



APRIL–JUNE 2022

HAKUIN'S YASENKANNA

The following was taken from an online lecture by Kwong-roshi to the Shambhala Community on March 12, 2022.

This gathering is dedicated to Ukraine and to Russia. It's really a great pity that we as people don't know that we all have the same mother. I heard recently that dogs from the same mother do not fight over food. Even dogs know, but we human beings don't. If we did, we wouldn't have the need to fight with each other.

Yasenkanna was written by Hakuin, a very illustrious Zen master. His title means "idle talk on a night boat." Hakuin alludes to a story about a person who liked to tell stories and brag a lot. If you like to brag, you have to tell lies. One lie invites another, which invites another, and so on. This man told the people in his village that he had gone to Kyoto on a boat, and the people were amazed because hardly anybody traveled in those days. So the first lie was that he had sailed down this river, which turned out to be a dry creek. And then the people in the village eagerly asked him, "Well, what was it like when you got to Kyoto?" And he apologized, "I couldn't see because it was already nighttime." Hakuin introduces Yasenkanna with this title, but actually he's making up a story.

In the final part of the preface to Yasenkanna, there is a beautiful capping verse taken from a poem by the T'ang poet Keng Wei. "When the moon arrives at its zenith, shadows disappear from the wall." The second line is even more powerful: "The frost is heavy, willow branches are spare." When you're sitting, opposites disappear, as when the shadow dissolves and there's no more

shadow to be seen. In fact, there never was a shadow. The second line emphasizes that point. The moon shines even to the bottom of the tree, not just the wall but to the very bottom, meaning the bottom is everywhere, there are no shadows. It's a beautiful poem, isn't it? And in the footnote they didn't include the word "when" in the poem and "when" is when the vertical and horizontal meet. "When" is a very important word because that's "when" it happens. It indicates the precise moment it takes place.

In his story Hakuin talks about visiting Hakuyū, who is said to be over 300 years old. In those days, many of the young monks were ordained when they were 18 or even younger. They're our heroes because they threw themselves into zazen. I don't know if we have that resolve anymore, but they threw themselves into zazen without eating or sleeping. As a result of that intense practice, they sometimes got consumption, what they called Zen sickness, which today we call tuberculosis. Hakuin also got tuberculosis, and he couldn't find anyone to cure him, not even the finest Chinese doctors. So he discovered his own method. Now, in tuberculosis the internal fire rises in one's body, which is what's happening with people right now. We call it anxiety or excessive intellectual thinking instead of tuberculosis, but in many applications I see, people have a tremendous amount of anxiety. That means heat is rising, and you have to reverse it. There are old sayings that tell you to keep the area of the body from the navel to the top of the head cool, and from the navel down warm. So that's the balance we have to achieve, and we can do it through breathing and through practice.

continues next page



Eko Hensho by Max Hamilton

Chuang Tzu was Lao Tzu's successor—Chuang Tzu, the “true person.” Who is the true person? The true person is you. There's nobody else. Whether you accept it or not, you are the true person. You are the only person, right? The true person breathes from the heels; the ordinary person breathes from the throat.

Here's a note to support that. Hakuin says, “My heart fire began to rise upward against its natural course, therefore parching my lungs of its essential function.” In trying to cure himself, he uses what he calls introspective meditation, which is zazen. You can't separate the two, because when your meditation starts to get stronger and deeper, it is an introspective meditation. It helps your body as well as your mind and breath. Your breath is the most important. The breath controls the mind, and the mind controls the body. This is old stuff we should know. In Chinese medical lore, excessive exercise of the intellect causes the heart fire to overheat and mount upwards. This is what has happened to our civilization today, and while we may not have TB, we've got all these related problems. In Chinese medicine, the Great Way is divided into two principles, yin and yang, which produce human beings and all other things. A primal inborn energy circulates silently throughout the body, moving along channels or conduits to the five great organs. The blood and the chi, or ki energy, circulate together, ascending and descending through the body, making 50 complete circulations. As it circulates you not only control your health, but also your mental health.

Just a few more important things that we should know. Chuang Tzu was Lao Tzu's successor—Chuang Tzu, the “true person.” Who is the true person? The true person is you. There's nobody else. Whether you accept it or not, you are the true person. You are the only person, right? The true person breathes from the heels; the ordinary person breathes from the throat. Because Hakuin was really sick, he couldn't even stand; he had to lie down. And lying down he breathed through his tanden kikai. The tanden is two inches below your navel; the kikai is exactly an inch and a half. “Ki” is your chi, your energy, vitality, spirit, and kai is ocean, so kikai means ocean of vitality. You need vitality to practice, you can't just sit back and relax. But here we're on Zoom now and people are drinking water and stuff like that. You should be as if you're in the zendo, the shrine room. We don't drink water in the shrine room. But on Zoom we can sit in our pajamas. Even I've done it! But we have to maintain the dignity and nobility of our practice. That's why we're practicing, right?

So Hakuin was lying down and breathing through his tanden kikai. Experientially you should do the same. You're sitting up now, which is good, so breathe through that place. Learn how to breathe. When you go to Chinatown you see these buddhas with their big bellies. People go there and rub their bellies for good luck. But symbolically it refers to your tanden kikai—not the buddha's, but yours. And when you breathe through it, what happens? Your tanden kikai is filling with air, so your diaphragm begins to expand, and also your chest and your ribs. It's wonderful, waking up all those areas in your tanden kikai. You breathe through the back as well, and that's where your kidneys and liver are. So when you breathe through

both areas, front and back, you will find where the mind dwells. When you start breathing that way, your thinking is minimized because you're reaching to where the mind dwells. It's amazing, and then what Hakuin did when he was full of air is he reversed it and directed it to go to his rear, his legs, and to his heels and arches of his feet. At the very end he pushes down on his feet. So we're sitting up—say you're sitting in a chair—you do the same thing and reverse the current of air down your bottom, your legs, and your feet. As you push down on the heels of your feet, you let the air out and there's no more thinking from the *tanden kikai*.

When we go down, it's the same as with our bow. The bow is the best gesture of humanity because everyone does it, but many spiritual people don't know why they're doing it. You're reuniting what has been separated into subject and object. You have to bow on the exhalation; there's no other way to bow. When you give someone something, you have to give it on the exhalation. When someone is holding their breath, they're not really giving. This is universal. So put this wonderful gesture together, and when you bow you have to bow on the exhalation. That's giving, and as you bow on the exhalation it's the same as the *tanden kikai*. You're taking the air down to your feet, and as you bend, getting to the end of the bow your mind stops. Try it now. Is it true? Did we succeed? It's very simple, but this is what Zen people do—they miss everything—so we've really got to slow down, because you know *Yasenkanna* is really true. It's right with you, and nowhere else.

That's how Hakuin does this breath practice, and then he explains that in the practice there are five things to do. As you're sitting in meditation, your mind will start working and go somewhere else. He offers these pointers such as the breath going to your rear, to your legs, to the bottom of your feet. He's pointing, and as you're doing that you're repeating to yourself, "This is also part of my original mind." My butt, my legs, my feet—each one is part of my original mind, and then he asks the rhetorical Zen question, "and if this is all my original mind, then why does my original face have a nose?" That's the koan. Through practice, you will be able to answer it. So he has five of those points, but we concentrate on just the first one. To read *Yasenkanna* and really get into Chinese medicine and the conduits is very important and takes a long time to understand. If you really have the interest, you'll read it over and over so that it seeps into you, and you'll practice and find out if it's true. Have we lost our curiosity? Find out if it's true. People will have fewer migraines, and they won't have to think and worry so much. They can sleep easily. I mean you know it can be just a simple practice.

Hakuin ends his talk in an interesting way, with someone taking a nap. I think this work has been in continuous publication from 1700 until now, and you'll

find it in the latter part of the book *Wild Ivy*. In the end he says that a horse chomping on dried beans disturbs a man during his noonday nap. The footnote says a man is sleeping soundly in his bed and it could also be a woman sleeping soundly. As he sleeps a rice pounder begins which in the old days must have made a lot of noise. The sleeping man hears the sound in his dream as if it were a drum beat or someone striking a bell. That's what the sleeping man hears when—W-H-E-N—he is dreaming, and he takes it for another sound. But at the moment he wakes up, he knows it's a rice pounder. Thank you. ❖

Ango Closing Poem

WINTER 2022

Read by Kaian Jennings

Don't think a mountain home means
you're free
a day doesn't pass without its problems
old ladies steal my bamboo shoots
boys lead oxen into the wheat
grubs and beetles destroy my greens
boars and squirrels devour the rice
when what happens isn't what you expect
forget it and turn to yourself

— Stonehouse

QUESTION & ANSWER WITH ROSHI

The following Question & Answer session followed the Dharma Talk (pp. 1–3):

Student: I've been trying to follow my breathing but I make it a chore or a goal or like a self-expectation which sort of defeats the whole purpose. So how do I work with that?

Roshi: Well, that's where you start. You know we have a part of our practice where we chant Dogen's Fukanzazengi and it takes us 40 minutes. And we start out with one beat for each syllable in English. And the people on Zoom start dropping out. Sometimes there's only two people left, me and someone else.

In the beginning, it's difficult because your mind is oriented to keep going forward. But we're going backwards. It does something to your consciousness and to your conditioning. People have resistance. They don't want to go slowly. They want to get it fast. But this way, you have to go very slowly.

And so, you start off with what you have. You have resistance, you may want to go fast, but you stay with the practice. Then later on, you begin to enjoy the syllables and each moment. You're not looking for the end. And you will find it to be a great treasure. It's in the practice. It's what we do.

I tell my students I must be failing, because everyone goes off the grid. They're gone and I feel badly for them because it's the practice. This is what we do, though. There's an outcome to it, too.

Bill: Hello Roshi. This is Bill. I'm originally a Zen student and still consider myself to be a Zen student. I like meditating with my focus on the hara. But in the Vajrayana tradition, at least in parts of it, there's a lot of emphasis on the heart being the center. And somewhat the center of one's attention. And for me, there's a little confusion about that.

Roshi: In the Vajrayana tradition, when they say heart, what exactly do they mean?

Bill: Not the physical heart, but right here in the center of the chest.

Roshi: Ok, so there are two other power points: Tanden kikai, this (pats chest) and here (points to forehead). We emphasize the lower one. For Yasenkanna, this is the main focus.

Bill: I actually like that a lot. Thank you very much.

Roshi: Charity, I think you had a question.

Charity: Nice to see you, Roshi. Much love to you and all those on the mountain. I love that line about the true person breathes through their heels and the ordinary person breathes through their throat. Can you just go

over these instructions, a little bit? Again, just the simple breathing? The ascending and the descending, can you review those with us?

Roshi: Ok, so you could try it with me while you're sitting there. When you start breathing from the tanden kikai, in a very experiential sense, you put your hands on your belly and you can feel it expand, right?

Charity: Yes.

Roshi: And not just the front. Remember the back, the kidneys, and the liver. Breathing through both places. And now it's full and we're redirecting it down. And when we're redirecting it, we're repeating "my original face is in my rear, my knees, legs, heels." You repeat it while directing it. It's good to have a direction, because your mind will go off. So, you're keeping the mind focused. When you get to the very end, like at the end of a gassho, you release the breath and press down with your feet.

Charity: So, when you're directing it down, is that on the middle of the breath, is it the out-breath or the in-breath or does it matter?

Roshi: No, it matters a lot. With the in-breath you are full. But you direct it down and out on the exhalation.

Charity: Thank you.

Fern: Basha, do you have a question for Roshi?

Basha: Hi Roshi. So good to see you. I starred the thing you said; The breath controls the mind, the mind controls the body. I just found that amazing because I hadn't gone back that far to the breath. That the mind controls the body I kind of know. But that the breath controls the mind and the mind controls the body, I found that profound and something to contemplate.

Roshi: I think that so far, people have the mind and the body, but they've forgotten the breath. The breath is the most important thing.

Basha: Yes. Can you say some more about that?

Roshi: Well, I can't say too much more about that, but you can begin practicing it yourself... on the exhalation.

Basha: Ok.

Roshi: And at the end of the exhalation, your mind will stop thinking. It's not difficult. It's universal. It's how we actually function. We don't notice that the mind has stopped. And that's the beauty of it. That's like putting a penny in the bank. It starts accumulating. And then you can even do it at will.

Basha: Thank you so much.

Fern: And Melissa, you have a question?

Melissa: Yes. Hi Roshi. This is my first time studying with you. So, thank you. This was amazing. Because I follow the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, the heart and the tummy, that's a little confusing for me because I think too

much. I work with children. And I have one student who is Russian/Ukrainian. Her mom is there. And a lot of children are on medication for anxiety. If you could go over how to do the coolness. I guess it's four fingers below the navel. That's how I would explain it if I was trying to help them. And to keep it cool at the top. Could you go over that for me?

Roshi: If you just follow the practice you don't have to think about it being cool or warm. If you just follow the instruction, you don't have to think more beyond that. The other thing will naturally happen. It will become cool. But you'll also have to do it, especially with kids, you'll have to introduce it slowly, to get them in the rhythm of doing it every day as a kind of game. And then they'll get it. In fact, the adults are not much different from kids. We also have to do it a little bit at a time or do as much as we can handle. Each one has their own rhythm. So, you just do a little bit at a time. It's a game. Then they get it. It's a game for us, too. We'll get it, too. Same way.

Melissa: So, breathe through the belly and exhale down the legs through the feet. I know in Tibetan Buddhism it's about keeping the channels straight; your central channel, your left and right channel. I don't know how this plays into it.

The exhalation is our most
important breath. It's your
compassion breath. It's your giving
breath. It's also your strength
breath. You throw a ball on the
exhalation. You strike a nail on
the exhalation. You shout on the
exhalation. And, also, Trungpa
Rinpoche and Suzuki-roshi, both
said the same thing.
Your last breath is your exhalation.
You know where you're going.
You are going home.

Roshi: It's all the same thing, you know. It's not different. There's just different emphasis but it means the same thing.

Melissa: Ok. And I love what you said about you can only truly give when you exhale. That's beautiful. I would like to study it more. I need simplicity.

Roshi: Yes, the exhalation is our most important breath. It's your compassion breath. It's your giving breath. It's also your strength breath. You throw a ball on the exhalation. You strike a nail on the exhalation. You shout on the exhalation. And, also, Trungpa Rinpoche and Suzuki-roshi, both said the same thing. Your last breath is your exhalation. You know where you're going. You are going home. There was one of my dharma sisters, Yvonne Rand, who took care of Suzuki-roshi in his final days. And after she left the Zen Center she moved up north and started her own group. A very good person. She had Alzheimer's and just before she died she said, "No-form. Thank you for everything." Now, that is great. It's more than great. I hope I can say something like that or do something like that when I die. (Laughs) I've haven't even heard a zen master say that.

Melissa: How can we study with you more? I used to live in Sonoma and I think I went to the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center once a long time ago. Are you just on Zoom now, or are there classes?

Roshi: We're opening like everyone else. You can go to our website.

Fern: There's a study group that is just starting up. You can check the website and the book that we'll be studying.

Melissa: Thank you so much. This was a gift.

Fern: Thank you all. We're getting close to the end. And I wanted to thank Peter and Faith for coordinating this event; all the hard work that goes on behind this Zoom. And to Roshi for taking time to come here and speak to us during these very dark times. And to all of you for showing up and being here. Thank you so much.

By this merit may all attain omniscience
May it defeat the enemy, wrongdoing
From the stormy waves of birth, old age, sickness
and death
From the ocean of samsara may I free all beings.
By the confidence of the golden sun of the great east
May the lotus blossom of the Ridge's wisdom bloom
May the dark ignorance of sentient beings be dispelled
May all beings enjoy profound brilliant glory.

by Erik Zenjin Shearer

As we move toward summer at Genjoji, Sonoma Mountain Zen Center continues to implement a cautious return to full in-person practice. At this time, members and guests can attend every program in person if they have submitted proof of vaccination. Masks are not required, but welcome. We will continue to evaluate in-person requirements as the situation warrants. While continuing to offer online participation for those unable to join us in person, we encourage everyone who is able to return to in-person practice. If you can, consider making a commitment to join us in person once a month. Possibilities include the Saturday program and lunch, sitting zazen before dawn and staying for the morning service, sitting at dusk, or joining Friday morning work practice and lunch.

The Spring Study Group currently underway has been well attended, both in person and online. The text is "Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment" attributed to the 13th-century Zen master Keizan. Also called the Denkoroku, this text focuses on the Zen lineage through enlightenment stories of major figures beginning with Shakyamuni Buddha and Indian ancestors through the Chinese lineage and Zen Master Ejo, dharma heir to Dogen. Keizan's text is translated by prominent Buddhist scholar Thomas Cleary. Study group is offered every spring and fall and focuses on readings and discussion of important Zen texts as another avenue of practice. Consider joining the fall class to deepen your practice.

As the Zen Center has reopened to full practice, our need for volunteers is greater than ever. We rely heavily on members' volunteer efforts. The totality of our practice includes zazen, dokusan, studying the texts, and samu or work practice. Volunteering is an essential aspect of practice. Volunteers are needed in the garden, kitchen, clearing brush, and maintaining buildings and infrastructure, as well as help in the office. Volunteer opportunities are also available from home.

One special position we have an identified need for is a volunteer coordinator. This person would match volunteers to opportunities, working with staff to identify needs. Another important role is to coordinate the hosting of outside groups, a key part of the operating budget.

Our annual Sangha potluck, held on April 30 provided an opportunity for the membership and guests to get reacquainted with each other and with Genjo-ji. For those who have not traveled to SMZC recently, be prepared for a major change in the landscape in front of the Sangha House. As you may know, the ancient live oak tree that had provided shade and shelter to this spot on the mountain for hundreds of years had to be removed earlier in April. (see article & photos on pg. 10). It was diseased and in danger of falling onto the Sangha House. SMZC held a

ceremony for the tree a few days prior to commencing the enormous task of taking the tree down.

At the beginning of the year, the Center launched a new member portal on the SMZC website that makes it easier for existing members to stay current on membership dues and for new members to join our sangha. If you have not yet done so, please go to the website and sign up for the new payment system, cancelling any other ongoing direct bank payments or quarterly/annual payments. When you log into the new membership system, you can renew at your current level or choose another membership level as your finances permit. Your generosity is critical to sustaining our practice on Sonoma Mountain. ❖

The membership portal can be found at:
<https://www.smzc.org/membership>

EDITOR'S NOTE

by Katsuzen King

This issue of Mountain Wind highlights the passing of our great companion oak that watched over the sangha house and entry to the Zen Center for so many seasons. In its place now are the Japanese Maples that have recently taken root. The Zen Center offers a deep bow to Craig Stepanek for his diligent efforts in planting these new guardians. And a bow of appreciation to Margaret Saiten Tighe for her generous donation toward the purchase of the new trees. We would also like to extend a deep bow to Jon Perry for his skillful work in doing the difficult job of removing the Great Oak.

Additional thanks go to long-time sangha member Joel Merchant who contributed the early photo on page 10 of the oak tree in its fully glory. And, also a deep bow to Joel for his donation toward the removal of the tree and for covering the costs of this issue of the newsletter. ❖





To the Wisteria Wind Sangha and People of Sincerity,

TAKING REFUGE

With these past few years, Covid 19 and its post era, and now war in Ukraine, I've been feeling that our sangha has been in an intermediate period, like a Bardo. You are neither secular nor even Zen. You are like bodiless ghosts who cling onto grasses and trees for support, because you have no foundation. Just floating . . . to nowhere. I do not have the luxury of time that you do. I must remind you to return to the most essential thing in your life – the Practice and Application of authentic upright sitting. The Gatha below confirms the most important teaching of all Buddhas.

The ending two lines of the Ancient Dhammapada – Shoaku Makusa (Refraining from Evil) are:

“Personally, clarifying this mind.
This is the essential teachings of all the Buddhas.”

During this period, some of you sit on Zoom, which is good. The sitting is in the comfort of your home. In the sixties, I said that it took us 10 years to bring Zen into our homes. Now with Zoom, the sitting practice is instantly in your homes. This may be good for people far away, but not for students who live nearby a place to practice. Practicing Zen is beyond the comforts of your home. Being on Sonoma Mountain, you have the discipline of a relentless schedule, you are with other practitioners training in accord with the breath, mind and body, and are sitting in a rare mountain container with your Zen teachers. All this is to free you from your sufferings of likes and dislikes; furthering your efforts which in turn brings forth the depth that is profoundly deep within yourself.

How could the Dharma appear if this was not true?

If you are waiting for the Mountain Seat Ceremony, it is already happening! You have to be here to witness it. For whatever reason, you are in the Bardo. You need to dream the dream that you should do. Even though you think you are free, everything is impermanent.

No matter what you do, you remain in the Palm of Buddha's Hand.

We have practiced here for nearly 50 years. I want to remind you that we are right on the power spot of Sonoma Mountain, where its spirit of energy flows exactly through our land. Being here, you can feel it as the wildlife here confirms it. In ancient times, the power spots are where pyramids, temples and cathedrals were built. Sonoma Mountain is a rare jewel open to everyone.

These last few seasons are my happiest and the most profound. I wish to share this maturity with you, the Wisteria Wind Sangha, the Kannon Sangha, the Natthagi Sangha and People of Sincerity. I can finally explain and demonstrate what sitting upright is from the relative side as well as the absolute. I am not asking you; I am urging you to return to the Mother Temple to receive and share this alive and authentic Dharma. It is closer than you could ever imagine. It is found nowhere else, but within yourself. RETURN!



Dana Paramita

Jakusho Kwong-roshi, Abbot

**Jun 9–Jun 10 "Returning to the Ground of Being"
3-Day Sesshin
On-site + Online**

Jun 9, 6:00 PM – Jun 10, 9:00 PM PDT

Sesshin, literally "to touch the Mind," is a period of time set aside for an intensive meditation retreat to let go of the conditioned self and resume our original nature.

**May 31 Spring Study Group—ON-SITE
(Week 12 of 12)**

7:30 PM – 9:00 PMv

An opportunity to explore the fundamental teachings of Buddhism and build a foundation for daily practice through discussions on the book *Transmission of Light* (Denkoroku): Zen in the Art of Enlightenment" by Zen Master Keizan. Week 12: Pages 219-232 (52) Dogen (53) Ejo

**June 04 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by Erik Zenjin Shearer, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

June 13–14 SMZC Closed

**June 18 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by Michael Zenmen McCulloch, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

**Jun 25 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by David Kize Hirsch, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

July 4 SMZC Closed

**July 9 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Dharma talk will be given by Jakusho Kwong-roshi, founding abbot of SMZC, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)

**July 16 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Talk will be given by Chuck Tensan Ramey, a student of Kwong-roshi and ordained priest, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested donation)



July 18 SMZC Closed

**July 23 Saturday Community
On Site + Online**

10:30 AM – 12:00 PM PDT

Student talk will be given by Mitchell Hoden Katzel, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30 am zazen.
BY DONATION (\$10 suggested minimum donation)

**July 23 Zenshuji's Asian Americans &
The Zen Boom—Growing Up Zen**

5:00 PM – 6:30 PM PDT

Online. Join us for this special online event! SMZC's Vice Abbott and Executive Director Nyoze Kwong joins filmmaker Yoko Okumura for a conversation on "Growing Up Zen."

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: 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>.

RIISING OUT OF THE PANDEMIC — FINANCIAL AND PROJECT UPDATE

by Shunryu Kwong

After two years, the severity of the Covid pandemic has decreased in our communities to the point that masking and testing are no longer needed in many cases. The development of antiviral Covid drugs has also helped keep people out of the hospital. Everyone is breathing a sigh of relief!

The Zen Center now welcomes all vaccinated persons to Sonoma Mountain to practice. Guests and members participating in the Zen Center's upcoming programs can stay overnight at the newly completed Ando Quarters, Genjo Building or Sangha Cabin.

The Zen Center closed in the early days of the pandemic and remained so well into 2021 in an effort to keep everyone safe. This greatly reduced the Zen Center's income and the impact was felt immediately. The Zen Center laid employees off, reduced wages by 75%, applied for the US Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) and the US Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). We also put the Mandala Project and all other nonessential projects on hold. During this time the Zen Center sent out four appeal letters for donations, and the response to each has been phenomenal!

Thanks to the generosity of the Sangha community and friends, the Zen Center has climbed out of its financial hole and stands on stable financial ground. We have restored employee salaries and are resuming projects previously put on hold.

In the next few months work will begin on the following projects:

- Agriculture and Maintenance Building organization, storage and work spaces
- Ando Quarters pathway design build
- Sonoma Mountain Road fence construction

The Zen Center can turn its attention back to the Mandala Project this year and begin fundraising to complete the Inryu Studio, Sangha House Remodel and the new Zendo. Infrastructure for the Zen Center has been completed, so work on these three structures can be started immediately once construction funds are raised. Each dollar donated will go directly toward the design and construction of these buildings.

We share our appreciation for all of you for supporting the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. Come practice and volunteer on the mountain! ❖

KIDS' COMMUNITY—UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

by Taylor Tessendore

All families are invited to join us for the following Saturday programs.

September 10

Clay sculpting

We will begin with a short sit, a mindful walk, then spend the main activity with children collecting leaves or flowers to make nature imprints on the clay or anything they feel inspired to create.

December 10

Mochi Pounding and/or The Way of Tea

with Kashin Kwong. ❖



THE GREAT OAK

by Tom Bergin

I sometimes help a 7-year-old with his first-grade homework. Right now he's learning about adjectives. When I was asked to write a simple article about my experience with volunteering while the Great Oak Tree was being removed, I added another adjective. "I'll write a simple and short article," I responded. I couldn't leave it at "simple"; I had to add "short." Beginner's mind! Though I never read *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, I imagine that even a beginner to Zen practice might just leave it at "simple." I'm always getting in my own way. I didn't check my ego at the door in my response. By adding "short," I am putting my own will into play. I apologize, and I'll take two steps back and try to be simple. My experience with the Great Oak Tree was exactly that—leaving my ego at the door and trying not to get in my own way.

Nyoze spoke about the Great Oak Tree in his dharma talk, and I'm paraphrasing but he quoted someone using the analogy of a pickaxe, about hitting the stump with a pickaxe. "Everyone may have a different way of hitting the stump. Some hit it in a different place, and some hit it with different force, but eventually the job gets done."

That was my experience too, the chipping away until the job got done. But I don't want to write about the job getting done when I was asked to write about my experience. The joy was not in the end result, but in the journey, not to mention the delicious lunches. These were the community aspects of the experience, getting to know some of the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center community members. With everybody working together, there was joy in the process. Ben, Coco, and I were mainly rakers, and fed the branches into the chipper while removing the branches and stumps. There was joy in the process, and for me it's important to remember that there is joy in every process. It is joyful to enjoy the journey, and not worry so much about an end result or destination.

The Great Oak reminds me to be joyful about the journey of life. Part of the experience too was thinking about the oak tree's life, how all things are connected to me and to others. So it came as no surprise that another oak tree on the property fell after the Great Oak Tree was removed, a reminder of the impermanence of all things and the circle of life. We are grateful that we all had something to connect us to the beautiful Great Oak Tree. Thank you for the opportunity to join the community at the Sonoma Zen Center. ❖



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different way of hitting
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job gets done.

—Nyoze



*Oak Tree
Memorial Service
held on April 9, 2022.*



ACKNOWLEDGING OUR OAK TREE VOLUNTEERS

A very special thanks to these trusted volunteers:

Jon Perry climbed and cut down the tree.

Craig Stepanek assisted Jon on the ground with equipment.

Bob Phillips—master arborist and Jon's mentor who lives on Sonoma Mountain helped with his chipper and assisted Jon.

Alex Perrotti did stump grinding.

Scott Singleton—a friend of Nyoze who helped with his excavator.

Tom Bergin and **Coco Mellinger** helped chip and drag brush.

Nyoze, Koten and **Ben** worked all days.

Above: Jon Perry works high in the branches cutting the great oak.

Below: (left) Work crew during removal. (right) Completion of oak tree removal.



ANGO WINTER 2022: SMZC AND INTERNSHIP IN STRZELINKO

by Adela Ji Shin Kuik-Kalinowska

I was glad to be able to practice Zen together, to train One Mind in quite unusual conditions. Since 2020, when the world was facing a global pandemic, we have somehow got used to a new and difficult situation. And yet the possibility of practicing again with the community and under the guidance of Jakusho Kwong-roshi, inheritor of the dharma, and his son Nyoze Kwong filled me with happiness. Even if we are separated by a great distance, thanks to modern technology it could be overcome. Especially during the pandemic, practicing together with the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center has been a gift and challenge. I gratefully accepted the gift of practicing together in such a difficult time, and all the efforts made for us to surrender to what never passes away, beyond the earthly and material. I was aware that what I started as a young girl now seems to be a treasure to which I know the way back, and have known for many years. How grateful I am that the karma of this life was written so early.

I regret to admit that I did not participate in angō in its entirety, because of everyday life and duties. But if someone were to ask me if this distant collaborative practice makes sense, I would answer yes without hesitation. Discipline and precision mobilized my efforts during angō here in northern Poland. We were together,

united by the same effort, the bell announcing rounds of zazen, bowing, singing and Okesa.

The image especially embedded in my heart is the ritual where Nyoze bowed before the Buddha mat. He seemed so absorbed in this activity completely, almost like real and unreal, body and spirit at once, Zen teacher and water tiger. Soft and focused, unmoving as marble. This figure in zazen, filled to the brim with peace, is discipline and its consequence.

Ango 2022 also brought back to me very well known spaces—old asparagus in stone pots, an old friend from visiting Sonoma Mountain for angō 1999 and rohatsu in 2005. As if he hadn't aged, the green guardian of the zendo. The wood smelled warm and cordial, as if I were really physically with you. And of course the two altar guards, the old lamps with their intimate glow envelop the figure of Mandziusri on the lion. My zendo in Strzelinko smelled like the Sonoma Mountain zendo. I wanted to be with you and I was. I wanted to experience unity, and it just happened.

*And though the old plum tree
she can be tired and lazy
her flowers never stop ... ❖*

WINTER ANGO 2022

by Sheryl Gyonyo Hamilton

Winter Ango was my first visit back to the Zen Center since February 2020. I live in British Columbia, Canada so getting down to California hasn't seemed possible until now. Two years is a long time to stay away, and I was very happy to get back and practice in person with everyone. My time at the Zen Center seemed to wash away some of the difficulties of the pandemic, and it was a wonderful relief to be back in community without masks. I was very grateful to be allowed to return.

I especially appreciated sitting in the zendo again, working in the garden and in the kitchen, visiting the stupas and just being on the land. I am sure many of you have also experienced how great it is to have your feet on that land after a time away. It was very special to see everyone again. I feel a deep gratitude to everyone who worked hard to keep things going at the Zen Center. It was a helpful resource for me during lockdown and I feel so lucky that it is still there performing its dharma function.

It being springtime, there was a lot to do in the garden, weeding and bringing things back to life. Weeding became a great metaphor for practice, and I appreciated Suzuki-

roshi's words from his classic Zen Mind Beginner's Mind:

"If you have some experience of how the weeds in your mind change into mental nourishment, your practice will make remarkable progress. You will feel the progress. You will feel how they change into self-nourishment."

Ango was a difficult and wonderful time of weeding and nourishment for me. I feel like there are an awful lot of weeds around, and Zen practice seems to be the one thing that really helps. I left Ango feeling much renewed, and hope that we all get a chance to return in person soon. ❖

*Gosia Myoju
Sieradzka-Imhoff
gives online
morning reading
during Winter
Ango from
Warsaw, Poland.*



ZEN DUST NEWS

by Janet Myoho Buckendahl

Now that Covid restrictions have been lifted and we are open to fully vaccinated members and guests on site, Zen Dust is open again on Saturday Community mornings after the dharma talk.

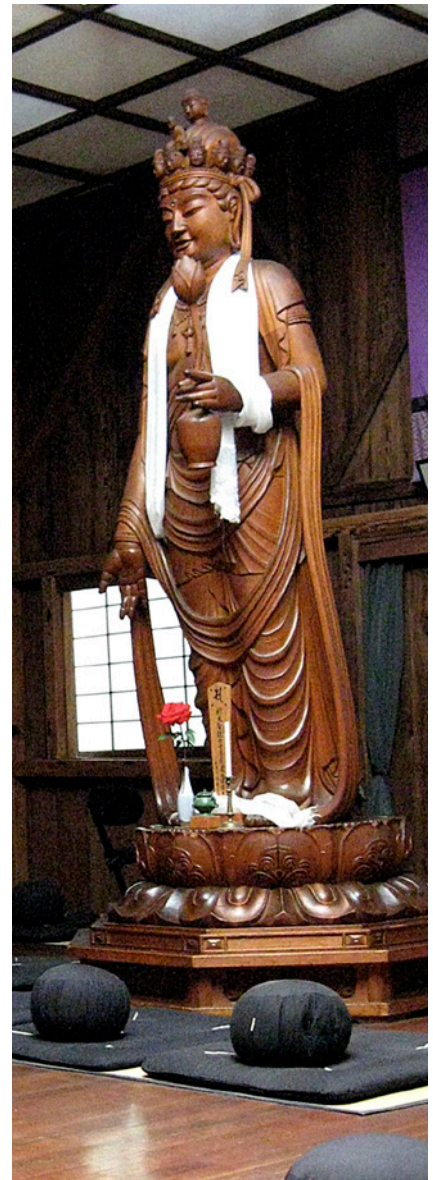
I have been busy restocking after two years of being closed except for online sales. We have a plentiful supply of statues, incense, bowls, and malas, and a good selection of books and cards. Zafus and zabutons were much in demand during the closure and are still available in the store.

We also have Roshi's latest calligraphy for the Year of the Tiger, which is offered for a \$20 donation.

If you are thinking of setting up a home altar, looking for your favorite incense, or a new mala, please come in and browse. We look forward to seeing you soon. ❖

My hut is at the top of Hsia Summit
few visitors brave the cliffs and ravines
lugging firewood to market I slip on the moss
hauling rice back up I drip with sweat
with no end to desire less is better
with limited time why be greedy
this old monk doesn't mean to cause trouble
he just wants people to let go

— Stonehouse



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the Buddhadharma!

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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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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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and Awakening of All Beings”



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