setcho hints at the absolute and transcendent in his own way in his verse:

*The empty hall resounds
with the voice of the raindrops.*

The empty hall, i.e., no one here, hints at the absolute. The voice of the raindrops hints at the transcendent.

In this case, Kyosei fails to answer beyond all words. Not because he doesn't know how to answer. Kyosei knows how to blend the seven-year-old and the sage beyond his years into a fully transcendent response. But he fails to answer, just as I am failing to answer right now. And why is that? Because if I answer before you answer, what's the point? There's no learning how to blend your own inner sage and your own inner seven-year-old.

If you say, "Oh yeah, but I know how to do that. I can do it; I know exactly how to do it." Setcho comes back with, "Oh, you have no understanding." But I tell you again, beyond your knowing how to do it, beyond your not knowing how to do it, still,

*Misty with rain the northern
and southern mountains.*

Whether we know how to do it or not, whether we understand it or not, the misty rain is coming. It's falling on the Cascades, and the Olympics, and the Space Needle, and Chobo-Ji.

Don't worry about being in pain, or exhausted, or feeling like a lump on a log. And don't get too excited about being clear and delighted. Don't get too excited! Sesshin is a whole lot like a rollercoaster. We don't know what the day is going to bring. We don't know what the hour is going to bring. I can tell you sesshin has been and will continue to be a rollercoaster.

Sesshin is a chance to experience in a deep way our own craziness, and the karmic baggage that we're pulling around with us that may go back many generations. And sesshin is a place to experience, taste, and be near to the beyond the beyond. It is a place to experiment with our inner seven-year-old and with learning how to better listen to our inner sage. Together, we go straight on.

Hekiganroku ~ Case 60

Ummon's Staff

Becoming a Dragon

Rev. Sendo's Rohatsu Dharma Talk
(based on her notes and memories)

Engo's Introduction: Buddhas and sentient beings are not, by nature, different. Mountains, rivers, and your own self are all just the same. Why should they be separate and constitute two worlds? Even if you are well versed in Zen koans and know how to deal with them, if you stop there everything is spoiled. If you do not stop, the whole world will be dissolved, with not a particle of it left behind. Now tell me, what does it mean to be well versed in Zen koans? See the following.

Main Subject: Ummon held out his staff and said to the assembled monks, "The staff has transformed itself into a dragon and swallowed up the universe! Where are the mountains, the rivers, and the great world?"

Setcho's Verse:

*The staff has swallowed up the universe.
Don't say peach blossoms
float on the waters.
The fish that gets its tail singed
May fail to grasp the mist and clouds.
The ones that lie with gills exposed
Need not lose heart.*

*My verse is done.
But do you really hear me?
Only be carefree! Stand unwavering!
Why so bewildered?
Seventy-two blows are not enough,
I want to give you a hundred and fifty.*

[Setcho descended from the rostrum waving his staff. The whole crowd ran away.]
.....

Choosing a koan for this Dharma Talk, my first full-length one at Chobo-Ji, I was drawn to this one for several reasons. First, it's an Ummon story. There are many Ummon koans, all wonderful, five in the *Mumonkan* and eighteen in the *Hekiganroku*. I've long felt a special excitement when I knew my next koan would be another encounter with Ummon. Second, right there at the beginning of Enzo's introduction to this koan are mountains and rivers. When mountains and rivers arise in Zen I'm already there: my Dharma name, after all, means "River Way." And third, quite wonderfully, Ummon's staff becomes a dragon! I love dragons!

I collect dragons. It's a small collection, only four, but all precious. First came a small silver dragon which I found in Kathmandu, in Nepal, where I'd gone in 1998 to trek in the Everest region – my first experience of Asia and my first experience, outside of books, of Buddhism. This little silver dragon, four and a half inches long and decorated with colored stones, stands with head up, mouth wide open and forked tongue waving out, ready for anything. The next dragon, which I found a few years later in Beijing, is the same size, and it's bright shiny yellow enamel with touches of other colors. Equally perky as it lifts its tail and a front leg. I found it at the beginning of a journey to Xinjiang, where I was able to climb around in what was left of Buddhist monastery dwellings carved into caves during the peak centuries of the Silk Road, one of the paths which brought Buddhism to China early in the first millennium CE. My third dragon is larger; it's a painted metal wall plaque from Bhutan, where I went the year after my Nepal trip because I wanted an immersion in the Tibetan Buddhist culture I'd met in the Everest region. Bhutan's culture is permeated with Tibetan

Buddhism; the country calls itself the Dragon Kingdom. My Bhutanese dragon, which has hung in the kitchen of my Chobo-Ji apartment, is all the traditional colors of Tibetan Buddhism. You can't really tell whether it's swimming or flying.

My fourth dragon is the only one found after I began Zen practice. It's a traditional bronze dragon bowl from Java. I spotted it in an antique shop in Port Townsend. It's dark, fierce, and long, and its back is open, forming a bowl. What I've put in the bowl is three blue-green glass balls once used in fishing nets. Decades ago these were readily found in the little stores on the Oregon coast. I bought these in the fifties when I was around 16, one of my earliest treasure-purchases. Dragons are watery creatures, so it feels right to see them riding in the dragon's back.



Dragons are an ancient symbol which goes way back in China. The Chinese calligraphy/ideograph for "dragon" developed from a pictograph which is a visual representation of a dragon: the earliest surviving example dates to around 4000 BCE. In Chinese the ideograph also means "excellent person" and "king". When Buddhism came to China, the dragon was adopted as a symbol of enlightenment.

Mythologically in SE Asia, dragons are shape-shifters; they are creators and destroyers. They are watery creatures, related to the Naga in Indian culture: they control thunderstorms, rain, and so on. They are scary but felt as fundamentally beneficent. This makes them very different from dragons in western European culture, which are monsters, demonic, and must be slain by Christian heroes (such as Saint George) who may die in the struggle. A wonderful example from Norse (and pre-Christian) legend is the great Wyrn (Worm)

in *Beowulf*, an epic which comes to us in Anglo-Saxon, a precursor of English. Wagner's Ring cycle of operas, which draws on Norse legends, has a fabulous dragon who guards the gold-hoard of deceased heroes, suggesting a deep connection in the Western psyche between fearful monstrosity and greed.

Japanese Buddhism adopted the dragon, this slippery, enigmatic creature, enthusiastically. In Japanese, the word for dragon is *ryu*. It appears in many Zen temple names – including Ryutaku-Ji, the temple founded by Hakuin and Torei Zenji, where Genjo trained. Some of the Rinzaï Zen temples in Kyoto, which my sister and I visited a couple of years ago, have amazing dragon ceilings, with huge twisted and intertwined dragon figures filling the whole ceiling. Swirling, fantastic – standing under them and gazing up you feel that they're in motion. It's better than the Sistine Chapel!

Now we get to Ummon's question. Having some feeling for dragons may help us respond to it. "Ummon held out his staff and said to the assembled monks, 'The staff has transformed itself into a dragon and swallowed up the universe! Where are the mountains, the rivers, and the great world?'"

How would you answer this question? Who is the dragon? If this dragon swallows up the universe, what happens? Where are the mountains, the rivers, and the great world? Where are you?

Late in a recent sit, I tried zeroing in on "swallowing," tried to imagine swallowing. What would it be like to swallow a mountain? Would it be like swallowing food or water? When I swallow our Tenzo's delicious food, what happens? It gets transformed into me – it joins up chemically, biologically, with my body's processes, which themselves are a flowing from earlier processes, evolutionarily going back to the beginnings of life and before. WHO is swallowing? Who and what are being swallowed? Leaving aside that the mountain would be hard to digest and take a long time, I could make an imaginative leap

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here: aren't the mountain and "me" already part of the same interconnected everything? I don't need to "swallow" it for myself and the mountain to be part of each other.

For a different approach to getting a feeling for Ummon's metaphor, we could envision a massive, sudden swallowing up – as in a tsunami. Suppose you and everything around you are swallowed up by a tsunami. What happens to you and everything around you? Well, for one thing, you're dead. Does this suggest what Ummon might be pointing to?

Now let's consider Ummon's staff. It has "transformed itself into a dragon and swallowed up the universe." Setcho in his verse shortens this and says simply that "The staff has swallowed up the universe." What this abbreviation leaves out: the dragon, transformation, mystery and miracle. What is the staff anyway, and why does Ummon have it? He is a Zen master and has a dragon staff. Genjo has a beautiful one, a piece of what looks like twisted driftwood, polished. A dragon, it rests on the altar when he's giving a Teisho. Today, when I'm giving a Dharma Talk instead, all we have up there is my fan.

Ummon is a Zen Master and a dharma dragon. Genjo is a Zen Master and a dharma dragon. Here at Chobo-Ji there's a little sign in the foyer saying you're a dharma dragon if you're over 60 – it means you get to wear socks in the zendo without any questions being asked. But of course we are all dharma dragons just as we're all buddhas, though most of us, or much of the time, may not realize this.

What is Ummon doing, then, with his challenge to his students? He's exercising his dragon power, the power called up by his role, to do what? To STARTLE HIS STUDENTS!

If everything is swallowed up by the dragon/staff, where are you? When you (as part of the great world, along with the mountains and rivers) are swallowed up by the dragon – and at the same time you also are the dragon – what is going on?

Enjo's introduction makes a statement that's very familiar to us, as we chant Hakuin's version of it before every teisho: "Buddhas and sentient beings are not, by nature, different." Enjo continues, "Mountains, rivers, and your own self are all just the same. Why should they be

separate and constitute two worlds?" Indeed, why should they? Wouldn't it actually be quite weird if you, on one hand, and mountains and rivers, on the other, constituted two different worlds? Wouldn't this be the height of unnaturalness? Yet our defensive, distinction-making consciousnesses delude us into feeling that separateness is natural and non-separation unnatural. This delusion can be, we well know, much of the time very hard to cut through.

Setcho's verse at the end of this case tries to encourage the struggling students he's addressing, by acknowledging what a difficult struggle it can be:

*The fish that gets its tail singed
May fail to grasp the mist and clouds.
The ones that lie with gills exposed
Need not lose heart.*

These lines, a footnote tells us, refer to a myth about a site on the Yellow River in China where a large waterfall called the Dragon's Gate impedes the hundreds of fish trying to swim upriver. The fish congregate below the falls. "The energetic ones leap the falls to reach the waters above. Their tails are scorched by lightning, and they are transformed into dragons. . . . Those who fail to make the leap fall back on the rocks below and die, their gills exposed to the sun." Setcho cautions us that even the successful fish who transform into dragons (i.e., become enlightened), may in the end not make it. Enlightenment is not a permanent condition. On the other hand, the sad, panting fish who have fallen back onto the rocks "need not lose heart." Summon up Great Determination and try again.

Setcho, however, seems to become rather fed up with his listeners, wishes he could give them a hundred and fifty blows, and descends from the rostrum waving his staff threateningly. Fortunately I don't feel that way at all! Feeling more hopeful for us all, I turn to another great *Hekiganroku* case about a Zen Master and his staff. This is

Case 25, "The Master of Rengeho's Staff." Genjo Roshi talked about this one not that long ago, during Spring Sesshin.

The master of Rengeho cottage was Ummon's dharma grandson. He says to his disciples, "When, in olden times, a person reached the state of enlightenment, why did they not remain there?" The disciples are silent, so he answers his own question: "Because it is of no use in the course of life." And he continues, "After all, what will you do with it?" In effect, he's asking, what will you do with enlightenment? And I'd like to close by suggesting another version of that question: How can you live ordinary life as a dragon?

The master of Rengeho tells us how, in metaphor, with his beautiful concluding verse:

*Taking no notice of others,
Throwing his staff over his shoulder,
He goes straight ahead and journeys
Deep into the recesses
of the hundred thousand mountains.*

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 final day of Rohatsu Sesshin, Dec. 9, 2023, Alex Gheorghiu did Jukai. Before this sesshin Alex attended two weeklong sesshins at Chobo-Ji, attended more than one sesshin with Genjo in Germany, stayed as a guest resident at the temple and attended Rev. Sendo's precept class by Zoom from England where he lives. When Alex was asked to write something about *why Jukai now?*, he said:

As you know, I met Chris Gyoshin Mooney, Sensei when I was eighteen and apprenticed myself to him. He led me to Zen. I found Zen to be a powerful practice, but it has taken a lot to make me recognize it as a personal and spiritual one.

... In the Summer of 2022 asking if I may come for a month to Chobo-Ji. I arrived at one in the morning on the 31st of August – my first time in the USA – and spent a good hour looking around the zendo by phone light, meeting it privately.

I love the atmosphere at the temple: the faint smell of incense, the beautiful wooden interior, the luscious garden, the bells and gongs, the chimes, the chants, and the silence. I loved the people. It felt – from the very first moment – like a home.

My last week on that trip was the Autumn Sesshin of 2022. ... It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Somewhere toward the middle of sesshin, I was hit by thunder. I got it. How can I describe it? I experienced a non-separation: for a moment, I felt no boundary between my mind and my flesh and my spirit; no distance between myself and the zafu, zendo, Seattle, Washington, USA, Earth, Milky Way, and so on; between the beginning of September and the end; between the smell of the incense, the sound of the wind chimes, and the taste of the rice porridge; between the pain in my knees and the pleasure of my knees. It came and went like a flash, but I felt it. I would not say that the boundaries dissolved; instead, they vanished as though they had been a trick of the eye all along.

What has stuck with me from this crashing moment is the memory of an awesome open heart-mind that stretches across both the material and transseptal worlds while being so fine and sharp that it produces a cut without width called “Right Here, Right Now!” I found discriminations from which frustrations, resentment, and anger stem become strangely alien: Where is this “self” that condemns this “other?” I cannot say “I am good, but he is bad” in absolute terms when we are continuations of the same pervading heart-mind.

... All manifestations are, in some sense, perfect – perfect as a crying baby. I came away from sesshin knowing only one thing: I was coming back to sesshin. Of course, I was also looking forward to spending more time with the beautiful Sangha. I returned in the Summer of 2023, and now I am back in the Winter of 2023, the third time in a little over a year.

So, why do Jukai?

Firstly, it represents a commitment. It is challenging to do zazen, especially away from a community of sitters. Staying involved with Zen will only get more difficult as my other, more directly material, responsibilities grow. Jukai is an open letter to my future selves to remind them that this practice is good and healthy and should always be returned to.



Secondly, I am a model. We are all models, inadvertently. I mean, by interacting with one another, we affect one another. So, at this point in my life, as I become a plenipotentiary member of society, I ask: How should I comport myself to be a good model? I believe Buddhist teachings such as the Eightfold Path, the Ten Precepts, and the Commandments of the Seven Buddhas form a helpful framework for these questions. During periods of strong zazen, I know that I naturally comport myself with compassion, jukai is signposting that I aim to behave accordingly in the world.

Finally, I'm joining the party. ... I am taking part in the zen practice at Chobo-Ji. I came for adventure and found it; I came for challenge and found it; I came to find the third dimension, and found the fourth. I want to be fully present at this party with

Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Jukai is announcing that I am right here, right now.

If the Eightfold Path is the ethical map, the Ten Precepts offer a particular and specific legend to read it. They require constant mindfulness to deploy effectively.

I experience the greatest personal challenge with the precept, “We will honor honesty and truth; we will not deceive.” For me, deception comes in two broad categories: intentionally misrepresenting the facts and deciding not to gather the facts. I have less of a problem with the latter. Concerning the former, I find it easy to refrain from telling lies. However, sadly I don't know how many more times I must be shown that, in the majority of cases, failure to communicate with clarity sends discord into the world just as much as telling a lie. Accordingly, I am resolved to become a better communicator to uphold this precept.

I experience the most ease with the precept, “We will exercise proper care of our body and mind; we will not be gluttonous or abuse intoxicants.” The reason is partly selfish, I enjoy feeling healthy; and partly selfless, I believe it is my duty to support my community, which I do better by being healthy. The most effective method I have found is, “Choose the Middle Way!”



Given Alex's breakthrough experience, I gave him the Dharma Name: ShoKei “Sho = Vanished (消) – “Kei” = Boundaries (境).

Impermanence

Jeremy Shojiki Neff
Dec. 6, 2023

*The fire to live and die burns within.
Tears stream down my cheeks and my mind
screams for everyone else
to awake and die with me.
This is all we have, this instant between.
The fire within is stoked.
This one moment is beautiful
and precious to me.
I may die at any moment, and that's okay.
I will live my moments well,
however long or short they are.
Love with all your heart, mind, and soul.
Embrace it all.*

Genjo's Closing

Incense Poem

Rohatsu Sesshin 2023

*The Great Tao has no gate.
Who hears the falling rain
And feels the autumn chill?
The great maple has no leaves.*

The Vow

Larry Palmer
Dec. 10, 2023

*Time has ticked us 'round
A trillion stars
That once upon a time were ours.
Love has licked its lips for us
When we were held in thrall
By the one who loved our all—
And in those golden days
Each kingdom ours,
Each touch, each kiss
Renewed the vow that beyond
The 'never-never'
A real forever is.

So off we go, around the sun
And spin on earthy axis all as one
Until we reach the final rung
Atop the stair, alone, and plunge
Into the one who held us once.*

Toya Haiku

Dec. 21, 2023

Wazan:
*Crooked incense burns
Warm heart backwards flowers blush
Kind people all around me*

Daichi:
*Deep loss without auto
Traveling into the great abyss
All things new on path*



Genjo:
*Car Dai Segaki
Who hears the transmission fall?
Wazan rings the bell*

Sendo:
*Altar altering
Blink whirr zazen past passing
Solstice turns the wheel*

Tom:
*Cold rainy morning
The dog would rather not walk
Can't poop inside though*

Ezra:
*The sun is not up
But a group sits in the dark
I am still asleep*

Michelle:
*The clowns of the zendo
Chortle heartily
And stop time for a moment*

Ken:
*The ache sits deeply
My pen does not work so well
Neither does my knee*

Josen:
*Bombs, drones, diving bombers
When will this heartbreak end?
Ancient holy land reborn*

Zenka:
*Cat naps, raincloud passes
BUZZZZZZZ goes the
Electrician's saw*

Aaron:
*Right behind my back
Whispers of something I knew.
I knew it by heart, too.*

Randal:
*Wind, rain and falling leaves
Yard waste bins full of leaves
Barren tree branches quietly wait*

Seigan:
*This hungry ghost
Ain't gonna feed itself
I need yummy love*

Cindy:
*On up the dirt path
Trees were leaping to the sun
Lengthening days glimpsed*

Muji:
*Nice quiet zendo
A drone appears at the door
Now I've seen it all*

Memories of an American Zen Pioneer

by Lou Mitsunen Nordstrom
Review by Genjo

Lou Mitsunen Nordstrom, was at one time married to Sherry Chayat, when they both trained and helped open the Dai Bosatsu Zen (DBZ) monastery in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. I also trained for many years with Eido Shimano, where Sherry Shinge Roko Chayat became an elder Dharma sister of mine and went on to eventually succeed Eido Shimano as the second abbot of DBZ.



Lou left DBZ and

Eido Shimano in 1975 during one of the multiple collapses of the Sangha caused by Eido Shimano's repeated incidents of deplorable behavior. Of course, you all know I left during the final debacle which came to light in 2010. Lou's and my time at DBZ never overlapped. And even though he went on to train with Bernie Tetsugen Glassman Roshi as I did after I left DBZ, Lou and I have never met. Lou has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Columbia University, and is currently the abbot of Hokori Zen Center in Lakeland, Florida. As for Lou's early history, it is full of trauma and psychological hiccups that feel uncannily familiar to some of my own difficult early history. Lou and I also share a great admiration for Soen Nakagawa Roshi, with whom we have trained. With all these parallels it was fascinating to read his memoir, edited by Alex Catlin, to see how we both developed in our journey to become abbots of Zen temples. We share a lot of the same perspectives, but worded rather differently. You may want to look for yourself.

Spring Temple Posts

beginning March 9, 2024

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

Elijah Seigan Zupancic
Felix Wazan Pekar
Tenzo (Cooks)

Felix Wazan Pekar
Charles Porter
Jikijitsu (Timekeepers)

Eddie Daichi Salazar
Michelle Kim
Densu (Chant Leaders)

Michelle Muji LeSourd
Will Rak
Brooks Donohue
Ansel Braidman
Jisha (Tea Servers and zendo care)

Sally Zenka Sensei
Andrew Pierce
Inji (Abbot Assistant)

Carolyn Josen Stevens Sensei
Michelle Atkinson
Fusu (Accountant)

Eddie Daichi Salazar
Felix Wazan Pekar
Intro Instruction

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 9) ending with Summer Sesshin. It's a time for concentrated study and practice. *Please let [Genjo](#) know before March 9 if you plan to participate.* Intensive participants are offered dokusan once weekly on Wednesday evenings. *All unsui 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 8:30 PM, 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.

Spring Sesshin

March 22 - 29

We welcome both in-person and Zoom participation in our week-long Spring Sesshin. For in-person participation, full attendance is expected; please speak to [Genjo](#) if this is not possible. For on-line participation, you may attend by Zoom ([Zoom registration required](#)) for any portion that fits your schedule, but some attendance each day is expected. 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 (minus dues for this month for dues-paying members); if attending by Zoom please make a donation that fits your budget and level of participation. You can use Pay/Pal or leave a check in the bowl at the entrance to the zendo. (Using Pay/Pal please note that your payment is for Spring Sesshin.) We provide sleeping accommodations to 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.

Sesshin starts Friday evening, March 22, at 5:30 p.m. with introductions, orientation and informal supper. From Saturday to the following Thursday, Sesshin runs from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. The final Friday begins at 5 a.m. and concludes around 11 a.m.

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



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, most Sundays at 7:30 PM

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

Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	March 9, 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	March 10, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	March 10, noon - 1:30 p.m.
100 Sandwiches Prep (March 16, April 20, May 18, June 15) ...	9:30 - 11 a.m.
Spring Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...	March 22 - 29
Spring Book Group starts Tuesdays (reading <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i>) ...	April 4 - May 9, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	April 6, 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
6-Week Intro to Zen Series Tuesday nights ...	April 9- May 14, 7:30 to 8:45 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	April 14, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Annual Meeting (please attend, a quorum is needed) ...	April 14, noon - 2 p.m.
Zen Sangha Hike (location to be announced in Temple Happenings) ...	May 4, 10 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Precepts Class - Part One ...	May 21, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	May 26, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Board Meeting ...	May 26, noon - 1:30 p.m.
Precepts Class - Part Two ...	May 28, 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.
Zazenkai (1/2 day sit) with zazen, Dokusan and Dharma Talk ...	June 9, 5 - 11:15 a.m.
Summer Sesshin (seven-day Zen intensive) ...	June 21 - 28



Dai Bai Zan Cho Ba Zen Ji

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