



October – December 2024

Everything Is Here!

This lecture was given by Kwong-roshi at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center on July 20, 2024.

I'd like to welcome everyone on this warm morning. I didn't prepare anything for today, but you should know that this hall is the only official Zen hall in this area, and the emphasis is to find self-liberation from the suffering that you see everywhere, which is promoted by greed, anger, and ignorance. This is the same since the time of the Buddha 2,589 years ago. When you come here, you should know this is not a place for entertainment. You should not be afraid of discipline. Discipline is training; it's preparation to find what you really have inside. Since birth, we've been conditioned to the material, to the relative world. We see things as good and bad. We separate things. That's what we're taught. It starts after birth when we're taught that nourishment is outside of ourselves. School confirms that separation. Everything is outside—that's why we don't look in. People train their bodies, but no one trains their minds, because people are ignorant about how the mind controls the body. Wherever you go, you take your mind, and with your mind depending on your greed, anger, and ignorance, you create karma. You cannot get out of it. There is no way out but in. That's the missing thing, looking inside.

Maybe for some it's very strange, because we always look outside. I saw, just briefly, a Chinese archaeologist in China where I guess they were able to open up the tombs of the emperors and find all these relics and treasures. But actually what they're doing is pilfering! What is said most

of the time is not that this tomb has been pilfered—but you are a pilferer also.

On TV we see people doing something good, picking up litter on beaches all over the world. That's a good action, but who actually created it? We never look at the people who did the littering with the fullness of their greed, anger, and ignorance. So you're doing good, but actually the litter is the symptom; the cause is us—we are the cause of climate change, not Amazon.com. Hojo-san told me in Iceland they are building a huge structure, maybe ten times larger than the zendo or more, that purifies the air. Iceland already has the best air, but they are building one there although pollution is caused by big companies like Amazon. I mean, even I'm an Amazon customer because it's convenient, it's easy, but everyone is feeding that and cannot stop, because everyone is involved in it. How can you stop it? You can try to stop it, or you can refrain from it here (pointing to himself). This is what you have to work on. Like, say there is a family where one child is having difficulty. They say, you should go see a therapist, but it's actually the whole family that is part of that difficulty. It goes back to the parents and the other kids.

I can't stress enough how important it is to work on yourself in a zendo hall like this. There's no other place. All the other places are entertainment. Then all of a sudden you're going to die, and then what? I mean it's frightening! You should work on yourself because that's where it all comes from. There's no other place and there's no other time.

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Since 2022, three continents are experiencing extreme heat, and 90 percent of the people who die from it are over sixty. They're part of us. Actually, my son gave me something from Kaiser about how heat affects older people, and it starts when you're 40 or 45. Cam said to drink a lot of water. Start drinking a lot of water, but know that heat can be your friend also. Our bodies are not what they used to be, we cannot push; we have to appreciate our bodies and when you are in a hurry, slow down and just feel the cup in your hand. Feel the the cup on the table (picks up a cup of water) and enjoy it. That's why Zen emphasizes the moment. The past has not arrived, nor is the future coming. The moment is the only thing we have. Once you experience that, it's gone. Even once you experience self-liberation, that's gone too. Nothing is permanent. We want to keep it—that's what we are taught—because we think it's something outside of ourselves. That's how we have been conditioned through schooling, and whatever you do after, looking for a job or going to college, which is more conditioning.

Then you get a job, you raise a family and have kids, you think you're happy. But the father has to drive fifty miles to San Francisco every day in heavy traffic so that it takes hours of daily travel just to support the family. What does that do to a person? It kills your spirit. You're supposed to be happy because you paid for your car or your home, but are you? It's really sad, you don't see many older happy people at Kaiser. It's really nothing to smile about. These are the casualties of this affluent society where we have everything.

The Buddha predicted—this could be a metaphor or it could be an absolute—that after he died almost 2,600 years ago, there would be 500 years of true dharma: dharma in action, the realization of dharma, authentic dharma. The next 1,000 years would be just a resemblance of dharma. And 1,000 more years, or 2,500 years, where we are now, would be the degeneration of the ultimate truth of the Buddhadharma. But it's not just the Buddhadharma, it's the entire world. Everything is falling apart. There's no ethics, there's no guidelines for people to grow, there's no foundation. Our presidents should be an example for society! We can laugh about it, but it's a really sad situation. They are the examples for our children.

You have to train to turn it around. Turning around is a training condition. Like it or not, there is no other way. If you can find another way, please tell me. You have to unravel your own condition. Each person's condition is different; you have to unravel that condition so you are free from who you think you are. Who you think you are is the condition—that's what you have to work with. It's not something we have to be ashamed of or anything, but what we have to do. I urge you to do it, because soon you are guaranteed to die, and we don't know how soon or later it will be.

The Karmapa in the Tibetan tradition, who had never been out of Tibet, was taken by Trungpa's Shambhala sangha to New York City for the first time, and when he got to the top of the Empire State Building, he started crying, when he saw all those people and realized they would die in ignorance.

Within this darkness, there is light. It's the principle of the universe. Within their sadness, there's a little laughter. If it wasn't like that, the whole universe would perish. There's the sun and there's the moon. There's lightness and there's darkness, female and male. In Zen there's the five skandhas that you chant in the Heart Sutra: form, sensation, perception, discrimination which also means memory and consciousness. Those five create the idea of who you think you are. In Sanskrit, skandhas mean "scattering," but in Chinese and Japanese kanji characters, it says five bundles. In scattering, there's a bundle. When you sit zazen, when you're completely where you are, those five skandhas dissolve, and there's a bundle, you're free.

In Zen we are going against the stream of conditioning. "Za" in "zazen" means sit. Suzuki-roshi used the phrase "just sit." This is better because when you're just sitting, that's the only thing you're doing. No thinking, no enlightenment, no Zen, nothing, just sitting. That's when you're liberated and actually feel the depth of calmness that's here. You already have it when you sit, and that's why people like to sit, but someone needs to point it out, and still you have to have the direct experience of Buddha's insight. Otherwise we perish just like everyone else.

So in a nutshell, in Zen, or even if we don't call it Zen, humanity needs this realization. We don't need to conquer the world; we don't need to control the world; we don't need to control or make climate change, because we're looking for the change inside. It's all inside here, not out there. It's easier to say it's not my fault, it's out there, but we're all involved. So to live as a true human being, you have to realize the subject and object are not in conflict. They contain each other, and in just sitting, those opposites are dissolved. That's the purpose of Zen. When they're dissolved, you have been liberated from yourself and from all things we think we own or attach to. We are liberated, and we have the ability, the capacity to help other people.

It has already happened, but you have not realized it. It is not far away. It's too near to even think it's that close. You realize it because you have it; if you didn't have it, you couldn't realize it. It's here that you recognize out there.

The skandhas are the bundle, the doorway. That's what liberation is—from the five skandhas, scattering. Mind is chaotic, can't concentrate, can't focus, can't see straight. Here's an example. In the Lankavatara Sutra there are three realities: imagined reality, dependent reality, and perfected reality. Imagined reality is what I explained already, our whole life is about conditioning. In the Lankavatara Sutra

we have the analogy of the snake and the rope. Because we can't see straight and divide things, which causes suffering, most people don't see the rope, they see the snake. That's what you see, what you buy into. You see the snake but you don't see the rope.

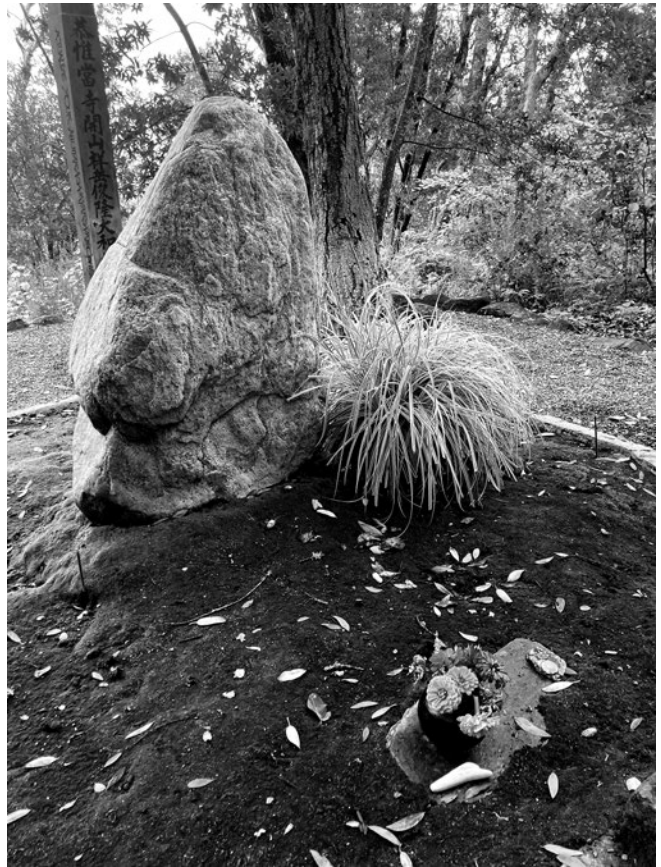
Then there is dependent reality, which is a little bit better because we see things as inter-dependent. We see the whole web of imagined reality on top of dependent reality. We can actually identify the difference between the rope and the snake. But because we give it a name, it remains an arbitrary designation. It's just a name, separate from reality, until you have direct experience of reality. And finally there's perfected reality, where you see things as they are. There's no projection. The truth is ineffable, but we could say "it is and it isn't." I mean (hits table) this is a table, but I named it and I use it. So it isn't just a table; it's part of you, and if it's part of you, you treat it differently. You don't throw it around, or drag it. The table serves me and I'm happy with it. It is an object, but it's alive. It helps you stay alive, and you appreciate its existence. So it is, and it isn't. Conventionally it is; non-conventionally, or in Zen, it isn't, because we haven't realized what this table actually is. That's it in a nutshell.

I think that's enough. I'm open for questions.

Student: I just want to say that when we chant the Heart Sutra, it's everything that you talked about. Instead of just reading the words and going through the motions, I think that for myself, I need to pay attention to it as a reminder that everything that you've said in your talk today is in the Heart Sutra. The skandhas, everything is in there. And I think that when we do it, we need to really pay attention to it.

Roshi: Yeah, including myself. Even though I'm Chinese, I had a bad education in Chinese when I was young. I was beaten a lot, and it was very painful. We were locked in a room and we couldn't write, we couldn't recite. It was very difficult. And we had to do this after school. So I rebelled. But just lately I have this screen that Bumju, the artist who painted the Bodhidharma scroll, gave me. He gave it to me really quickly when we were leaving his studio, and then he gave me another one really quickly. Two Heart Sutras. The first one I framed, but I found out it was only a sketch. He was just trying to get the spacing and how many letters in each line. The second one is the one in the Genjo cabin. I can trace some of it, and when I came to the five skandhas and looked it up, it's the five bundles. How did the Chinese and Japanese get five bundles out of something scattering? It implies that opposites coexist. In zazen, they dissolve each other. That's it.

Hojo-san is teaching everyone to chant in unison, because in unison there is strength. There's a oneness in the voice. You are not just an individual, one star in the galaxy. All these stars co-exist together. We are interdependent,



In Zen we are going against the stream of conditioning. "Za" in "zazen" means sit. Suzuki-roshi used the phrase "just sit." This is better because when you're just sitting, that's the only thing you're doing. No thinking, no enlightenment, no Zen, nothing, just sitting.

and we make a galaxy. That's what we are doing in chanting. The chants are primordial sounds. Chanting is creating the environment for you to be reborn, you could say. All the forms that we do here are not about ceremony. They are about finding yourself. This simple gesture (puts hands together in gassho) is the most important gesture in humanity. Everyone does it. They put their palms together when something is good, when something is true. They clap when they're happy. And in religion, in ceremony, they put their palms together and don't even know what they're doing.

I did this experiment. At the dentist's office, I asked the technician to do the gassho with me as humanity's best gesture. We acknowledged each other, as in Zen. We look and then we bow, universally. We bow on the exhalation. Hey, let's do it together. Okay, we see each other, and we bow on the exhalation. We do it slowly. When you reach the very end, your thinking mind stops, and you come up with that feeling. No one teaches that; it is lost. See? Your thinking mind has stopped. It's not impossible. And now you might think about how many times you exhale during zazen. You will go to the same place, just remembering, like you said, remembering that's what happens at the end of the exhalation. That is self-liberation. And it will grow, but it takes training to remember. And in time, you will embody the form.

(Roshi sits completely still in silence.) There's no thinking, because you are embodying, you are becoming the form. Okay?

You know, all these statues and images of the Buddhadharma, we think of them as outside of ourselves. But actually they represent aspects of ourselves. Over there is the God of War. But that god in the Chinese tradition means peace, not war. The God of War represents peace. And that peace is not outside you, it's within here (touches chest).

And Avalokitesvara, she is not over there, she's here (touches chest). Everything is here! The person next to you is a Buddha. Everyone is a Buddha. Everything is a Buddha right next to you. Even the altar is a Buddha. The floor is a Buddha. And she (Avalokitesvara), if you look closely at her, you can see by the faces on the crown that she went through hell. Each face is not a smiling face. But because she wears it as a crown it means that everything is workable. Anything is workable. As you go around the crown, from the hell faces around, they express less anguish, less greed, and less ignorance. And then a Buddha appears, a Buddha on top of her head. She becomes the Buddha. So what I'm saying is that it is not far. It's not India, it's not Japan, it's not China. It's here. Trungpa Rinpoche said that the dharma would come over here, but actually that was just upaya, skillful means, because the dharma's already here. How could anything come over here, if it wasn't here to begin with?



And Avalokitesvara,
she is not over there,
she's here (touches chest).
Everything is here!
The person next to you
is a Buddha.
Everyone is a Buddha.

Student: This morning after the work period, I was sitting in the Sangha House and reflecting on the first Noble Truth, the truth of suffering. That's a fact, not an opinion. It's a fact that cannot escape anyone's notice. In Christianity, the image of Christ on the cross speaks to the suffering of all beings. I thought of the image of Avalokitesvara in this hall, how her head is split into myriad heads hearing the suffering of the world. Those two images, Christ on the cross and Avalokitesvara, suffering and compassion, it seems like they are one, inseparable. Do you have any observations on that?

Roshi: There's no observation, because even delusion and enlightenment are inseparable. Those are the opposites I'm talking about: suffering and compassion, delusion and enlightenment. In fact, when I was younger and read the Four Noble Truths—the first Noble Truth that life is suffering—I said I'm not sure I like this. (Laughter) I mean, when you hear it, it's not very inviting. But it's the truth, and in other words, other times, other writings, you'll hear that the first Noble Truth is life is impermanent. That's the same as suffering. Because we never think of impermanence. Someday this Earth will perish, at the rate we're going. I'm afraid to say so; humans will all die. We're not doing any better. We have fancy cars. People do rap music with all kinds of gestures. At night they turn on their iPhones and have all these lights and joy and entertainment, but it's just a moment. I'm not saying we can't enjoy things. When you enjoy something, enjoy it. But it won't last very long. It won't make you really happy before you die.

Student: Many of us at the Zen Center came from down below. We drive up, have a nice time up here, and then drive home. Any suggestions or recommendations on how to bring what we have learned here into our daily lives as we go down the mountain, back home to our families?

Roshi: As you go down the mountain, you're thinking of your obligations, or you're thinking of something else instead of enjoying the ride. Hey, the road is smooth now. Did you notice that? (Laughter) No kidding. For fifty years it's never been smooth. When we first moved here, it was even worse. Potholes! I said, they should fix the road. But the longer I stay here, I hope they never fix the road, because people will drive faster, including me. And there will be more cars. I think the most important thing is the hall, where you do the work. That's the most important thing. And whatever happens when you drive down, to just be with your family. You will see how it evolves, how it reflects your practice in the hall. When you get home, do you shout "No, I didn't say that!"? There is a spaciousness. It just reflects. Enjoy the moment you are going down as you drive. Even your hands on the steering wheel, you know, we forget to do that. Then there is less thinking. Because there is no need to think until you get there, you know.

Student: I don't remember who, but I heard someone say that the feelings and ideas and perspectives in doing zazen and embracing Zen can't be explained, only experienced. Is that the same kind of idea that you are talking about? The sense of coming into the hall and doing that work to figure out your own self?

Roshi: It's not figuring out, it's letting go. On the exhalation we let it go. It's on the exhalation where the strength is, where you chop with an axe. Or engage with someone. It's on the exhalation when you let go of your thinking. You disappear on the exhalation. We need to refine that. Not independently, but with a group of people, because it makes a strong body. Not only are you doing it by yourself; you are with other beings doing the same thing. It's right here (hits table). Isn't that a relief? But you have to show up. Most people don't show up; it's too hard. They say, I'd rather do my own thing. But that's why the Zen container is very strict. You can't pick and choose in the Zen container. When you pick and choose, you create karma. You create greed, anger, and ignorance. I'm sorry to say this. But think about it—it's true. ❖

Theme for Summer Ango 2024

Shuso – Tokan (Just Clarify)
Toku Craig Stepanek



THE PLACE OF PRACTICE

from the book *"Tea Life, Tea Mind"*
by Soshitsu Sen XV

In the time of the Buddha, a man was walking deep in the mountains in search of a place where he could discipline himself to understand his spirit. While searching he chanced upon one of Buddha's disciples.

"Sir, from where do you come?" he asked. The disciple answered directly, "I've come from my place of practice." Thinking that this man knew of the very place for which he had been searching, he asked the disciple, "Sir, I am looking for that same place. Please take me there." The disciple answered, "The place of practice lies in the pure and honest spirit where there is no false vanity." Startled, the man saw that the place of practice and discipline is not only seen with the eyes. The place of practice is the spirit. The spirit searches to enlighten itself. It does not matter whether it is a room where one practices tea or meditates. Any place that is peaceful is the place where you can find your own spirit.

Shuso Interview With Tokan Craig Stepanek

by Genzen Cadman

Congratulations, Tokan, on having been chosen as Shuso to help lead the Summer Ango! Before the Ango began, you chose a theme to serve as a foundation for the teachings you would give in a series of talks. What was your theme, why did you choose it, and what are some of the insights you gained in communicating it to the Sangha?

I chose “The Place of Practice” after reading *Tea Life, Tea Mind* by Soshitsu Sen XV, the fifteenth grand master of the Urasenke Tea School. His words speak directly to the importance of this place in our lives. This place of practice is not a destination to a specific location. Rather, it exists everywhere in bringing the spirit of practice into our lives. “The place of practice is the spirit.” This spirit includes humility, especially in asking our teachers for help and guidance along the way.

As Shuso, what is a special memory can you share with us about your day-to-day practice during Ango?

I was especially moved by the opportunity to participate in all the periods of zazen during Ango. As the head student, my responsibility was to sit facing outward to the center of the hall, while the participants faced the wall. This is the tradition in Soto Zen. I could observe the upright posture and diligence of everyone present. Feeling the silence and stillness brought me a deep sense of the seamless expansiveness of us all as one body and one mind. It was a privilege to be moving together each day in this spirit which went beyond our individual selves.

As Shuso, you offered a reading for reflection to those present after the morning and midday meals. What were some of the sources for your readings?

I read mainly from two books by John Daido Looi: *The Heart of Being* and *Riding the Ox Home*. And I also read from *Ring of the Way* by Taisen Desimaru, and *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi.

Could you tell us about the experience of an unexpected sight, sound, or insight you may have received as you moved through your steady schedule during Ango?

Walking back to my room at night, I would often stop and gaze up at the stars. The constellations of blazing light in the darkness seemed to stretch beyond East and West. Each night the sense of One Sky Mind filled the air.

Many Sangha members were able to meet with you individually in a practice discussion either in person or via computer using Zoom. What were some of the topics you all considered and shared?

In meeting with individual members of our Sangha, I would often discuss with them how to deepen their Zen practice. We would consider how to relate our practice to the everyday world and develop the art of encounter-



Shuso Tokan receives the Shippei from Hojo san during the Ango Closing ceremony.

ing the present moment. These meetings actually inspired two of my Shuso talks, one on forms of practice, the other on gratitude and forgiveness.

Can you give us a sense of how you experienced the dharma encounter, or Mondo, on the closing day?

Yes, I was beside myself with joy at having this one last encounter with everyone under the universal bodhi tree of this moment.

How did you experience the Shuso party on the final evening of Ango, when the Shuso is celebrated and congratulated?

I experienced the Shuso party as a very relaxed and intimate celebration of everyone's efforts to make this Ango the place of peaceful dwelling and insight.

You are not only a resident of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, but also an ordained monk. Could you share with us how you imagine your experience as Shuso might influence your future contributions as a resident and priest?

I know I will continue to expand my network of friends and fellow pilgrims as I continue to deepen my connections with the Sangha. And I know I will experience continuing gratitude to Kwong-roshi for his presence and perseverance all along the way. ❖

Genjo-Ji Thoughts

by Noel McKenna

I traveled to Genjoji from Boston, Massachusetts, to take part in the Ango sesshin. I have been having dokusan regularly with Roshi for about two years, and finally made the journey. I am filled with joy, and planning my next visit.

I came to Soto Zen via the Tibetan (Kagyu) tradition, and was a monk for eleven years. My first experiences with zazenkai and sesshin were at Pioneer Valley Zendo in Charlemont, Massachusetts. I would visit regularly, traveling from my monastery in upstate New York. Currently I practice with a small Sanbo Kyodan group that traces its lineage to Harada-Yasutani via Aitken Roshi.

The day before sesshin began, I was working in the Zen Center's garden pulling weeds during work practice (samu). Hojo-san approached and asked if I would be willing to take on a role in the zendo during sesshin, asking what kinds of experience I had previously. I told him I had some experience as Ino (oversees zendo practice) and Jikido (cares for zendo and altar). We decided that I would shadow the current Jikido during that evening's zazen/service, and I would take over the next morning. So I had an abbreviated crash course. My first thought was about the limited experience I was bringing. How would I remember all of this? So terrifying! But sometimes we are invited to jump into the fire, so jump!

I made a lot of mistakes, because I couldn't figure out when to time the strikes of the densho (smaller zendo bell) at the beginning of each zazen period. This was very uncomfortable, and in the silence of sesshin this discomfort felt very loud. The Shuso Tokan explained in the kindest way to listen to the strikes of the bonsho (large temple bell). A certain pattern of strikes was the cue to strike the densho. Listening to the bonsho felt like surrender, the call and response so beautiful. This was especially poi-

gnant after chanting the Four Bodhisattva Vows at the end of evening zazen, the low resonant tones of the bonsho emerging from the night, inviting us to be awake.

The first few days of sesshin were so difficult, like being boiled alive. Hojo-san addressed this in a talk on the third day. He said that Roshi often said that on the third day we feel like we are being cooked, because surrendering to the Zen forms invites us to let go of conditioned mind. That can be painful, as most of our lives are navigated with conditioned mind. We hold on so habitually.

Zazen posture, kinhin (walking meditation), bowing, chanting, oryoki (formal meals), samu, and the Jikido role invited me to witness discomfort and resistance, and to let go. In the silence of sesshin, a truth dawns that there is no wiggle room, no escape. The only choice is to witness this reality as it unfolds, to be here in the middle of it and be open to whatever happens. We recognize that there is no separation between us and reality. Together, in silence and stillness we explore such intimacy. It felt like my heart was breaking open.

In what seemed like the space between an exhalation and inhalation, it was my last full day of sesshin. I was sad to leave, yet at the same time feeling such joy, which arises now as I write this. ❖

Right: Members chant during oryoki meal in Ango sesshin.

Below: Group photo following the Ango Closing.



Oct 26 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

Perfect for beginners wishing to learn meditation form. Meditation is a way to calm the mind and find balance in your daily life. Join us for our regular 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 Tensan Chuck Ramey)
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Talk will be given by Tensan Chuck Ramey, Leading Teacher of South Sound Zen in Tacoma, Washington, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen, 11:00 am–12:00 pm Talk.

Oct 26– Rev. Myousin Takeuchi
Nov 26 Visiting from Japan

Please welcome and come practice with Rev. Myousin — a nun from Kasuisai in Shizuoka Prefecture. She will be staying at SMZC from October 28 to November 26.

Oct 29 Fall Study Group (Week 4 of 8)
On-site or Online
 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM PDT

Explore the fundamental teachings of Buddhism and build a foundation for daily practice through discussions on the book “The Diamond Sutra and The Sutra of Hui-neng” translated by A. F. Price & Wong Mou-lam.

Nov 1–2 1-Day Sitting
‘Peacefully Settling Down’
 Nov 01, 6:00 PM PD – Nov 02, 5:30 PM PDT

This retreat is an introduction to Zen training and an opportunity for beginners and experienced sitters to plunge into the heart of Zen practice. RSVP and we will email you to complete your registration. \$85–160/night. 10–20% discount for members.

Nov 4 SMZC Closed

Nov 5 Fall Study Group (Week 5 of 8)
On-site or Online
 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, October 29.

Nov 9 Saturday Community
(Talk by Jakusho Kwong-roshi)
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

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

Jukai (To Receive The Precepts)
On-site

Nov 09, 2024, 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM PST

Please join us for our Jukai Ceremony. Jukai is the ceremony of formally becoming a Buddhist and of taking the 16

Bodhisattva precepts as guidelines for life. Free admission. Open to the public. Please bring celebratory snacks/finger food.

Nov 12 Fall Study Group (Week 6 of 8)
On-site or Online
 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, October 29.

Nov 15 November Fusatsu Ceremony
On-site + Online
 7:30 PM–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.

Nov 16 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, Oct 26.

Kids Community Monthly
On-site, Garden
 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join us for a delightful morning, here on the mountain. Led by our sangha member Kristin ‘Misan’ Nichols. \$15 admission/person (child or accompanying parent)

Saturday Community
(Talk by Nyoze Kwong)
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

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

Nov 19 Fall Study Group (Week 7 of 8)
On-site or Online
 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, October 29.

Nov 23 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, Oct 26.

Saturday Community
(Talk by Lizbeth ‘Myoko’ Hamlin)
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Talk will be given by Lizbeth ‘Myoko’ Hamlin, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen, 11:00 am–12:00 pm Talk.

Nov 26 Fall Study Group (Week 8 of 8)
On-site or Online
 7:30 PM – 9:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, October 29.

**Nov 30 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, Oct 26.

**Kids Community Monthly
On-site, Garden**

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

See description in previous event, Nov 16.

**Saturday Community
(Talk by Zenki Traustason)
On-site + Online**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Talk will be given by Zenki Traustason, Leading Teacher of Natthagi Zen Center in Reykjavik, Iceland, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen, 11:00 am–12:00 pm Talk.

**Dec 1–2 Rohatsu 5-Day Sesshin
(1 to 5 Overnights)
On-site + Online**

Dec 02, 6:00 PM PST – Dec 07, 8:00 AM PST

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 via online invoice. \$85/night & up. 10–20% discount for members.

**Dec 6 Tetsuya: All-Night Sitting &
Founder's Sunrise Ceremony
On-site + Online**

Dec 06, 7:00 PM PST – Dec 07, 8:00 AM PST

In the spirit of Buddha's enlightenment, on Friday night we will be in tetsuya, which means we will "sit through the whole night," from 12:00 am to 4:00 am. \$25 admission

**Dec 7 Founder's Sunrise Ceremony
On-site**

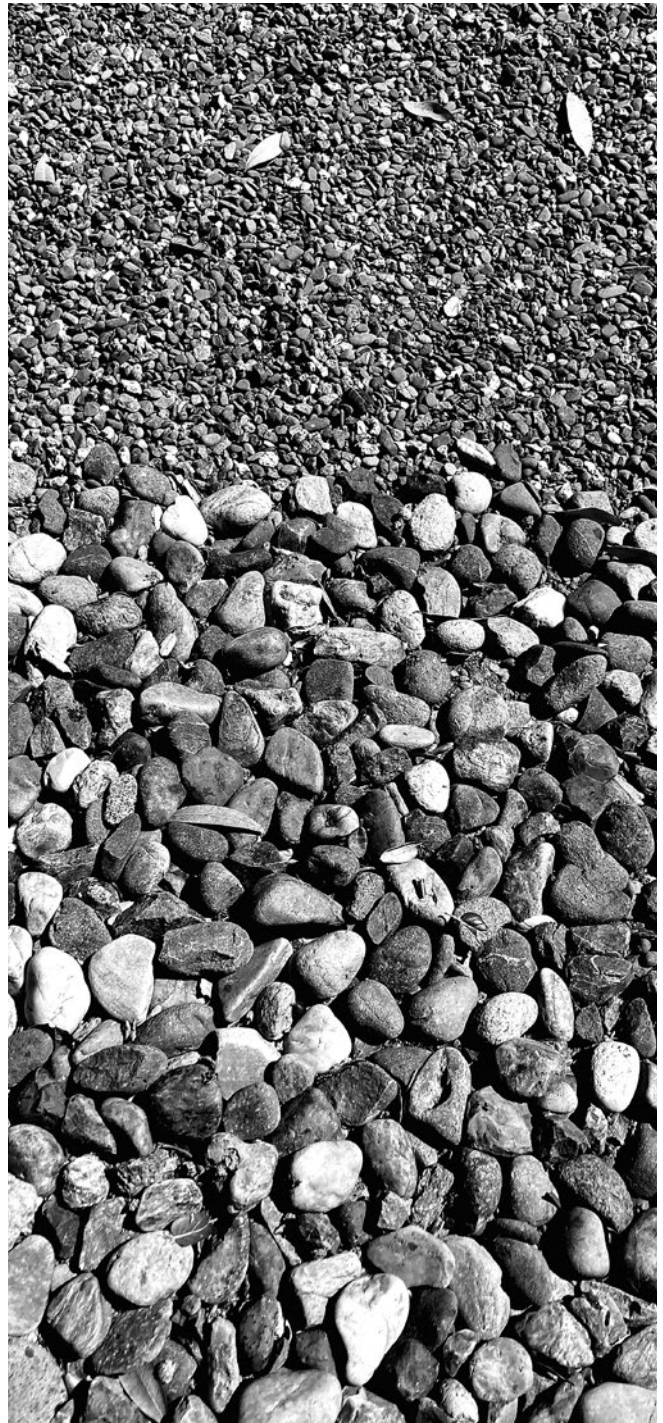
6:00 AM – 8:00 AM PST

Sangha members, families and friends are invited to attend our annual Founder's Sunrise Ceremony at 6:00am. By donation.

**Dec 31– Ringing in the New Year:
Jan 21 Welcoming 2025 Year of the Snake
On-site**

Dec 31, 10:30 PM PST – Jan 01, 1:00 AM PST

A wonderful chance to get together and renew our commitment to practice for the New Year. Onsite only event (not available online).



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>.

Valley Sounds From Windsor Zen

by Katsuzen King

The Windsor Zen Group, located ten miles north of Santa Rosa, continues its offerings despite several location changes over the past few years. We began as a small sitting group with two in-person sittings per month in a cozy yoga studio in Windsor. Fast-forward ten years, and our post-pandemic schedule now features seven online sittings a week and a hybrid in-person sitting once a month at the Finley Community Center in Santa Rosa.

Over time we've expanded our online activities to include dharma talks, the Full Moon Bodhisattva ceremony, chanting services, and World Peace and Well-being ceremonies. We've also been strengthening our Sangha connections through a "My Path to Zen" series, where members introduce themselves and share their journey to Zen practice.

We are also involved in outreach at the U.S. southern border, primarily in Tijuana, Mexico. Over the past five years, I've made three or four visits a year to offer workshops and classes in meditation, mindfulness, and self-defense techniques at migrant shelters, community kitchens, an Aikido dojo, and a large orphanage, Casa Hogar de los Niños. Most of these venues are in marginalized areas of the city, bringing these teachings to people who might not otherwise have access to them.

One of the highlights of our efforts in Tijuana has been the creation of an organic garden at Casa Hogar de los Niños. The long-term goal of the Huerto de Niños project is to teach children the value of healthy nutrition and how to care for an organic garden that provides food for the children, staff, and neighboring community. Since July 2023 we've offered classes in sustainable gardening and composting, created a spiral-shaped permaculture herb garden, and planted vegetables and fruit trees. Our next step is to build a large chicken coop to provide eggs for the orphanage.

Another accomplishment has been establishing Centro Zen Tijuana, the first Zen Buddhist organization in the city. One of CZT's initial community services is the Thursday morning sitting group at the Francisco Eusebio Kino Library, organized and led by Aurora Boreal. The group consists of ladies from a reading club who sit together for thirty minutes, practice walking meditation, and discuss Zen-related texts.

It's wonderful to offer these teachings to the citizens of Tijuana, as well as to our local and extended Sanghas. You are welcome to join us for our Sunday practice or during the week. Our daily online sittings are held at 7 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, with evening sittings on Tuesday and Thursday at 8 p.m. Our online Spanish group meets Tuesday mornings at 7:30 a.m. For more information about our group and current schedule of events, please contact me at flacoking@aol.com. ❖



Top: Katsuzen leads walking meditation at the Borderline Crisis Center in Tijuana's Zona Norte.

Middle: Ricardo Arana and volunteers complete the spiral garden at Casa Hogar de los Niños.

Bottom: Giovanni learns zazen at Casa Hogar de los Niños.



New To The Sangha

by Shindo Souza

We offer a warm welcome to the following new members of our community.

Craig Vercruysse, Portland, Oregon.

Having served as a healthcare administrator for Sutter Health based in San Francisco, I continue to build upon my 15 years of learning and applying Japanese management methods to the fields of healthcare and public health. I serve as an advisor, coach, and builder of organizations dedicated to serving the well-being of all. A Chicago native, I married Alison in 1999, and our son Asher was born in 2012. Together we enjoy traveling, cooking, hiking, and other outdoor activities. I was raised Catholic and received a Jesuit education at Loyola University Chicago, which exposed me to many religions and spiritual practices from around the world. Based on my study of Japanese management and affinity for Japanese culture, I wish to deepen my broad practice of mindfulness-based meditation. I participated in the Tetsuya and Founder's Ceremony in December and had a profound experience that brought me to become a member of the SMZC Sangha.

Sahil Cavallaro, Sacramento

I was born in Pittsburgh and raised in part by my grandparents, who exposed me early to nature in the Allegheny mountains and the teaching that nature is the vehicle of God, who could be found in all living things. I was raised on Long Island, NY, where I developed a passion for the ocean. My first exposure to Zen was while writing haiku poetry in my teens, when I taught myself crude meditation. In my fifties I took up martial arts, and eventually became interested in Kyudo (Zen archery) with Zen Mountain Monastery in New York under Sensei Ryushin. Studying with Kyudo teachers Don Semanski and Lucy Halverson deepened my Zen practice, and it was then that I was introduced to the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center more than eleven years ago. I moved to Northern California to be closer to my teachers and SMZC. I always find enlightenment on the mountain, particularly when I have the privilege of meeting with Kwong-roshi, and while participating in daily monastery practice. I express my reflections on Zen in my practice as a clinical psychologist with the Air Force and in my poetry and collage art.

Dan Herskee, Novato

I live with my partner Alan in Novato and am currently an independent appraiser of Asian art. I have studied various schools of Buddhism for a relatively long time, but never joined a temple before. I very much appreciate everyone's patience while I learn the SMZC ropes! ❖

Ango Reflections

by Itay Sharf

Every evening, watching the sunset over the mountains at Sonoma Mountain Zen Center was a very special experience for me.

I arrived at the Zen Center from Israel for twelve days. I got to know the Zen Center four and a half years ago during Covid. I was very happy to be able to practice with you online, and since then I haven't stopped.

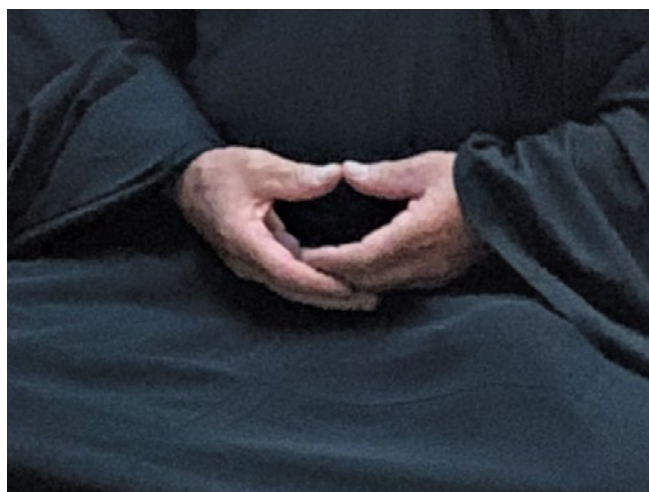
Over the years, I've learned to recognize the various sounds that arise during zazen practice: doors moving in the wind, birds, roosters (how it sounds to me), passing cars, and more. At the first zazen session I participated in, it was exciting to hear these sounds live.

We were a group of practitioners who bravely left their habits to learn and open to entirely new things: eating style, time management, silence, and not making personal choices about tasks, among other things. The first few days were challenging, as expected, but as the days went by, we became a group that learned to get to know each other (without words) and function as one, which occasionally allowed us to agree to put self aside, enabling us to get closer to our true nature.

Each of us who participated in the practice will never forget this powerful experience. No matter how many times we go through it, we always experience new things.

I would also like to say a few words about the amazing and endless dedication of the shuso and the organizing team to ensure that everything runs exactly as it should, allowing us participants not to worry about anything other than following the schedule. Behind the scenes, careful thought is given to every detail to ensure that things go as they should. Without this diligence, our ability to give everything we can for the sake of practice would diminish.

Once again, thank you very much to each and every one, and I hope to meet and practice with you again at the Sonoma Zen Center or online. ❖



Revitalizing The Mandala

by Erik Zenjin Shearer

“In 1973 a group of nine students, my wife and I pooled our resources and our vision, and with hardly any expertise and little money renovated and assembled mainly out of recycled materials most of the buildings here. Our intention was to continue the practice lineage of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, and to manifest and establish the 91st generation since Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Although useful and habitable, what we built was in many ways temporary. Now, after more than forty years, our structures simply cannot meet today’s more rigorous building codes. Therefore it’s time to begin constructing a truly enduring temple complex on this ancient mountain, vibrant enough to reflect the authentic spirit of Zen, and to inspire people from every region and all walks of life for the next 300 years. The Sonoma Mandala will consist of two guest buildings, a kitchen and administration building (kuri), and a meditation hall (zendo). These will be powerful, living buildings that protect and nurture our heritage as has always manifestly happened in traditional Zen temples. At the same time, we will continue to preserve and enhance the natural beauty and tranquility of our forest trails, garden, and lotus pond, which help make Sonoma Mountain Zen Center a sanctuary where we can awaken to the true connection to the universe that we share with every being and thing. This is what the term Mandala essentially implies.”

—*Jakusho Kwong-roshi on the Sonoma Mandala Project*

A Vision for the Future

After years of planning and fundraising, construction of Phase 1 of the Mandala Project began on June 27, 2017, with a ground-blessing ceremony. The wildfires that October ravaged half of the Zen Center’s property, halting many construction projects. Then, in 2020, the pandemic forced us to close for a year, reducing income to zero and depleting our financial reserves. Nevertheless, we were able to complete two new residence halls, renovate the Sangha Cabin, construct a new maintenance building, and complete grading and site preparation for the next phase of construction. Despite the challenges posed by fire and pandemic, we never lost sight of our vision for the Mandala Project. After resuming normal operations post-pandemic, we have returned to raising money for the Sonoma Mandala project with fresh energy and determination.

Next Steps

With the first phase essentially complete, we are now shifting focus to the next stage of the project. The primary goals for Phase 2 are constructing a new Wisteria House Community Building and new Manjushri Meditation Hall, to serve as the heart of the center’s future public programs. Architectural plans for these structures have been



Top: The Manjushri Meditation Hall and Wisteria House (foreground).

Bottom: Eastern and southern views of the Wisteria House. Renderings by Chris Dorman.

finalized, and the permitting process is underway. A detailed construction timeline was submitted to the County of Sonoma in February 2024, outlining major milestones for the remaining phases. Our goal is to submit construction documents and the application for building permits for the Wisteria House by December 2024. The Wisteria House will serve as a home for the Zen Center’s public programs until the new Zendo has been built.

Construction is set to begin on the Wisteria House in early 2026, with a target completion date of January 2028. The new Manjushri Meditation Hall will begin construction in February 2028, with completion by April 2031. All public programs will then shift to the new zendo, marking a significant step in realizing the Center’s long-term vision.

Building on the Foundation of Sangha

As the physical structures of the Zen Center are being rebuilt, it is essential to recognize that they are more than brick and mortar; these buildings support and nurture

the Sangha (congregation). Both the Genjoji Sangha and the broader Zen community are crucial to the success of the Mandala Project, ensuring that the Center remains a vibrant place of practice for generations to come.

A fundraising committee has been organized to actualize this vision. The committee, which met for the first time in August to begin raising funds for the Wisteria House, which is projected to cost \$2.4 million. Committee members include chairman Erik Shearer, Craig Fraser, Keiko Ohnuma, John Churchman, Alexandra Thomas, Carol Adams, and Coco Mellinger, all bringing new energy and skills to the effort. Initial projects include:

- A new web page for the Mandala Project
- A new video to communicate with potential donors the Zen Center's mission and vision for the Mandala Project
- Launching a marketing and outreach campaign to engage the local and global Zen community and potential donors

A new volunteer has graciously offered his considerable professional expertise to update the Center's business plan to reflect for potential donors the long-term viability of Genjoji and its vision for the next 300 years of Zen

practice on Sonoma Mountain.

A Call to Action

The collective strength of the Sangha will be essential in the coming months and years. Since 2019, the community has raised \$1 million toward constructing the Wisteria House. That leaves \$1.4 million to raise, the fundraising goal for a year-long capital campaign to secure the total by late summer 2025. This date coincides with the raising of the new Sanmon, or temple gate, an important symbolic initiation for Phase 2 of construction.

We invite everyone to share our messages with family and friends, volunteer time, and assist with outreach to donors, especially those with deep hearts and pockets. Every contribution, big or small, brings us closer to realizing the full potential of the Mandala Project. With the community's help, we are confident that Kwong-roshi's dream will continue to manifest, transforming Sonoma Mountain Zen Center into a space of practice, contemplation, and growth for centuries to come. ❖

Mountain Gate Update

by Mitchell Hoden Katzel

In late July we reached a key milestone, ordering 7,700 board feet of cedar from East Fork lumber mill for construction of the Mountain Gate. We anticipate that milling will be completed by the end of September. The cedar will then be transported to the workshop of our designer-builder (Lucas Benjamin) in Richmond, where it will be stored for several months, allowing it to slowly lose moisture and acclimatize to local conditions. The wood will then be ready for a period of slow drying in a dehumidifying kiln. These are important steps to help ensure that the Mountain Gate will be structurally sound, and will stand for several hundred years. The woodworking process begins after the kiln drying, later this winter and into the spring. When Lucas has completed dimensioning, planing, and preparing the wood at his workshop, the Mountain Gate will be ready to assemble at SMZC.

We had contractors inspect the construction site in August so they could provide cost estimates for the concrete foundation and steps leading up from the parking lot to the Mountain Gate. Once we receive the building permit, we will set a schedule for pouring the concrete, possibly this winter.

The permit application submitted in late December is still under review by Sonoma County. There have been a few comments and questions from the county about the Mountain Gate design, which required adjustments to the foundation plans. All of the county's comments received thus far have been addressed, so we are hopeful that the permit will be issued soon. ❖



Zen Dust News

by Carol Adams

Fall greetings to everyone as we welcome the shorter days and cooler nights of the autumn season!

Volunteer Opportunities:

1. Sewing: Seeking volunteers to help create the many hand-sewn items sold in the store.

2. Creating Greeting Cards: Seeking a volunteer to glue photos to card blanks and prep for sale.

Please let us know if you feel called to help support the Sangha and Mahasangha with either of these ongoing activities. All supplies provided by Zen Dust store.

The store continues to stock all your meditation and training supplies, including Zen-made zabutons, zafus, jubons, support cushions, oryoki cloths, a fabulous selection of incense and more! Please visit during Saturday Community practice, from 12 noon to 1:15pm. For orders or questions, email zendust@smzc.org, or call (707) 545-8105. ❖



A Spiritual Journey

And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles,
no matter how long,
but only by a spiritual journey,
a journey of one inch,
very arduous and humbling and joyful,
by which we arrive at the ground at our feet,
and learn to be at home.

—Wendell Berry



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 **@sonoma-mountainzencenter**). Talks will be posted one month after the live talk.



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MOUNTAIN WIND STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: Katsuzen King

Copy Editor: Keiko Ohnuma

Layout: Kurt Morella

Lecture Transcription: Kaian Jennings

Mailing & Postage: Jo Morohashi

Contributing Writers:
Carol Adams, Wendell Berry, Genzen
Cadman, Mitchell Katzel, Katsuzen King,
Noel Mckenna, Itay Sharf, Erik Shearer,
Shindo Souza

Contributing Photographers:
Carol Adams, Susan Frey, Katsuzen King,
Noel Mckenna (B&W photos), Coco Mellinger,
Evan Shearer

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

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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