



JANUARY—MARCH 2022

GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT

The following is taken from a Dharma talk given by Kwong-roshi on December 11, 2021 at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center.

Last Saturday we finished our Rohatsu sesshin with Tetsuya, which means sitting through the night. I did my first one in 1971, and in 1973, after Suzuki-roshi died, we moved up here and I did my second. The Tetsuya is done in honor of Buddha, who sat through the night, and it's important to remember that when we talk about Buddha we understand that he was an enlightened person. He wasn't just a historical buddha or a future buddha or a present buddha. He was enlightened, and that enlightenment is inside you. It's not outside. No wonder people can't become enlightened, since they're always looking for something outside of themselves. It's right here. Nowhere else.

Someone once told me that if you can master the four-hour sitting, you have mastered the sitting position. But it doesn't mean you can't move or stretch your legs during that time. We were in a much more rustic building in those days. The floor was concrete and sloped a little bit, so we were kind of leaning when we sat. At that time I could sit full lotus. I sat down, the bell rang three times to begin zazen, and within five minutes it rang once. That meant the period was over, and I didn't know what I had experienced, but I didn't feel any pain, I didn't experience time, I didn't experience any difficulty, and I was just amazed. Every year after, I tried to do the same thing, but failed because I tried to make something happen. I think for maybe twenty years I failed, and you know failure is a very good lesson. What happened was I finally realized that I could

move and adjust my posture. There are certain protocols that say you can't lie down, you can't stand up because you might fall down, and you can't leave the room...but if you do have to use the toilet; you can leave and come back. Rules and guidelines are like the wooden beams in the parking lot: If we didn't have them, people would be parking all over the place. Guidelines provide a container for something great to happen, not outside yourself but within your very own being. That was a big lesson for me. So you move a little bit, wiggle a little, you have a few thoughts, it's okay. Zazen is the great teacher. Nowadays there are groups forming all over, discussing what Zen is, what zazen is, but they are not sitting. Zazen is not about discussion. It's about your direct experience. It's not about the head, the thinking mind; it's about letting go of your self-centered ideas which create suffering.

After the all-night sitting we have a procession down to Suzuki-roshi's stupa, and I was mentioning to a few students that no one could create a ceremony like that and sell it, because it's pure ceremony, the pure heart of the people. And so as we walk down from the zendo with flashlights, big coats, and a procession with bells, the animals on the mountain know, they're familiar with what we're doing. We walk down all the way in procession, and it's still dark when we get to the stupa. And then a little light begins to come in, and at that time it's so incredibly quiet and calm. No one can make that happen. At the same time the energy from the mountain comes right through the stupa, which contains the power spot of the mountain. We circumambulate the stone—and when you walk around something sacred, you try not to think, just walk, just feel your heel and toe,

continues next page

heel and toe. We circle three times, then stop at the picture of Suzuki-roshi on the altar. We each have a chance to stand before his picture and say something to him. “Good morning, Roshi, how are you?” We greet him and then do a chant and finish by offering water from a stone basin. We each take turns pouring water over his stone, and it’s really beautiful because the water makes the stone come to life.

Anyway, that’s Zen. It has lots of disciplines, and we honor and try to keep the essence of those traditions because it’s through discipline that you realize you need training. You know, the West is the body and the mind, but we forgot the breath. Breath is one of the most important things for our practice. We need to know to come back to the breath, and how to breathe. Since we’ve become a mouth-breathing creature we have so much sickness—sleep apnea, anxiety, depression, excessive thinking. And I think one of the causes may be the pandemic but the underlying cause has been there all the time—impermanence.

My friend Hee-Jin Kim, a Korean translator of Dogen, wrote me a letter and said something about the post-Covid era, that we need to understand what Dogen taught. Kim said that we need eternal peace more than ever now, because humanity is in crisis. Most people think that we’re going back and the world will be the same, but it can’t be the same—it’s not the same. So we’re being introduced to impermanence, and that’s the real world, whether we like it or not. There’s nothing permanent—that’s what we’re taught, but we often don’t truly realize that everything’s changing. We have to know how to change with it, or to be with impermanence. This was what the Buddha discovered in his first noble truth: Life is impermanent. I had heard the usual way it is translated, ‘Life is suffering.’ When I first read it, I didn’t want to think about the noble truths, and if life is suffering, that doesn’t sound very happy. But because we don’t know that life is impermanent, we suffer, and it’s through our practice of zazen, when we let go of our self-centeredness, that the opposites, created by our thinking mind, the bad and the good, long and short, dark and light—cease to exist. In zazen, when these opposites disappear, our suffering dissolves.

There is a saying in one of our chants called the Sando-kai or “The Intimacy of the Relative and Absolute”: “Within light there is darkness, but don’t try to understand it. Within darkness there is light, but don’t look for it.” Those two lines are very powerful, because it means that you have just stepped out of yourself, your self-centeredness, and your thinking is no longer there. It’s completely calm, there is no need to think. You’re resting in the stillness that’s within. You are just resting there. Once in a while maybe there will be a thought, but one thought is not thinking; two thoughts are thinking. A thought may arise, but you are still there calm, with composure and dignity. It’s called non-doing. You are not doing anything, not trying to make anything, and that’s what’s happening.



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Even in Dogen's time (the 13th century), they had plague, they had wars, bodies stacked up along the river. We thought with technology we had gotten rid of everything, but actually it's right here. One thing about the sitting posture is that it's your personal, direct experience of what sitting actually is. When the breath controls the mind, the mind controls the body. We are a culture of inhalation. Inhaling means to be alive; inhaling means taking, getting, keeping. But we don't know how to truly exhale. Exhalation means giving, compassion.

Suzuki-roshi once told a story about a friend of his who was having a stroke. The only thing he could do was to breathe in. When we breathe in, we feel alive, but we forget we have to breathe out. Because his friend could only breathe in, he ended up dying. Breathing in means breathing out, breathing out means breathing in. It's "no end and no beginning." It's a continuous cycle. I had heard that when you sleep you should not open your mouth. In the old days when a parent saw their baby sleeping, they would pinch the baby's lips, because mouth breathing can create havoc. So you would learn to shut your mouth, just as in zazen. Here's the top of the teeth and here's your tongue that goes lightly against them and up on the palate. Your teeth are not closed tight but just resting, and that's how your mouth should remain. When you inhale through the nose, it is said that the molecules you are inhaling are more than all the sands in the world, but when you inhale through the mouth, you hardly get any. You get crooked teeth, aches and pains, rheumatism, and on and on.

I am trying to tape my mouth shut when I sleep. I had congestion for a long time in my nose. I couldn't breathe and I snored. So I put on a band-aid. I look like Charlie Chaplain, but I was amazed that I could breathe through my nose the whole night. You go to the toilet less, your mouth is not dry, your lips are not parched. People have these machines for sleep apnea because they breathe and then they can't breathe, but just a simple thing like that can help tremendously.

Now we're looking at the post-Covid era and trying to understand how to live with impermanence. Even when we are sitting right here, we are present, but it's already gone. When you start looking into the future or the past, you get anxious because you don't know what's going to happen. Will there be more fires, earthquakes, it's endless what can happen. To be grounded in the present, that instantaneous thing that happens in less than a second, to be here, that's all we can do. That's the greatest thing we can do.

I had an interesting experience last night while sitting on the living room couch. Someone had given me a bronze Quan Yin, about 18 inches high. Bronze means that it's metal with other alloys in it, so you can do very intricate things. I don't know the exact process, but just by looking at Quan Yin's face, you know that it's a museum piece. It's a

black metal with gold leaf, but most of that is gone now. Her crown is gold leaf and her face is a beautiful black. When we look at people, we always see the front of them, but never the back. Suzuki-roshi would walk behind us and look at our backs and know where we were or weren't, just by observing our backs. In our Sangha House there's a picture of a monk, or maybe he's a father, sitting with some children. If you look closely at his back you can see that he is totally there with the children.

The front of the Kannon statue has many dharma ornaments on her chest, and tassels, beads, a flowing robe with embroidery on the ends alternating with the remaining gold leaf and the metal itself. She's very beautiful, standing on the ends of lotus leaves, six rows of leaves in a circle. In her right hand is a vase pouring. That's compassion pouring out, the moisture of compassion for all living beings. Her other hand displays the gesture of no fear. She has two stems, in bronze, that go between the middle finger and this other finger, and these stems rest on her left shoulder. There's the lotus flower, but instead of petals there is just the pod, with little holes where the seeds are. The other stem is a lotus leaf. If you've ever seen a lotus leaf, they're big enough to use as a rain hat. The lotus leaf is folded up and rests on her left shoulder. I noticed her shoulders are rounded and well-shaped. When I first wanted to move Kanzeon, I asked her for permission. I moved her a little bit and I saw her back, which is a dark metal with a few lines of the curving robe. You feel not only her stature, or her dignity, but your own dignity. How could you recognize it if you didn't have it? How can you recognize anything if you don't have it? It's not outside. It's all here. That's what zazen brings you—what you have. This is the first time I felt Kanzeon in communion with the other statue and the thangka painting in our living room. I've never felt that about a statue before, but I felt that they were talking to each other while the TV was on. I sat there for a long time just enjoying that kind of presence. I wanted to share that with you today.

I have a note here that I want to emphasize to all our members to please return to zazen. And remember that regardless of where you are, here or not here, you are always in the palm of Buddha's hand. Thank you. ❖

SANGHA NEWS AND MEMBERSHIP

by Erik Zenjin Shearer

SANGHA NEWS

Toward the end of 2021, Sonoma Mountain Zen Center made careful steps to reopen in person on the mountain. In November, on-site participation was expanded for Saturday Community and other programs. It was wonderful to see familiar faces and finally meet new members face to face.

We are continuing to offer online programming during the current omicron surge. Fall Study Group participants read and discussed “Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness,” a collection of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi’s talks on the Sandokai.

Last month, SMZC launched a new member portal on our website that will make it easier to stay current on membership dues and to sign up for new membership. As part of this transition, we are asking that all members go to the website and sign up under the new payment system, cancelling any other ongoing bank payments. When you log into the new membership system, you can renew at your current level or choose another level as your finances permit. Your generosity is critical to sustaining our practice on Sonoma Mountain. We are deeply indebted to the work of Coco Mellinger and Carol Adams in the SMZC office for making the transition to a new system possible. It took a huge effort to get this organized and off the ground. The membership portal can be found at: <https://www.smzc.org/membership>.

In October we held a hybrid sangha gathering of about twenty residents and members, joining both in person and online. During this event we provided an update on reopening, introduced new members, discussed the status of the Mandala Project, and presented information about the new membership portal and upcoming changes to how we organize volunteer efforts at SMZC. Becoming a member is both a commitment to practice and a commitment to the sangha. We rely heavily on volunteer participation to sustain the Zen center and provide practice opportunities for the community. As we announced at the gathering, we will be initiating new ways for members to focus their volunteer efforts through work committees organized around skills and interests. More information will be sent out in the spring. ❖

NEW MEMBERS

Our membership has expanded over the past three years, with more than 40 members joining since 2018. Of that number, 38 joined in 2020 and 2021 alone. We look forward to joining everyone in person in the coming years.

Roger Webb was a member of SMZC when he lived in Sonoma County from 2012 to 2016. Currently he lives in Yamhill County, Oregon, southwest of Portland, with his wife Amber and three children, Forrest, Fern, and Violet. Roger works remotely as a software engineer in Marin County, while his wife runs the farm and household. The family are avid outdoor enthusiasts, regularly sailing on the Columbia River, kayaking, hiking, snowshoeing, and generally taking in their wonderful Pacific Northwest environment. The family still very much considers SMZC home and looks forward to reconnecting online and in person on the mountain.

Rick Sparks has lived in San Anselmo, Marin County, for over 40 years. In the 1970s he practiced zazen in Santa Barbara under students of Suzuki-roshi and sat sesshin at Zen centers in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Minnesota. Recently retired from vocational rehab counseling, he now manages a residential site for people with disabilities. Over the past year he took advantage of the opportunity to sit online with the Sonoma Mountain sangha, and then started going in person once a week to volunteer. Heartened by hearing that “the Zen Center takes all shapes and sizes,” Rick feels now is the time to deepen his relationship to the triple treasures.

James Biggs’ dharma name is Muso. He has practiced off and on for years, first at SFZC, then ZCLA, sitting sesshin in France, Holland, and Poland. He spent about six months at Bukkoku-ji in Obama, Japan, and did sesshin at Rinzaï monasteries Sogen-ji and Ryutaku-ji. Muso ordained with Tenshin Fletcher at ZMC in 1999, and most recently was a disciple of Shohaku Okumura, whom he met in 1995 after the death of Maezumi-roshi of ZCLA. He retired from construction management and recently moved to Sonoma, and likes the friendly, relaxed atmosphere at SMZC.

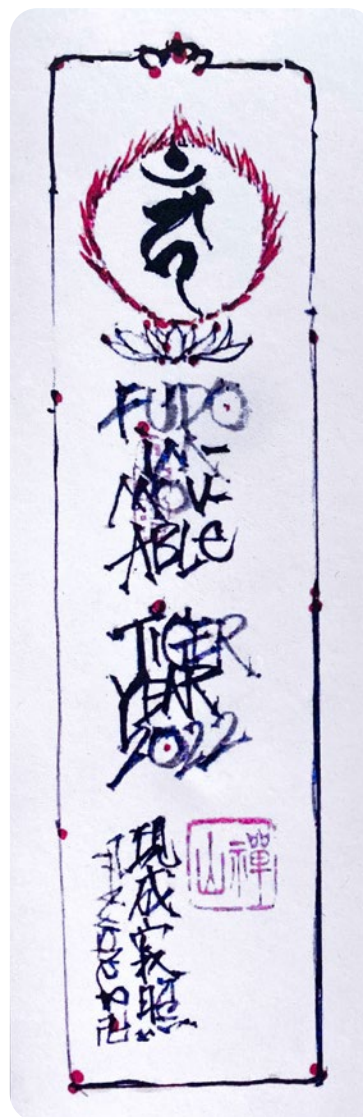
Michael Scalet – Physically active throughout his life, Michael has been slowed by shoulder surgery this year, but still likes to hike and, when healthy, to sail and swim. Michael moved to Boyes Hot Springs ten years ago with his partner Renee. He has practiced Vipassana meditation for over 30 years, after learning meditation from Jack Kornfield. Most of his practice has been with teachers at Spirit Rock Meditation Center, but he let his practice wane when he started a business eight years ago. Thanks to the pandemic, Michael has been able to renew his practice. A teacher at Spirit Rock told him about Kwong-roshi, and he is curious what Zen has to offer.

Keizen Li Qian recently moved to Santa Rosa from Oakland, where they practice with East Bay Meditation Center's People of Color sangha, and Rev. Keiryu Lien Shutt's Access to Zen practice group. They received lay precepts from Rev. Lien at City Center in 2016. Keizen teaches biology at a community college, sings tenor-bass choral music, and plays Balinese gamelan. Keizen and Thomas met at the first transgender Buddhist retreat hosted by Insight LA in 2019.

Thomas Hare has lived in Sonoma County since 2003, and has been sitting with Stone Creek Zen Center for the last two years. He is pretty new to Zen and hopes people will let him know if he does something distracting. He loves playing folk music and singing, hiking and camping, reading, playing games, and conversing about things other than the weather. He is excited to join a sangha with his partner Keizen.

Judah Nagler lives in Petaluma with his partner Courtney and their two cats. He has practiced meditation on and off for years and recently began a daily zazen practice. He works as a technical director at a marketing company based in San Francisco, and also occasionally wears the hat of touring musician. Judah looks forward to meeting and sitting with our sangha.

Please join me in welcoming our newest members to the Wisteria Wind Sangha at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center! ❖



KOTOBUKI

The SIDDHAM SYMBOL in the RED **FLAMING CIRCLE** means **PERFECTION**.

SIDDHAM is an ancient SACRED CALLIGRAPHY. This ONE is HAM—FU DO—IMMOVABLE.

IN JAPANESE—IT'S **FLAMES** DISSOLVING ALL BAD dharmas which CAUSE **SUFFERING**.

RESIDENT REPORT

By Susan Gesshin Frey

FOOD FOR PRACTICE

Here we are at New Year's, when one cycle ends and another begins. We have a chance to pause, stop, and reflect. In this time of reflection, I came across a dharma talk by Thich Nhat Hanh that really spoke to me. From his article "Transforming Negative Habit Energies," in the Summer 2000 issue of *Mindfulness Bell* (Plum Village):

Dear friends, the energy that pushes us to do what we do not want to do and say what we do not want to say is the negative habit energy in us. In Sanskrit, the word is *vasana*. It is very important that we recognize habit energy in us. This energy has been transmitted to us by many generations of ancestors, and we continue to cultivate it. It is very powerful. We are intelligent enough to know that if we do this or say that, we will damage our relationship. Yet when the time comes, we say it or we do it anyway. Why? Because our habit energy is stronger than we are. It is pushing us all the time. The practice aims at liberating ourselves from that kind of habit energy.

Buddhist meditation offers the practice of stopping. Stopping is very important, because we have been running all our lives, and also in all our previous lives. Our ancestors ran, and they continue to run in us. If we don't practice, then our children will continue to run in the future.

During Rohatsu in December, we practice stopping like Shakyamuni Buddha, who sat for six years before attaining enlightenment. We finish the five-day sesshin by sitting continuously from midnight to 4 a.m. Many things come up during these four hours that make us want to run, but we keep our seat somehow. Sitting alone but together, facing a wall, we refrain from running.

DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS

Kashin, Nyoze, and Ejo Kwong visited Kashin's family in Denmark in December, and returned before New Year's. Koten Price was on leave to visit his family in Ohio, and plans to be back for Winter Ango. Carol Adams went to help care for her son, who was seriously injured in a bicycle accident in November. Fortunately, he made a quick recovery, and Carol has returned to residency at SMZC.

It is sad to say goodbye to good friends who have moved on. Former resident Angus Atwell is now living in San Francisco. Kristine Bell has returned to her studies at the Theological Seminary in Oakland, and Alexander



Cook went home this fall to Texas. Ben Ihrig remains as a resident-in-training and as our work leader in Koten's absence.

Some goodbyes become hellos. Former resident Brian Watson visited in early November and stayed through Rohatsu sesshin. He helped in many ways while he was here, not only by fixing pipes and the kitchen porch, but through his constant, sincere presence of mind.

The cold mornings also bring clear skies and sunshine, a break from the recent rains. Birds are singing with so much energy, it is as if spring had already arrived. There are a few blossoms on the quince, Chinese lilac and ume plum, blossoms that emerged before last year's leaves had fallen. Mounds of compost made from fallen leaves, alfalfa, and heaps of dry foliage have heated up rapidly as if waking from a long rest. We are enjoying the gift of oranges and persimmons, and may even get snow on the mountain. ❖



KIDS' COMMUNITY NEWS

by Taylor Tessendore

Mike and Jesse generously handed the tradition of Kids' Community Day over to me in December. By way of introducing myself, I'm a child therapist and emotional wellness child coach who has studied mindfulness meditation practices for a decade. I hold a Master's of Science in Marriage, Family, and Child Therapy. I'm passionate about integrating interpersonal neurobiology, Buddhist psychology, somatic experiencing, and meditation into my work. For the past fifteen years I've had the opportunity to mentor, teach, and counsel culturally diverse children in school settings. I'm deeply connected with my purpose to share the power of mindfulness meditation in transforming and positively impacting a child's well-being.

The planned events for future Kids' Community Days will consist of yoga, mindful movement, gardening, nature walks, mindful crafts, and other activities. More details will be provided as the events come closer. When Covid restrictions are eased, we are hoping that parents will be able to leave their children to sit zazen. I look forward to meeting you all soon at our future children's programs. ❖



Feb 12 Saturday Community

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PST

Join us for Saturday Community in the midst of Winter Practice Period. Dharma talk will be given Zenki Traustasson, Leading Teacher of Natthagi Zen Center, Iceland following 10:30 am zazen.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested minimum donation)

Feb 19 Ango Saturday Community

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PST

Zoom

Join us for Saturday Community in the midst of Winter Practice Period. Dharma talk will be given by Katsuzen King, Guiding Teacher of the Windsor Zen Group following 10:30 am zazen.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested minimum donation)

Feb 26 Winter Practice Period Closing Circle

10:30 AM PST – Feb 27, 12:00 PM PST

Join us for the Winter Practice Period Closing Circle.

10:30am Zazen; 11:00am ceremony.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested minimum donation)

Mar 05 Saturday Community

10:30 AM – 10:35 AM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Jakusho Kwong-roshi, founding abbot of SMZC, following 10:30 am zazen.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

Mar 19 Saturday Community

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by Kevin Shindo Souza, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

Mar 26 Saturday Community

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by Sheryl Gyonyo Hamilton, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.

BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

Please check website for more upcoming events and for additional information and current schedules.

Morning Zazen: Monday – Saturday 5:15 – 7:00 am

Evening Zazen : Tuesday – Friday 7:30 – 9:00 pm

Ongoing online Zazen on Zoom. For more info, visit the online Zendo at <https://www.smzc.org/online-zendo>.



GREAT OAK TREE MEMORIAL

Everyone is welcome to attend the Great Oak Tree Memorial Ceremony on Saturday April 9th at 11:00am.

TEAM, SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT NEEDED

We are in the process of assembling a strong team of 5 people to assist Jon Perry with the trees removal. The work is scheduled for April 11-15, 2022. We need to rent or borrow; 4-5 chainsaws(18-20"/36"), mini skid steer, big dump trailer and a stump grinder. It will take 2 days to lay the tree down and 3 days for cleanup and processing. To help us with tree work please contact office@smzc.org for information.

DONATION

Please make a generous donation towards equipment rental and services.

FAREWELL TO SONOMA MOUNTAIN'S GREAT OAK TREE

Our lovely Oak Tree in front of Genjoji's sangha house has been diseased for over 20 years. We've tried many ways to save the tree and prolong its life. In 2016 Jon Kaiten Perry, 2004 resident work-leader and now arborist in Hawaii, severely pruned back the tree to lighten its weight hoping to encourage new growth and restore its health. Jon has been keeping a close eye on the tree's condition and its response. In the past couple of years there's been significant signs of weakening at the tree's base. It has become evident that we need to remove the tree as soon as possible before it becomes more of a danger to visiting guests and our Sangha.

This Great Oak tree has existed as long as we can remember. It's like our dearest friend—standing openly available and deeply present. It's one of the great sentinels that protects the grounds of our temple. Not only has it shielded us from the elements; sun, wind and rain but it has protected 1,000's of guests, visitors, teachers and practitioners coming from all around the world to awaken under its golden parasol. For over 50 years it has provided a sacred space and a container holding the depth of practice, encouraging all of us to realize what is most important. Our children have climbed, played and run around this great tree like playing with a close friend. Birds, squirrels, bees, moss and countless insects have made the tree their home. Even Jon Perry began his tree climbing journey on this very Great Oak and is now a professional arborist in Hawaii. Jon said, "It's like coming full circle. The last thing I want to do is to cut the tree down, but we have to do it."

Please join us for the tree removal work and the memorial ceremony in honor of the life and well-being of Genjoji's Great Oak Tree. (*see info on previous page*)

Dana Prajnaparamita,

Jakusho Kwong
Jakusho Kwong-roshi

Shinko Kwong
Shinko Kwong

Top: Kwong-roshi purifies tree with sacred water from Lake Manasarovar during the Great Oak Blessing and Prolonging Life Ceremony, 2016.

2nd from top: SMZC's sangha recites the Heart Sutra during the Great Oak Blessing Ceremony.

3rd from top: Arborist & tree climbing champion Jon Perry updates our sangha on the Great Oak's health. Jon is founder of Oahu Tree Works in Hawaii.

Bottom: Sesshin photo during Summer Ango. Myoji Gyda Tryggvadottir shuso. August 16, 2015.



SANGHA REPORT: KANNON ZEN CENTER

by Ania Eko Mills

Our Rohatsu sesshin took place [dates], and included people sitting together in two small groups in Gdańsk and Kaçiki. Others were able to join us online. We had about 30 people for the midnight zazen. Rohatsu was led by Uji, Kogen, and Esho. Kogen, a monk and close friend of the Polish sangha, studied and practiced in Japan for many years. Esho, a nun, served as abbot's jisha at Toshō-ji in Japan. In one of her talks she shared her experiences of practicing there. After Rohatsu, she offered a workshop in Warsaw on traditional Zen forms. In Kaçiki we had five people sitting together in a small zendo. Kaçiki also held one-day sesshin from summer until early December.

One project that Uji initiated and led last year was Sitting for Peace. Organized together with Father Max and the Catholic meditation community in Lubin, the twice-weekly meditation sessions on Zoom sometimes bring together more than 50 people for zazen. A special meeting was held to mark one year of practice together.

Our Warsaw group is very fortunate to have a new zendo. Totai and Uji helped us apply to the city of Warsaw to rent a large space in the center of the city. The agreements are being finalized, and we hope to meet in the new zendo in January. Since Covid is surging in Poland, we try to practice together in ways that safeguard everyone's health.

We are continuing our Silence for Climate events. Four times a year, at each solstice and equinox, we sit a 30-minute silent meditation together on the streets of Warsaw. ❖



Kannon sangha members hold a Silence for Climate meditation in front of The Palace of Culture and Science on December 19, 2021. Located in the center of Warsaw, this building is considered one of the most controversial built in Poland after WWII. Uji has said of this location, "It's as if we are sitting in front of the White House."

What will remain as my legacy?
Flowers in the spring,
The hototogisu in summer,
And the crimson leaves of autumn.
—Taigu Ryokan

INTERFAITH PRACTICE IN POLAND

by Totai Czernuszczyk

Roshi first came to Poland in 1987 at the invitation of Korean Zen master Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim, as a kind of religious pilgrimage. One point on their journey was a visit to Lubin monastery, where they had been invited by Father Jan Bereza, founder of the Christian Meditation Center. Lubin Monastery is around 800 years old and one of the two oldest Benedictine monasteries in Poland.

When Kwong-roshi started to make yearly visits to Poland at the invitation of his Polish students, he regularly conducted short retreats and meetings at the monastery. These events enjoyed great popularity and were very unusual in Poland.

Several years ago Father Maksymilian Nawara took over leadership of the Christian Meditation Center. And as Roshi came to Poland less often, Father Maksymilian asked our abbot Uji Markiewicz to conduct retreats at Lubin. For more than twelve years Uji has been leading retreats at the monastery once or twice a year. In turn, Father Maksymilian meets with our Kannon Zen sangha. He led the week-long spring sesshin in 2019 at our Warsaw center.

Uji has been going to Lubin since the 1990s and is very close to the monastic and lay communities, as well as the current prior. For a year now we have been conducting online meditation with the communities of Lubin, in the spirit of harmony and peace, in the face of great evil and harm in the world. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people have taken part in these online meditations.

In the meantime, Father Maksymilian has become one of the most important monks in the global Benedictine community. It is well known that he practices meditation and that he also meditates with other faiths. This has had a significant effect in creating a more peaceful society.

Here is one example of the close relationship between Roshi, our sangha, and Lubin monastery. On the Kannon sangha's 20th anniversary, Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi came to Poland with his wife Chitose and three monks from Eihei-ji, including Hakujin-roshi, who handles Eihei-ji's interactions with the global community. They visited Lubin, talked with the monks, and stayed in the monastery for the night. A beautiful friendship has taken shape between our communities. ❖



Middle photo: Back row – left to right – Father Max, Uji Markiewicz, resident monk. Front row – left to right: Father Karol, Kwong-roshi and resident monk. Father Karol was a dear friend of Father John Paul II and his efforts made it possible for Lubin Monastery to survive during the time of communist rule in Poland.



Kannon and Lubin sangha - front row center left to right. Kwong-roshi, Father Karol, Uji Markiewicz, Nyoze Kwong. Photo taken at the time of Uji's Mountain Seat Ceremony, April 29, 2016

NEWS FROM NATTHAGI — DECEMBER 2021

by Zenki Traustason

We were able to practice in our dojo in Reykjavik this fall despite the pandemic, as everything was close to normal until a fourth wave hit us in November. We didn't have to go on Zoom, as we did last year, and Iceland was "green" on the global incidence map until recently. Currently we are red, sometimes dark red, but we have been able to practice in person, canceling everything but zazen. This includes reading groups and social gatherings with the sangha.

We had Urban Sesshin in October, as usual, and in December we had Rohatsu as always do in December. I was planning to give Jukai to two new members in November, but we had to postpone until January. Hopefully by then Iceland will have turned green again, and we can go somewhat back to normal in Natthagi.

Usually in January we have the Burning Karma Ceremony. Sangha members come together with friends and family and burn a piece of paper where they have written down things they are ready to let go of, that don't serve them anymore. After the ceremony we have coffee, tea, and cookies and enjoy being together as a sangha.

Our member Brynjar Shoshin has finished translating Kwong-roshi's book *No Beginning, No End* into Icelandic. It is our goal to have it published by fall. We had hoped to read the translation together in a reading group, but this wasn't possible because of the pandemic.

In November we were able to complete work on the lights and electricity in our zendo. The lighting design includes a spotlight on the beautiful calligraphy by Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi (which I wrote about in a previous article). This tokonoma is very beautiful and inviting.

The virus is actually not in our way, nor outside of us, but shares this very moment with all of us. Hopefully we will all be able to accept this moment just as it is. Why? Because it is already as it is.

Warm wishes from us at Natthagi, the Icelandic sangha.

For the blessing of all sentient beings, Zenki ❖



*Top: Myoji serving during sesshin in Skálholt, Iceland,
May 16, 2021.*

*Middle: Kannon statue in Skálholt zendo.
Bottom: Close of summer sesshin, Skálholt, Iceland.*



HONORING THICH NHAT HANH (1926 – 2022)

by Katsuzen King

Our sangha was saddened to learn that Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh passed away on January 21 at his root temple, Tu Hieu Pagoda in Vietnam. ‘Thay,’ as he was known by his students, was ordained at Tu Hieu Pagoda at age 16. In 1966, after presenting a peace proposal in Washington urging Americans to stop bombing Vietnam, he was exiled from his home country. He was granted asylum in France, where he established his temple Plum Village. He remained there until his recent return to Tu Hieu Pagoda. Thich Nhat Hanh’s life and work have played a profound part in bringing Buddhist teachings to the West, and throughout the world. We are deeply grateful for his dharma and for the help he has offered to Kwong-roshi and our sangha. We send our deepest condolences to Thay’s students, disciples, and his family in Vietnam. ❖



Kwong-roshi and Thich Nhat Hanh during Thay’s visit to Genjo-ji in the mid-80s.



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This body of mine will disintegrate, but my actions will continue me. If you think I am only this body, then you have not truly seen me. When you look at my friends, you see my continuation. When you see someone walking with mindfulness and compassion, you know he is my continuation. I don’t see why we have to say “I will die,” because I can already see myself in you, in other people, and in future generations.

Even when the cloud is not there, it continues as snow or rain. It is impossible for the cloud to die. It can become rain or ice, but it cannot become nothing. The cloud does not need to have a soul in order to continue. There’s no beginning and no end. I will never die. There will be a dissolution of this body, but that does not mean my death.

I will continue, always.

From *At Home in the World*, 1996

ZEN DUST NEWS

by Janet Myoho Buckendahl

Last fall, the Zen Dust store reopened in-person during Saturday Community. Not many have ventured in, but our online business has been good and the store is well stocked.

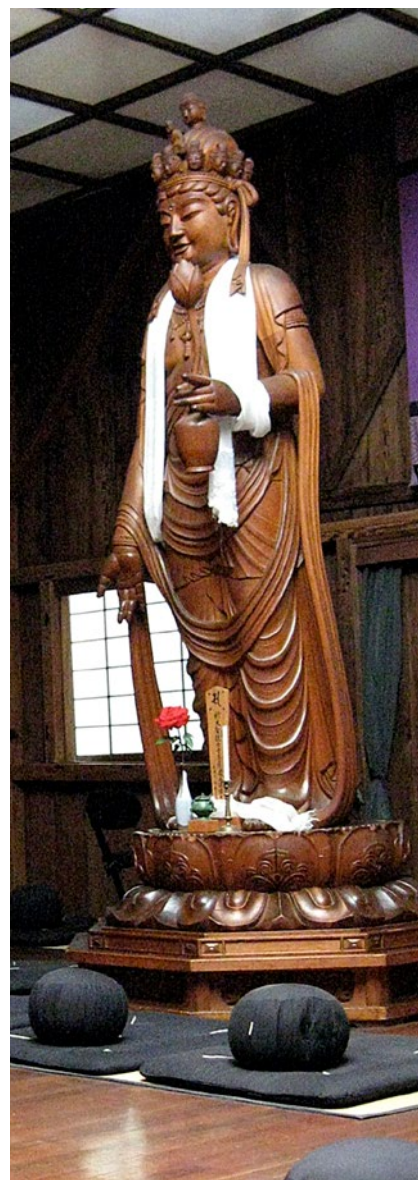
We have received a new shipment of oryoki sets: mahogany wood bowls with the traditional cloths, which are sewn at SMZC, and dark wood utensils. We also carry a good set with plastic bowls, plain cloths, and wooden utensils. The mahogany set sells for \$150, the plastic set for \$65.

Thanks to Tim Metzger and Jason Nichols, our store website is getting a makeover, with new photos and other features. We have excellent gongs for sale that need to be recorded for our online customers. Please contact me if you have the right recording equipment and are willing to do this for us. I also need someone to help with stuffing zafus and zabutons. It's a good task to keep you warm in winter!

Stay safe, and I hope to see you all in the store soon. ❖



We meet today.
We will meet
again tomorrow.
We will meet at the
source every moment.
We meet each other
in all forms of life.
—Thích Nhất Hạnh



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In order to continue to offer our programs and ensure the future of SMZC, we are asking for your support. Your donation is tax deductible. Sonoma Mountain Zen Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Tax ID #23-7304793

MEMBERSHIP



We invite you to become a member of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. Our purpose is to offer Soto Zen meditation practice and its basic teachings to people of all religious faiths. The practice of meditation allows us to see beyond our one-sided perception of ourselves and the world so that we are able to participate in society with clarity and peace. We are a lay residential practice center and a non-profit organization relying on membership dues, guest practice programs, Zen programs, and contributions to sustain our operating cost. *Call or visit soon to join us in actualizing the Dharma!* ❖

ONLINE RESOURCES ~ DHARMA TALKS & EVENTS

SMZC's website conveys the essence of our practice to others and invites their participation at the Zen Center. It is found at **www.smzc.org**.

A selection of Dharma Talks by Jakusho Kwong-roshi and more are available online in video, audio, and podcast formats.

Roshi's **Vimeo** channel offers several of Roshi's and Shinko's Dharma talks plus other notable events from SMZC. Please check it out! Just go to **www.vimeo.com/smzc**.

"The best" of Roshi's talks are available free through two websites—Podbean and iTunes. Access via **iTUNES**—Open iTunes on your computer; click "iTunes Store" in the left navigation column; click "Podcasts" on the top row; in the small box at the very upper right side shown with a "Q", enter "smzc"; hit the enter key on your computer; in the middle of the page with Roshi's picture, click on "Sonoma Mountain Zen Center" under the heading "Podcast"; and Roshi's talks then appear.

Access via Podbean—Go to **www.podbean.com**; in the box at top right of page, enter "Sonoma Mountain Zen Center" (not case sensitive); click "SEARCH"; click on "Sonoma Mountain Zen Center" next to Roshi's picture or on the picture itself. **OPTION 1:** click on the "Listen" button beside any talk or **OPTION 2** (recommended): click on **smzc.podbean.com** beside Roshi's picture; once in the site click on any "Listen" button. ❖



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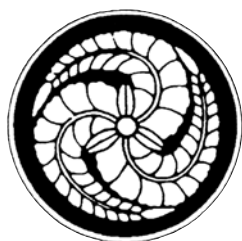
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This newsletter is available to all members of the SMZC sangha. If you are not a member of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and would like to receive the newsletter, the cost for a one-year subscription is \$25. Please call the office to request a subscription, or visit online at www.smzc.org and donate via PayPal. When subscribing via PayPal, once you have made your donation, please email us your receipt and include your newsletter format preference (print or electronic), and your contact information. If your subscription is due to expire, please renew. We also welcome submissions of poetry, prose, and art relating to the Zen experience.



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