



July – September 2026

Approaching Zero

On May 9, 2026, Nyoze Kwong-osho delivered the following teisho at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center.

Good morning. When we start meditation or do zazen, it is important to understand, actually, what we're meditating on. It's not the thinking mind. There's the mind that thinks thoughts that we get caught up in. It could be a negative thought or a positive one. But we disengage; we let the thoughts go. And we also let the mind express what the mind needs to express. So it's not trying to get away from thoughts, but not getting caught up in the objects of thought, which are outside oneself.

When we do zazen, it's very important that we actually keep our eyes open. Because you can have internal thoughts you get caught up in. So to disengage, when we take the seated posture, it's our hands and our legs, and we make this posture of zazen, which is upright. Very upright. You push the crown of your head towards the sky. So we close our eyes and go in, but zazen is actually a turning out. It's really important how we stand, how we walk, how we sit. The mind needs to be kind of exposed in a vulnerable way so it's not shielded by this "I" that we create.

When you start to sit, no matter if you are doing it for thirty years or your first day, it's really important to sit down and actually just be and feel. I was going to say brevity—feel the brevity of life, and feel your groundedness. Becoming grounded is very important, and not up here (points to head). This is the only time in life, or in the 24 hours of a day, that up here is kind of cleared. So don't get caught up in the long lists that we make for ourselves, but

look in front of you and see reality as it is, without labeling it. Let the mind express what it is, but don't get caught up in attaching to the thoughts of the mind.

Some of you new people have probably seen the building of the gate down in the lower parking lot. The builders came last week and dropped off the wood for the gate, and this week they've been building a pole barn to shelter the gate, so it'll be out of the sun. Some of the builders are going to this Japanese planing workshop, a kind of competition in Japan that is called *Kezuroukai*. They have one in the Bay Area that they also go to. In Japan, thousands of people get together and have these competitions for the longest, thinnest shaving of wood. It's amazing because the builders were saying they get fabricators, I guess blacksmiths, to make the blades, and it's just incredible how sharp they are. The blacksmiths make these tools, and then the carpenters use the tools. And when they plane, I think they were saying the thickness of the shavings is like 4 microns, or 30 to 50 times smaller than a hair. I was talking to one guy who said they call it "approaching zero." That's an interesting one, approaching zero.

They were saying that when they all get together and one guy planes, everybody is looking. And then when he or she does the planing, there's a moment when everything is just silent. That's actually practice—that's what we're doing with zazen. It's quiescent. In the *Fukanzazengi*, Dogen talks about the "peaceful repose and bliss." So quiescence is actually not active. And when it's not active, then it approaches zero. I thought that was interesting to try—not try, but the activity of approaching zero. It's the activity of

continues next page

approaching infinity. Quite wonderful, right?

So when we sit, you could say it's emptiness, or it's going in, or it's going out into infinity. And so the practice of zazen then is cultivating and expressing. This direct experience on the cushion, it's your direct experience as an individual—and also not you. You're one, and also the many. So when the planer pulls on the plane, everybody is there; there's this silence, and everyone gasps, and then it's back to the regular, relative world. So approaching zero. They were talking about these guys that, you know, wrap their tools in plastic and then, like, five containers, because the wood will get affected by everything. And humans think we do everything, that we create everything. It's the same with the planers. They want to win this competition; we want to gain enlightenment. But they were saying it could be the humidity, it could be the person next to the planer, what he or she is wearing. It's actually all the causes and conditions in the universe that will create the 4 microns. It's kind of interesting.

So we're all connected in that way. In zazen we're all connected that way. When we start, then we have to understand to let the mind be, and not chase after these thoughts that we connect to objects outside of ourselves, but just as an expression of our being. So when we think thoughts, the thoughts and the process of the whole body—our blood, how we see, how we think—it's an expression of not ourselves, but of actually the people planing in Japan, the expression of the camera (points), the expression of Kanzeon. It's a way different view of living life, you know. I think they were talking about one fathom, right? Fathomless—it cannot be measured. I think a fathom is a measurement, but when you say infinity, it's still a measurement. Infinity or a fathom is great, but when we directly experience it, then it's not a concept. Even when I say, "infinity," that's a concept, right? But when we directly experience it, then there's something that is present and vibrant, and it's the emptiness. It's the vibrancy of all the things in this room, outside of this room, inside oneself, your cells, the atoms, and everything, all one body. It's quite beautiful. All one body being planed and built.

So when we sit down, this quiescence, it's a peace, peacefulness. It's a repose. That's important, to feel the body down. Linc Rhodes, it may have been a month ago, he was talking to us and said, you put it down. That means to the ground; you put it down, surrender it. The beginning of the Heart Sutra says "Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva." Kind of interesting: I was reading about Avalokiteshvara, and Avalokiteshvara is right there (points to statue in zendo). When we put it all down, and when the feeling, the sensation of our body is grounded, then there's a wisdom, or insight, in which it's up. The translation of Avalokiteshvara is "one who sees the suffering or cries of the world," meaning that there's one who looks down. You have a very big view of this self. So when you sit down and you feel yourself rooted, then



In the Fukanzazengi, Dogen talks about the "peaceful repose and bliss." So quiescence is actually not active. And when it's not active, then it approaches zero. I thought that was interesting to try—not try, but the activity of approaching zero. It's the activity of approaching infinity.

there's a view in which there's magnanimous mind.

I remember when I was living at Upaya, we were going through hardship there, or maybe I was- I'll say I was. So I hiked up to this mountain above Upaya, near St. John's College, Atalaya. I would climb to the top; I could see Upaya, and I was like, for days I have been running around in just this little area; how insignificant it is. You can see the sky, you can see all things, with this huge view. Human beings, we cannot see this big view because we only see each other when we create a lot of suffering. It's only on a human level. When we sit down and, I don't want to say become the Buddha, but when the Buddha has arrived, then it sees everything.

So Avalokiteshvara means seeing freely. "Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva when practicing deep prajna paramita": that's zazen; it's the deep practice. It's interesting because Avalokiteshvara is also created by Mahayana. There's this case that I'll read, but the eyes and the hands of Avalokiteshvara- the eyes are wisdom, seeing freely- so when we see freely—when we arrive at the place that we are, and there is nothing except the seeing and not labeling, just the expression of seeing—then everything is seeing you, and it's the seeing of seeing. It's big.

But as practitioners, we need to double down and really dig deeper in this lifetime if we've crossed this path. To dig deeper is the best thing you can do for yourself and for all things in the world, whether animate or inanimate, because it's your own body—how could you not? We create wars in our self, then we create trash, we live in our trash, we think about our own trash, we produce our own trash, and it goes on and on. Just to sit and be where you are is disarming. Disarming this "I" is quite wonderful. I was thinking it's interesting because Avalokiteshvara is this seeing that when one gets this magnanimous or big view, which at the same time goes down and up, it turns into wisdom. And then it's not Avalokiteshvara, but the wisdom practicing wisdom. So Avalokiteshvara, when practicing this deep wisdom, has to go down and up in this body. That's why it's really important to be upright, because the energy goes down, and it's up. When it's down and it's up, then it radiates in all directions. So down and up is not necessarily down and up, but it's all directions. And it covers all things, and includes all things. It includes love, hate, anger, the war inside yourself, the war across the world, everything. It includes politics, government, everything that we are. That's great because it's the wisdom that is sitting there. It's not you, and it is you at the same time, because you activate it, and then it's you and not you at the same time, but we cannot conceive of that because it's limitless, bottomless, and boundless. That's why we sit, and that's why we live in that way, the quality of living with this life force of Avalokiteshvara.

Even to come and be here today is actually not your choice, even though maybe you thought of it and all that, but the expression of coming here is the life force of



Avalokiteshvara, when practicing this deep wisdom, has to go down and up in this body. That's why it's really important to be upright, because the energy goes down, and it's up. When it's down and it's up, then it radiates in all directions.



Avalokiteshvara, the life force of this one body that has arrived. So it's the wisdom that has arrived and is making a decision. Maybe, oh, you should come to the Zen Center; then when you're sitting, oh, this is not that fun. I could be at the beach or off the schedule. But somehow we have all arrived in this body (points to self) and this body (points to audience) and this body (gestures to the whole zendo) to become awakened. So that's waking up to reality; waking

up is waking up. It's reality right in front of us. It's how we live that is the awakening of awakening. I think we were talking about waking up to the awakening. When we wake up to the awakening, we wake up to reality in front of us, without getting caught up in labeling it as something apart from yourself. Therefore, when you see flowers on the altar, flowers die, the candle burns down, seasons change, the guy weed-whacking in the vineyard is gone, thank God, but that's my "I" that wants him to go away.

Those are all good things to look at in your life when you are practicing. Look at how you label, pros and cons, how you deal, how this self deals. "Be good, say good things, get good things back"—not necessarily. Through this big view, you start to see that life changes around you, the seasons change, the weather gets warmer, and then it could get colder. If you know that things change outside of oneself, then this self must change too. But that's just by us observing; it's not doing anything but facing reality in front of you and being very true to it. Then you understand, wow, the mind changes, the body changes, getting older, we're going to die. This "I" gets more dismantled, unraveled. Then in your life this "I" becomes more flexible, merging with all things, in which you become closer to all things around you because this is the hands and eyes of Avalokiteshvara. The reality in front of you, this book, is Avalokiteshvara.

I think I should probably stop. It gets complex. Sometimes people say, Nyoze, make it really simple. I'll stop, but I am going to read a little. This is Yunyan's *Great Compassion*. I'll just read the introduction. "Crystal clear on all sides, open and unobstructed in all directions. Emanating light and making the earth tremble in all places. Suddenly exercising spiritual powers at all times. Tell me how this is manifested." Then there's the case: "Yunyan asked Dao Wu, what does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion do with so many hands and eyes? Dao Wu said it's like someone reaching back for the pillow at night." That's really interesting. I remember when I was training at Eiheji, it was all dark, all the time. You couldn't see anything, so even walking down the halls, sometimes I would look up or look away to find myself. Not to look where I am going, but to feel with your feet and with your whole body. Interesting that there's the phrase of reaching back in the middle of the night to grab the pillow. Who is that, or who is doing it when you are sleeping? The mind isn't there, but it's a reaching.

"Once there was a mountain man who sold fortunes. After rain on the muddy road, he would wear pure white shoes to go into the market. Someone asked him, 'You're blind, how come the mud doesn't soil your shoes?' The mountain man raised his staff and said there is an eye on the staff. The mountain man is proof: when reaching for the pillow at night, there is an eye in the hand. When eating, there is an eye on the tongue. When recognizing people on hearing them speak, there's an eye in the ears." I'll stop here. ❖

Board Of Trustees – President's Letter

by Michael Zenmen McCulloch

Friends and members of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center: We just celebrated together the opening of the Sanmon Mountain Gate. In the Soto Zen tradition, the building of a temple gate symbolizes the opening of one's path to Dharma practice, and deepening that practice through training and sitting together.

SPECIAL EVENT! We can all be part of that opening by attending a tile signing ceremony for the Sanmon Mountain Gate on August 1, followed by a potluck lunch. By making an offering (dana), you have an opportunity to sign one of the clay roof tiles and put your mark on the gate for perpetuity. By modeling through example the strength of your practice, you help open the gate for others. Details will follow in an email from the office.

The Sanmon is the gateway to our future Zendo, which has been designed and permitted. Building the new Zendo is the final step in our Mandala Project, bringing us into compliance with county zoning regulations and making practice more accessible to new visitors and guests.

The Board of Trustees gathered recently to thank outgoing board members and welcome new members. We are grateful to the outgoing members, who continue as trusted advisors: Tensan Chuck Ramey (former president), David Kize Hirsch (former treasurer), Lizbeth Myoko Hamlin (former secretary), and Kevin Shindo Souza (former membership chair). This board helped us navigate the complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic and organized and hosted Shinsanshiki, the ceremony installing Nyoze Kwong as the new abbot of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center.

The new members on the Board are Michael Zenmen McCulloch (President), Wayne Dziedzic (Treasurer), Carol Seizen Adams (Secretary), and Jason Shinmei Nichols (Membership Chair). Former board members also helped us prepare a series of conversations for the roadmap forward at SMZC, skillfully facilitated by Craig Vercruysse. We are working to strengthen our authentic Soto Zen practice centered on "just sitting." We feel a deep respect and living kinship with this precious practice reaching back 92 generations, to cultivate awakening and transmit the teachings in a way that is alive and relevant to the issues of today.

Membership Chair Jason Nichols and Volunteer Coordinator Alexandra Thomas are working to build more work opportunities and access to the teachings for people in our community. Look for emails from the office and feel free to share them with friends and family who would like to train with us. Thanks to all those who participated in the Spring Sangha Potluck, where we asked for feedback on how to expand accessibility and create on-ramps for those wishing to begin or deepen their Soto Zen practice.

As your new president, I welcome communications from everyone at zenmen@smzc.org. With respect and appreciation, Michael Zenmen McCulloch ❖



The Sanmon is the gateway to our future Zendo, which has been designed and permitted. Building the new Zendo is the final step in our Mandala Project, bringing us into compliance with county zoning regulations and making practice more accessible to new visitors and guests.

SMZC And Lubin Monastery

by *Uji Mikolaj Markiewicz*

Kwong-roshi first came to Poland in 1987 with Korean Zen master Seung Sahn, who had visited Poland before. Among the places they were invited was the Benedictine monastery in Lubin. A young Benedictine monk there, Father Jan Bereza, wished to create a place where Christians could practice meditation.

The monastery in Lubin, founded in the 11th century, was one of the first monasteries in Poland. Today it consists of a large church and several residential and other buildings. When Kwong-roshi and Master Seung Sahn visited, at least a dozen monks were living there.

For three decades, Kwong-roshi traveled to Poland every year to continue teaching—for a few weeks at first, and later for as long as two months. Each time, he visited Lubin, where he was always a welcome and expected guest.

In time, Father Bereza received permission to establish a Christian meditation center. He created a meditation hall for about thirty people, plus guest rooms, in the attic of one of the monastery buildings. Kwong-roshi led a special retreat whenever he visited Lubin. In addition to periods of seated meditation, participants joined in all of the monks' daily practices. They attended the morning chanting, midday prayers, and evening services. Retreats usually began on Friday and ended on Sunday. On Saturday a Holy Mass was celebrated in the meditation hall.

Experiencing such a retreat was something unique at that time. Kwong-roshi and his students stayed in the monastery and spent time with monks before and after the retreats. Some of the conversations they had were very deep and moving.

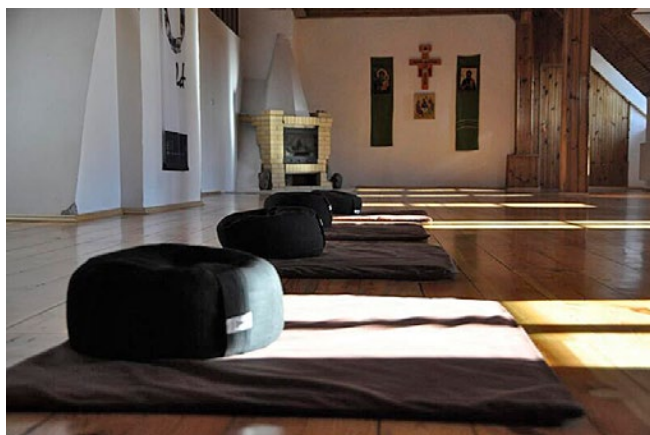
One of the monks who developed a particularly meaningful relationship with Kwong-roshi was Father Karol Meissner, a Benedictine elder renowned in Poland for his scholarship, pastoral work, and service during the Second World War, when he took part in the Warsaw Uprising and was later imprisoned by the Germans. He had graduated from medical school, but eventually chose to become a monk.



Above: Kuun Jurek Dmuchowski, Jakusho Kwong-roshi and Father Jan Bereza during an early retreat at Lubin Monastery

Below: Father Karl Meissner and Kwong-roshi in conversation at Lubin Monastery





Father Karl Meissner played a key role in revitalizing the monastery in Lubin during difficult years. He was assigned by then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to work on family ministry and marriage counseling, and with the cardinal's theological team helped formulate the Catholic teaching on marriage and family life. He was one of the few people who was invited to visit Wojtyła, who had become Pope John Paul II, just before the pope's passing in April 2005.

Reflecting on his friendship with Father Meissner, Kwong-roshi said, "He was one of the few monks who had an interest in us." The two shared many profound conversations, and Kwong-roshi felt that practicing together opened a deep understanding between the Christian and Zen traditions.

In 2007, during the 20th anniversary celebration of the Polish Kannon sangha, when we were visited by Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi, his wife, and several monks from Eihei-ji, we organized a visit to Lubin for them. The monks from Eihei-ji prepared miso soup, which the monks of Lubin tasted for the first time. There were many conversations, and the encounter touched everyone deeply.

After many years, Father Jan Bereza stepped down as director of the meditation center for health reasons, and Father Maksymilian Nawara took over. He had entered the monastery while Kwong-roshi was making his annual visits and developed a strong bond with him.

These days, Father Maksymilian serves as president of the Benedictine Congregation of the Annunciation, which has him traveling around the world to visit Benedictine monasteries. But the relationship between him, the monastery in Lubin, and the Kannon sangha continues. We organize retreats together and extend invitations to one another's events. In Poland, such a relationship lasting nearly forty years between two completely different religious traditions is something truly exceptional. ❖

Father Bereza received permission to establish a Christian meditation center. He created a meditation hall for about thirty people, plus guest rooms, in the attic of one of the monastery buildings. Kwong-roshi led a special retreat whenever he visited Lubin. In addition to periods of seated meditation, participants joined in all of the monks' daily practices. They attended the morning chanting, midday prayers, and evening services.

Mandala Update — Sanmon and Sangha House Remodel

by Mitchell Hoden Katzel & Cam Shunryu Kwong

The Mountain Gate (Sanmon), known as the Gate of Three Liberations, is rising like a flower, growing from the fertile ground of our practice. The three bay openings at the front are an architectural representation of the Gate of Three Liberations: Kumōn, Gate of Emptiness; Musōmon, Gate of Formlessness; and Muganmon, Gate of Non-Construction. Building activity has been speeding along over the past three months, so that we are now about halfway through construction. Following is an update on what has been completed and what remains.

The concrete foundation and steps from the parking lot to the Sanmon were poured at the end of March, including a conduit for electrical wiring to provide lighting inside and around the perimeter and along the steps. Eric Scudder will be installing the wiring and lighting in July and August.

After nearly a year preparing the intricate wood joinery that holds the Sanmon together, Hermitage Woodworks spent the month of May erecting the structure. The crew stayed at the Zen Center for most of the month. Lucas, Jason, and Vann built a temporary shade over the structure, installed the twelve cedar posts that rest on granite plinths to anchor the structure to its foundation, constructed interior walls that will eventually house the Nio Guardians, and installed beams to support the roof structure. The Hermitage crew is taking the month of June off (Jason and Vann are attending the world-famous Kezuroukai wood-planing competition in Japan), and work will resume in July to construct the shear walls and roof. A traditional ridge-beam raising ceremony is anticipated for late July or early August. (An announcement will be made closer to the date.)

In late August, roofers from the firm Daibutsu will arrive from Kyoto to install the Kawara tile that we received in March: 1,300 tiles intricately packed on five wooden pallets, each weighing about a ton. Tile installation will take about two weeks. A tile signing ceremony, which also kicks off the Mandala fundraising campaign, will be timed to take place shortly before tile installation begins. We are also working on a Sanmon opening ceremony in late September, following completion of the roof tiling.

Many other tasks need to be attended to before and after the opening ceremony, including drainage lines to capture rain runoff from the roof, fabricating and installing handrails for the steps, and realigning the pathway from the parking lot to the Sanmon. Construction will continue well into October before we are ready for a final building inspection with Permit Sonoma.

Meanwhile, Dorman Associates has received approval from the Sonoma County Permit Resource Management Department for the Sangha House Remodel. This paves the way for SMZC to obtain the building permit!

We are reviewing the remodel estimate from G-Man Construction, the likely general contractor for the project. To prepare for construction, the SMZC library has been moved to the Genjo Building, and the Zen Dust store packed up. Construction is anticipated to begin in late summer. ❖





Far left: Preliminary foundation work for Sanmon Gate

Above: Sanmon Gate of Three Liberations

Middle: Preliminary foundation work for Sanmon Gate including electric wiring

Below: Concrete platform and platform with steps leading to the parking area



July 18 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

Perfect for beginners wishing to learn meditation form. Meditation is a way to return to your calm mind and create a stable foundation. Join us for our Saturday Community program (included in the fee) immediately following instruction. Please arrive at 8:50 am at the Sangha House to check in.

Saturday Community
Talk by Rick Cogen Sparks
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Rick Cogen Sparks a student of Nyoze Kwong-oshō, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

SMZC Board Meeting
On-site (in Sangha House)
 1:30 PM–3:30 PM PDT

July 24–25 **Summer Temple Stay**
On-site
 Jul 24, 3:00 PM – Jul 25, 1:30 PM PDT

Temple stay is an opportunity to experience authentic Soto Zen Buddhism, its lifestyle, rituals and spirituality. Take the backward step, sit down and illuminate the jewel within yourself. \$150 & up.

July 25 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 18.

Saturday Community
Talk by James Alexander
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by James Alexander, author of *Courage in the Face of Cruelty* following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

July 31 **July Fusatsu Ceremony**
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 7:30–9:00 PM PDT

Be present for & experience the Fusatsu At-one-ment Ceremony of release, purification, and presence with the full moon. 7:30pm–8:00pm Zazen, 8:00pm–9:00pm Service.

Aug 1 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 18.

Saturday Community
Talk by Nyoze Kwong-oshō

On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Nyoze Kwong-roshi, abbot of SMZC, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

Summer Sangha Gathering
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Aug 6–9 **Bodhidharma**
3-Day Sesshin (1 to 3 Overnights)
On-site or Online
 Aug 6, 6:00 PM PDT–Aug 9, 4:00 PM PDT

This retreat is a period of time set aside to let go of the conditioned self and resume our original nature. RSVP and we will email you to complete your registration. \$85/night & up. 10-20% discount for members. (Log in first to receive the member discount.)

Aug 8 **Sesshin Talk by Nyoze Kwong-oshō,**
abbot of SMZC
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 Aug 8, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Nyoze Kwong-oshō, abbot of SMZC, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen, 3:30pm–4:30pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

Aug 10–11 **SMZC Closed**

Aug 14 **August Fusatsu Ceremony**
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 7:30–9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 31.

Aug 15 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 18.

Saturday Community
Talk by Carol Seizen Adams
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Carol Seizen Adams, a student of Jakusho Kwong-roshi and Nyoze Kwong-oshō, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

Aug 22 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 18.

Kids & Youth Community Quarterly
On-site
 10:00 AM–1:30 PM PDT

Join us for a morning of mindfulness and discovery at the Zen Center, designed for ages 1–7 and 8–18 yrs. While parents participate in meditation and Dharma talk, children and teens

will engage in fun, age-appropriate activities, led by sangha members. \$15 admission/person (child or parent)

**Saturday Community
Talk by Tom Jakuryu Huffman
On-site + Online**
10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Tom Jakuryu Huffman, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

**Aug 29 Summer Ango Opening Ceremony
On-site + Online**
10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Join us for Summer Ango Opening Ceremony with Shuso. 10:30am–12:00pm Opening Ceremony and Zazen.

**Sept 4 September Fusatsu Ceremony
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
7:30–9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 31.

**Sept 5 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
9:00AM–1:30PM PDT

See description in previous event, July 18.

**Saturday Community
Talk by Alfred Chozetsu
On-site + Online**
10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Shuso Alfred Chozetsu, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

**Sept 13–20 'Actualizing the Self'
7-Day Sesshin (1–7 Overnights)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 13, 7:30 PM PDT–Sept 20, 4:45 PM PDT

This retreat is a period of time set aside to let go of the conditioned self and resume our original nature. RSVP and we will email to confirm accommodation details and complete your registration. \$85/night & up (based on room type). 10–20% discount for members.

**Sept 15 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Shuso Alfred Chozetsu
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 15, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Alfred Chozetsu, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Sept 16 Sesshin Shuso
Talk by Nyoze Kwong-osho
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 16, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Nyoze Kwong-osho, abbot of SMZC, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen, 3:30pm–4:30pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Sept 17 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Shuso Alfred Chozetsu
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 17, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Alfred Chozetsu, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Sept 18 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Jakusho Kwong-roshi, founder of SMZC
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 18, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Jakusho Kwong-roshi, founder of SMZC, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen, 3:30pm–4:30pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Sept 19 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Shuso Alfred Chozetsu
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 19, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PDT

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Alfred Chozetsu, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Sept 26 Summer Ango Closing Ceremony
and Mondo
On-site + Online (Zoom)**
Sept 26, 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Join us for Summer Ango 'Revealing the Dharma' Closing Ceremony & Mondo with Shuso Alfred Chozetsu. 10:30–11:00am Zazen, 11:00–11:45am Closing Ceremony & Mondo.

Sept 28–30 SMZC Closed



**Morning Zazen: Monday–Saturday, 5:15–7:00 am
Evening Zazen: Tue–Fri, 7:30–9:00 pm**

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

The Question In The Doorway

by Kanzenchi Peter Pocock



On what we carry when a teacher gets sick — and what we have to learn to carry ourselves

Editor's note: Kanzenchi Pocock and his wife, Nancy Seiko Reder, lead the Del Rey Zen in Alexandria, Virginia, an affiliate center of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center.

Some mornings the tremor is mild enough that I forget about it for a few minutes. I make coffee, sit, read. Then I reach for something, and my hand reminds me. That's usually when the day's actual work begins — not ignoring it, not catastrophizing, but just registering, yes, still here. Good morning.

I've been living with Parkinson's for several years now. The diagnosis came three years ago, though the signs were accumulating long before anyone put a name to them. I told my Zen community the week after I received the formal news, and I promised to stay open about how things progressed.

Keeping that promise hasn't always been easy, and I'm only now getting back to writing after more than a year of indecision. I think getting back to work will be good for you, friends, and for me. Not because openness is inherently virtuous, but because this disorder has been teaching me things, and I want to report them in real time — not cleaned up, not made to look more coherent than they actually have been.

What it's been teaching me lately is something I thought I already understood. I didn't.

There's a koan — number 3 in Blue Cliff Record — called "Master Ma Is Unwell." It goes like this: A great eighth-century Chinese teacher named Mazu is sick. His temple superintendent comes to check on him and asks, "Teacher, how has your venerable health been in recent days?" Mazu answers: "Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha."

That's it. Two names from a list of legendary Buddhas — one who lives for eighteen hundred years, one who lives for a single day and night. Long life, short life. The teacher is flat on his back, and that's his answer.

Most commentaries go straight to unpacking what Mazu said. I want to stay a moment longer with the superintendent's question, because I think it carries something important.

Mazu must have been a powerful figure at that temple. The old records describe him as physically extraordinary, his gaze like a tiger, his bearing like an ox, his presence commanding. He trained more than a hundred dharma heirs. Students traveled from across China to sit with him. He

was, for those people, a fixed point.

And now he was sick. Maybe dying.

Imagine the distress in that community. Not just grief — something more disorienting than grief. The quiet panic of watching someone you had relied on to hold something steady begin to slip.

I'm no master, but I'm beginning to understand that panic from the other side now. I've watched it move across people's faces in my community — quick, controlled, careful. Someone sees the tremor on a day when it's more visible, or notices that I've lost a word mid-sentence, and there's a moment when I can see them recalculate. There is something exposed in that moment, for them and for me.

What I've realized is that many of us come to practice carrying a particular hope, usually unspoken — that someone, somewhere, has figured it out. That the puzzle of existence — what Douglas Adams called "life, the universe, and everything" — has a solution, and that if we stay close to the person who found it, some of that clarity might reach us.

I carried that hope for years before I found Zen. I was the son of a Presbyterian engineer, with a crisp sense of logic, of cause and effect. None of that helped with the puzzle of existence. I spent four years in China in my twenties, and left with the realization that my way of knowing was far from the only way. I read the Daodejing in numerous translations. I tried various forms of meditation. I helped start a contemplative practice group at our Unitarian church. Every time I thought I was getting closer to an answer, the question slid away into deeper water.

Then twenty years ago, my search led me to Genjoji. I sat zazen with the residents, met Jakusho Kwong-roshi, and something clicked. Not overnight, not without plenty more confusion — but I understood that what I'd been circling was this practice, and that I needed to actually do it rather than study from a comfortable intellectual distance.

What I didn't know then was how much of that practice — mine, and probably others' — was still built around a fixed point, around the idea that the teacher knows, the teacher



holds it, and our job is to stay close enough to benefit.

That idea is not without value. A good teacher does hold something. But the holding isn't permanent, and the point of practice was never to outsource your ground to someone else's.

The superintendent's question, "How has your venerable health been in recent days?" is, among other things, the question of a person who hoped not to have to carry this alone. It is looking for reassurance. And Mazu, in the most loving and unsentimental way possible, declines to give it.

Sun Face Buddha. Moon Face Buddha.

Here is what is actually happening. Long life, short life. Both are Buddha. Come in out of the doorway and be with

what's real.

I have tried these past three years to give something like that answer when people ask how I'm doing. Not the performed reassurance — I'm fine, don't worry, the practice protects you from this, but also not despair. Something closer to yes, this is happening, I am still here. Both of those things are true at the same time. Come sit with me.

The fixed point was never me or any leader or teacher. It is this practice, which holds both the Sun Face and the Moon Face, and asks us to be present to whichever one is showing up this morning.

Even when that morning starts with a trembling hand. ❖

Kids Community News

by Kristin Misan Nichols

Since its founding, Sonoma Mountain Zen Center has emphasized a harmonious blending of residential and lay practice. Today many of our non-resident members are parents balancing family and work responsibilities, for many of whom access to childcare is essential for participating fully in Sangha life. The Kids Community program at the Zen Center is an important step toward making Zen practice accessible for families. Parents can choose to either join the Saturday Community Program for zazen and the dharma talk, or participate along with the Kids Community if they prefer. Aside from offering parents support, the program is designed to introduce Zen practice in ways appropriate for children.

Kids Community is oriented around short periods of meditation and craft-based activities that engage children's tactile sensations. Feeling the smoothness of dough, the coldness of clay, or the softness of wool fibers, children are invited to return to the present moment. These activities give them space to express themselves, and are simple enough that their minds can relax.

During our annual Summer Campout Under The Stars, we spend a longer period together, during which our children take part in some of the temple's rituals. We arrive, put up our tents or get comfortable in one of the guest bedrooms. We eat dinner together, the first few minutes in silence. After everyone washes dishes, the older children have a short period of zazen in the zendo. When they emerge, the younger children have already helped prepare the fire for s'mores, and we end the evening with each child ringing the bonsho.

The next morning starts at 6. The older children have another period of zazen, followed by eating breakfast togeth-

er. Our closing ceremony is a silent procession to the stupas. Led by one of our monks and nuns, the children take turns playing an instrument in sequence: The first child starts, and the second one knows his or her turn will come next, but must first take six conscious steps, creating a pause, a

space for emptiness. That part is most challenging for the younger children. After the last child has played, the first one knows to start again. As we walk through the forest, we experience the sensation of moving together as one body.

Finding Zen practice ten years ago made a big change in my life, allowing me to learn deeply who I am and what I want to do. Ultimately, it has allowed me to have a happy, fulfilled, and purposeful life. It feels incredibly important to return to the Zen Center and deepen my connection to myself on a regular basis, but with the birth of my daughter six years ago and son three years ago, it was very challenging to make time for practice. Starting to lead the Kids Community program two years ago was an important opportunity to continue my own practice at the Zen Center. My biggest hope for the program is that we are able to plant the seed of Zen practice in the next generation, so they can return to it in their adult life if they wish..❖



In Praise Of The Sonoma Mountain Zen Center Study Group

by Susan Raczka

A common factor of many things I have experienced at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center is that you never know what you're in for! After two years, I am a relatively new student, though I have had many years in other traditions. I literally knew nothing about Zen, so I am always interested in exploring the different options available at SMZC.

I just finished my second study group, consisting of weekly meetings via Zoom with a group attending in person. We were studying *Living by Vow* by Shohaku Okumura. I admit I fell in love with this book! Studying Zen is not an easy matter. My first experience was reading books by Jakusho Kwong-roshi, our beloved teacher. His books were primary and a beautiful introduction to the spirit of Zen practice.

In pursuing books by other masters, practitioners, and scholars, I found that the language and study of Zen, whether newer books or old sutras, is not the same as informing yourself on conventional subjects. The language of Zen is poetic, leading instead of instructing or demanding attention. There is no way to communicate exactly what is meant by Zen, zazen, realization, or anything you might want to "know."

Clearly, the path is a self-discovery led by those who have walked that path for many years.

Living by Vow is a thorough introduction to chants used throughout the practices at the Zen Center. It covers some of the oldest teachings, and literally broke my heart and mind! But I couldn't have had the same result by just reading the book on my own.

I am not a big fan of Zoom, but I did feel present in the room and was thoughtfully acknowledged by the discussion leaders. I had an opportunity to speak and was heard and acknowledged with the other online participants.

But the most startling effect overall, always surprising, was feeling inspired with every class. I found myself buzzing with a glow every time from sharing and being included in a cloud of wonder, gratitude, and personal discovery. Even though my ordinary, everyday self said, "Sheesh, I'm tired, worked all day, I don't know" as I slowly joined in, the end result was always the same: a deep gratitude, and dare I say excitement, to discover more layers in myself, and through the others, a love for and deep reverence for the teachings, old and new.

My advice is to give it a try! You will find the study group an interesting way to gain "knowledge," if we can call it that, of this radical invitation to live your life in a different way. ❖



Hoitsu Suzuki-Roshi Appointed Vice Abbot Of Eihei-ji Daihonzan



Dear Genjoji Sangha,

It is my honor to announce that Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi has been appointed as Kanshu of Daihonzan Eihei-ji.

May the spirit of the Buddhadharma on Sonoma Mountain continue to come alive, be cultivated, and sustained in this intimate lineage connection radiating out to all things.

May this be so!

Yours in the Dharma, Nyoze Kwong, Jushoku ❖

To Everyone at the Zen Center,

We respectfully share this important announcement with all of you.

Effective June 26, following the formal procedures of the Soto Zen School, Rev. Hoitsu Suzuki, the Abbot of Rinso-in, has been officially elected as the Vice-Abbot (Fuku-Kanshu) of Daihonzan Eihei-ji.

He has expressed that he is deeply honored and, at the same time, humbled by this great responsibility.

He shared the following message: "I will continue to serve as the Abbot of Rinso-in just as before. I will continue my practice to further deepen the wonderful relationship with all of you, and strive to be a bridge between you and the Soto Zen School in Japan, centered around the Head Temple."

We humbly ask for your continued friendship and support.

Nine bows,
Shungo

New To The Sangha

We offer a warm welcome to our newest members.

Kyle Azevedo, Santa Rosa, CA

My name is Kyle Azevedo, and I live in Santa Rosa with my fiancée Vernadette and my box turtle Shel. I work in Software Development and Information Technology, supporting local government systems for the City of Rohnert Park. Outside of work, I enjoy martial arts, fitness, making music, nature, wildlife, hiking, zazen, and learning.

My path to Zen began through martial arts, where I was introduced to meditation and quiet awareness as a teenager. Years later, reading Shunryu Suzuki-roshi's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind inspired me to establish a regular zazen practice and eventually visit Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. Through zazen, samu, and the support of the Sangha, I have found greater clarity, patience, and appreciation for everyday life.

I am grateful for the warmth and encouragement I have received at SMZC and am honored to join a community dedicated to lifelong practice.

Taylor Lemmon, Santa Rosa, CA

Greetings, SMZC Sangha. My name is Taylor Lemmon. I was born and raised in Santa Rosa. I'm the fourth child in a family of six. I was raised in the LDS church, but stopped going to church when I was seventeen. As an adult, I feel that I was not fully prepared for life by my parents, the church, or even school. It was not until I read Thich Nhat Hanh's book No Death, No Fear that I realized there were methods of letting go and transforming suffering. I have lived more and suffered less since I became aware of the Buddha's story, teachings, and practice. I look forward to practicing with all of you. ❖



Polish Sangha Report

by Eko Ania Mills

The Polish sangha has had a full and inspiring spring and is now preparing for the Jukai ceremony during Ango, at the beginning of July. After Ango, we will have a ceremony to establish Kaiin Jarek Chybicki as the resident teacher of our rural center in Kaciki, where we held a seven-day sesshin in April with around 20 participants.

Uji's visit to the Sopot sangha in northern Poland was a big success. The weekend included a Dharma talk, dokusan, and a communal meal, and we welcomed six new members to the sangha. The Warsaw sangha continues to offer zazen three times a week, along with regular introductory workshops led by Kuun Dmuchowski.

In early June, we were honored to host Venerable Heng Sure and Jin Wei from the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery and City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California. Rev. Heng Sure is known for his 800-mile "three steps, one bow" pilgrimage for world peace, which he completed in 1979. Their visit included an ecumenical gathering of friends from different religions. We also hosted a rakusu-sewing class, sumi-e calligraphy workshop, and photography exhibition by Krzysztof Porzeżyński.

Our online study group led by Erik Kompo focused on Suzuki-roshi's classic *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. We also hosted Zen retreats for students of Toni Packer and have continued our public meditation initiative, Silence for the Climate, zazen on the streets of Warsaw at each solstice.

We are grateful for the continued growth of our practice community, and look forward to the Jukai ceremony and the upcoming Ango. ❖



Close of sesshin in Kaciki, April 2026

We were honored to host Venerable Heng Sure and Jin Wei from the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery and City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California. Rev. Heng Sure is known for completing the 800-mile, "three steps, one bow" pilgrimage for World Peace that he completed in 1979.

News From The Icelandic Sangha

by Zenki Traustason

Spring has arrived in Iceland, as always on its own terms — long, cool, and unhurried. The landscape is slowly dressing itself in green shades with vibrant flower colors, and the birds have returned, filling the air with song. There is something deeply reassuring in the way nature simply is, and doesn't become anything. As Dogen Zenji said, we don't say that spring becomes summer; each moment is complete in itself.

It has been a season of meaningful milestones for the Icelandic Sangha Náttíagi. Last February I had the honor of being formally installed as abbot of the Icelandic Sangha in an intimate, heartwarming ceremony within our community. Kwong-roshi joined us via Zoom, and his presence, even from across the ocean, gave the ceremony weight and significance. It means the world to me that Roshi supports and trusts me to take on this responsibility. I am deeply honored and humbled to serve and to carry our Dharma lineage forward here in Iceland.

Earlier this year I gave Jukai to two students. Sigurlaug Didda received the Dharma name Joko, Quiet Lake. Baldur received the name Onryu, Gentle Dragon. When I give a Dharma name, I reflect carefully on the character of the student — their qualities, their way of being in practice. The name is not assigned so much as recognized, as if it were already waiting to be called forth. I congratulate Joko and Onryu and welcome them warmly into the Dharma family.

We held our spring sesshin here in Reykjavík, a deeply nourishing few days of practice together. Fifteen people participated, which is a lot for a small Sangha.

A truly historic moment for our Sangha lies just ahead. In October I will give Shukke Tokudo, the Leaving Home Ceremony, to four members of our community: Alfred Chozetsu, Örn Issan, Jóna Shinko, and Guðmundur Steinn Shoto. This will be the first Tokudo ceremony performed within the Icelandic lineage. The ceremony will be held at Eirð, a quiet retreat about an hour east of Reykjavík.

Reflecting on this milestone makes me think of Kwong-roshi, who traveled to Iceland nearly every year for close to four decades. The seeds he planted with such patience and dedication are now flowering. The ordination of the first priests in the Icelandic lineage is the fruit of his long, faithful effort. We are deeply grateful.



Icelandic Sangha following sesshin in Reykjavík

This brings to mind the koan “In the middle of the night, groping for the pillow.” Roshi’s yearly journey to Iceland was just like this: a natural, unhesitating reaching in the dark, guided not by certainty but by deep trust in the Dharma.

With deep gratitude and warm wishes to all my Dharma brothers and sisters.

Gassho, Ástvaldur Zenki ❖

When I give a Dharma name, I reflect carefully on the character of the student — their qualities, their way of being in practice.

The name is not assigned so much as recognized, as if it were already waiting to be called forth.

Rakusu Sewing Reflection

by Liz Myogetsu Johnson

Sewing practice, the way of taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha again and again and again with each breath and each stitch, is a beautiful and meaningful way to express and examine our true nature. I can see my little self come up in moments of impatience, frustration, or pride. Then the silent chant reminds me to let go, dissolve, and return wholeheartedly to what is actually in front of me—the fabric, the table on which it rests, and my own nature as it is.

At SMZC, sewing often means using the scissors, spools of thread, and hand-crafted diagrams that have been diligently cared for by Shinko, Kashin, and others here on the mountain for decades. Even the needles we use have been held and handed down by our sewing teachers and preceding students. It's an honor to take part in the strong sewing tradition at SMZC, honoring the teachers who have transmitted the practice, and those before us who have realized the awakened way, one stitch at a time. ❖

RAKUSU SEWING HAIKU

Kashin shows the way
Her generous nature flows
Through paths and channels

Not a dot or line
each stitch the size of one drop
of rain on the field

A knot stops the thread
new breath, new stitch, clean start,
I take refuge again

Where is the Buddha
in me? Unstitch, restitch, breathe
the rice fields flood slow

—Nena Gleason



All Contributions
Help Maintain
the Buddhadharma!

DONATE ONLINE SMZC.ORG

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**.

Talks by Kwong-roshi and senior students are now available on the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center **YouTube** channel (search by **@sonomamountainzencenter**). Talks will be posted one month after the live talk.



SMZC BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Nyoze Kwong, Abbot

Jakusho Kwong-roshi, Founding Abbot

Michael Zenmen McCulloch, President

Shinko Laura Kwong, Wisdom Chair Holder

Wayne Muchi Dziedzic, Treasurer/Finance

Carol Seizen Adams, Secretary

Jason Shinmei Nichols,
Membership & Community Representative

Kashin Julie Bachmann,
Geido (Arts & Aesthetics)

MOUNTAIN WIND STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: Katsuzen King

Copy Editor: Keiko Koryu Ohnuma

Layout: Kurt Shoki Morella

Lecture Transcription: Garry Gilooly,
Mitchell Hoden Katzel

Mailing & Postage: Jo Morohashi

Contributing Writers:
Carol Seizen Adams, Nena Gleason,
Liz Myogetsu Johnson, Mitchell Hoden Katzel,
Shunryu Kwong, Uji Markiewicz, Michael
Zenmen McCulloch, Eko Ania Mills, Kristin
Misan Nichols, Susan Raczk, Zenki Traustason

Contributing Photographers:
Carol Seizen Adams, Bankyo, Mitchell Hoden
Katzel, Kashin Kwong, Nyoze Kwong, Coco
Myoshin Mellinger, Lizbeth Myoko Hamlin,
Jake Wachtel

CONTACT US

Sonoma Mountain Zen Center
6367 Sonoma Mountain Road
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
(707) 545-8105
Fax (707) 545-9508
Email: office@smzc.org
Website: www.smzc.org

Newsletter Subscriptions

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.



SONOMA MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

“For the Beneficial Protection
and Awakening of All Beings”



Sonoma Mountain Zen Center
Genjo-ji
6367 Sonoma Mountain Road
Santa Rosa, California 95404