

Mountain Wine

JANUARY – MARCH 2021

LIGHT WITHIN DARKNESS

The following Dharma Talk was given by Jakusho Kwong-roshi on November 7, 2020 during SMZC's Saturday Community gathering on Zoom. This talk took place shortly after the U.S. presidential election.

Good morning everyone. This is a special day of celebration because we have a president-elect. It took me many years to begin to connect what we study with my everyday life and we can see that the ancient ideas or principles pertain to these very uncertain times we are living in. The five skandhas that the Buddha taught are about how you envision your everyday life. What do you do in your everyday life? How do you live your everyday life? And also, how do you exist within the world as it is with Trump, with Biden, and all these things that are happening in our world?

In the Dhamapada that we study, there is a gatha about *Shoaku Makusa*, 'Refraining from Evil,' which is a very profound chapter in the *Shobogenzo*. There are four lines in the verse which is central to Dogen's essay; 'refraining from evil,' 'carrying out good,' and the third, 'personally clarifying the mind.' Personally clarifying the mind is what we should do. That's our purpose in practice. That's our direction, clarifying the mind, personally clarifying my mind and your mind. The last line in the gatha is, 'this is what all the Buddhas taught.' When we use the word Buddha, we sometimes forget that he was an awakened person. And when we use the word Buddhism, what Buddha taught is not an "ism," in fact you could say it's before an "ism," because an "ism" is a belief system. Buddha's teaching is not a belief system, you could say it's a non-belief system. So because it's zero, it can hold everything, the number zero holds everything.

It's a very exciting time in the sense of opposites, and what we often try to do in our life when there are opposites. Often we try to do away with one so we can get the other. What we don't understand is that the world of opposites is how the cosmos manifests and unfolds itself. These are the fundamental principles of the universe.

I've been reading Joshu Sasaki-roshi's little book titled, *About Tathāgata Zen* printed by Rinzai-ji. Joshu Sasaki-roshi was one of the oldest Rinzai zen masters. He lived to 107, and we had the chance to visit him a few times when he was with his group on Cobb Mountain. It's interesting, Sasaki-roshi came here in the 60's from Japan, and the only thing I remember him writing was a little article in some kind of 60's newsletter. It was something about Buddha's gravity. In those times there was a lot of revolution and unrest happening. After at least 50 years of practice, he didn't really publish anything, but a student noticed there was a little box with small scribbly kanji symbols he would keep under his bed. One day, after a long period of time, the student asked him what happened to the box of notes under his bed. Roshi looked at him and said, "I burned them." I don't know how old he was then, maybe over 100.

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I remember we went to Cobb Mountain to hear him give a teisho. He would come in for the lecture, slowly preparing to take his seat on a very precarious walk up to the altar. Then, he would finally sit down and give a lecture or standard teisho on a koan. This is the Rinzai method, the consideration of questions that you can't logically, or you can't use your conceptual mind to unravel. The next time we went to see him, I thought that he would give another lecture on something different but it was the same koan. When I heard that he repeatedly lectured on the same koan, I was surprised because there are not many people who can do that. It's the same subject, but the time he is giving the lecture is not the same. This points to the world of impermanency and the truth that everything is changing. We are living in a time of uncertainty and impermanency. Actually, I think that we have been sheltered by technology and even though we think we are the masters of the world and our planet, little by little we are being proven wrong. In Dogen's and Buddha's times, there were wars and epidemics. There were stacks of corpses lined up on the river where Dogen lived. There were floods and fires, so the time of uncertainty or impermanency aligned with Buddha's first noble truth that life is impermanent. Especially over the 20th century we have tried to create a life of permanence, and we foolishly think that we can control the universe or that we control our planet, but everything now is coming into our face.

This word has been on my mind for a long time, and I've been thinking about how impermanency relates to our practice. Like in the ancient times in India, even before Buddha, people practiced *dhyana* and Sasaki-roshi mentioned this in his book. I remember using the word *dhyana* a long time ago, but I didn't really understand its meaning. Sasaki-roshi describes it as one-sided zen. Actually, it was the spiritual legacy of the Aryans who were the aboriginal people of India. The idea was that they understood and used religious technique as a kind of spiritual cultivation. They learned it through the practice of meditation and its application. But even so, it's a one-sided technique. The *dhyana* is like Samadhi where the mind, focusing on a single point, becomes calm. But that's not what *zazen* is about. When the mind focuses on one point, the activity of the mind is not scattered but is focused solely on that one point. In ancient times they even taught this to their slaves.

I'll read this paragraph from Sasaki-roshi's book and make some comments. *Dhyana* is a word translated into Chinese as undisturbed cogitation, the mind is quiet. So even *dhyana*, if one only trains in concentrating the scattered mind, conditioned into a single point, this would not be the equivalent of training to bring the self to completion. This is not our Way. You have to think about it, this is not Zen's way. This is not completion of the self. If training consisted only of single pointed concentration, then this would be a one-sided cultivation method. Why is this? Because it would restrain the activity of the scattered mind. Since even the scattered mind is an activity of the mind, we don't want to get rid of it, we don't want to get rid of anything. Since even the scattered mind is an activity of the mind, one also has to begin to learn the activity of the scattered mind. We are not trying to get rid of it. That is the activity of the distracted mind.

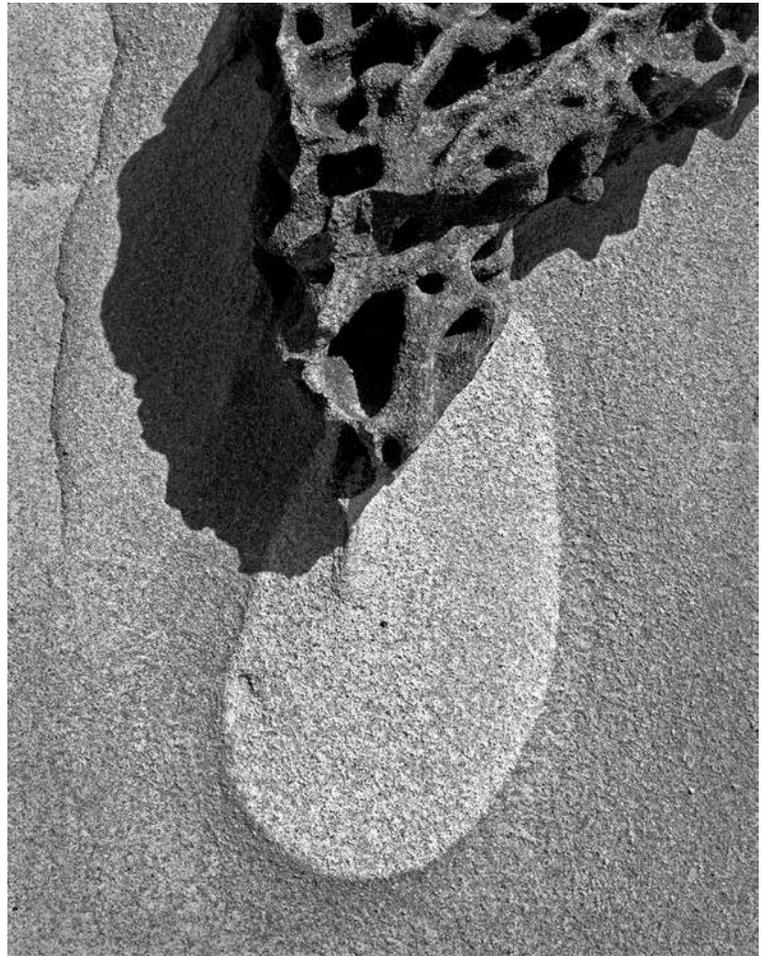
In other words, we need to use it and be aware of it when we are sitting and see when the mind is scattering. So, the scattering is not bad. Perfection is accepting the scattered mind, not trying to get rid of it. The condition of the mind concentrated in a single point needs to be reversed. You need to put it in reverse, in the opposite direction of the activity which is characterized by its scattering. Learning and practicing is the application of what you have learned during sitting. You have to apply it. Practicing this way, the complete range of the activity of the mind can be understood. Because such a dynamic meaning was needed for true *dhyana* and because of the original one-sided *dhyana*, it had to be called simply *dhyana*. This is the beginning introduction of *About Tathāgata Zen*.

I also want to say something about opposites. "Tathāgata" in Japanese is *Nyorai: nyo* means 'just as it is' or 'just as you are.' This is the essence of you, just as you are. *Rai* means come. Just as you are, come forward, *Nyorai*. And Tathāgata is the same thing, the suchness within you comes forward or has arrived. When you say Tathāgata with the two a's in between it means "thus coming." Tathāgata, *Nyorai* means thus going, and Tathāgata means "thus coming." These two opposites are the activity of impermanency. That's why the opposites, which people are not used to, are the dark and the light. You could say the light and the dark, the long and the short, the good and the bad, any things that are opposites are the activity of the cosmos. Our activity as human beings in clarifying the mind is to dissolve these differences in *zazen*. It's not one-pointed, it's dissolving the differences as you sit. This is what happens when you sit: the opposites are held by your small, mind. It means it's dissolved, your thinking mind of who you think you are, dissolves. When that self-centeredness dissolves, then you have arrived; you see things impartially. That's the freedom in Zen, and it's anchored in impermanency.

Take for instance when the young Siddhartha lived in the palace, everything was wonderful for him. He was wealthy, a part of the nobility and could do as he pleased. He was also married and had a child. But it wasn't until he went outside the walls of the palace that he saw suffering, death, and sickness, those things that mirror much of our regular 21st century life. We see the good part of life, the light, the part that everyone sees in the light, but we don't understand what's behind the light or what's within the light. There is a darkness, but the darkness in this sense is not bad. Dark does not mean bad, but it includes the opposites. In Buddha's time he had a resolve to do something, but he knew he couldn't stay in the palace. He had to experience something outside the palace. He had to experience impermanency.

In my life I experienced a vivid sense of impermanency when I was in a serious car accident. And when I had cancer, I also experienced a deep sense of impermanency. But you have to experience and know that part, and that's exactly what the young Siddhartha did after he went out on a six-year resolve and search. He found out that impermanency is real life. During the uncertain times that we live in, we should know how to navigate ourselves and our life because this was Buddha's first noble truth—Life is impermanent. If we don't understand this uncertainty, if we are not settled from our practice of zazen and its application, we will suffer. This is what makes people so anxious and emotional and sad.

Let me continue to read about Tathāgata. This coming and going means the same thing as the opposites, light and dark. When we are sitting in zazen, as I've mentioned many times before, like the five skandhas which are form, sensation, perception, discrimination or will, and consciousness, they interact to create the fallacious self. So in our zazen experience and practice, these are suspended, they are not reacting to each other. Also, behind me on the screen, I don't know if you can see it, this kanji or Japanese and Chinese is from the Heart Sutra and the first few sentences are *Go-un*. *Go* is five and *un* is bundle. Interesting because all these years I had not thought that much about the skandhas, but skandhas are a vital part of the Heart Sutra and Buddha's teaching, Buddha's Tathāgata teaching. When the five skandhas are mentioned, that means the five aggregates,



Tafoni Rock Salt Point 1985 by Fred Setsuzan Jacobs

which create the fallacious self, there is within each of the five skandhas a little bundle that comes with it. We always think one thing does not include the other, negates the other, but actually the two coexist. Like in the 'Sandokai' when there is light there is darkness, but don't try to look for it. There is a little darkness and within darkness there is a little light, but don't try to understand it.

The same way with the pistachio tree that we planted over 40 years ago. Right now there are orange colors and a brilliant red color, but there are still a few light green leaves. When they finally fall off through the seasons and in the winter, the tree will go back to being naked where all you see are the remaining branches. But when springtime comes, the green leaves start to grow back very slowly, like drops of water, and each drop begins growing and manifesting until later we have a full green tree. I also noticed that there was a little red leaf. It's the darkness in the light, it's there but we don't notice it, we only see the green. So that's the wondrous part, meaning we don't try to get rid of the chaotic mind or the scattered mind or the confused mind, but we are aware of it and we dance with it. We reverse it and use it, like in judo when someone advances, when the



Japanese Maple Trees by Barbara Tanko Medaille

so-called opponent advances toward you, you dance and welcome the advance. You don't see someone coming to get you, instead you become part of the dance and invite your opponent to dance with you. You throw the person with the energy of their own movement as they advance toward you. Similarly, with the scattered mind you use it, you don't try to get rid of it, you use it in the dance.

As far as impermanence, Sasaki-roshi, describes it as the standpoint of the source. *Kongen no tachiba* means that your experiences are grounded completely in the activity of impermanence, which is the underlying activity of the cosmos and of consciousness. So that's why zen uses the words "as it is," "as they are," or "the instant of the moment before the present." All these phrases are grounded in the world of impermanency. Pretty good, ha? It's all in our zazen and how you clarify the mind, that's our social engagement before you go out. That is the world in crisis. I mean it's pretty fantastic. So, you know, of course we feel the suffering, it's not that we are removed from the suffering, but we feel the suffering, and this is what we do, clarify the mind, so we can help people in that way.

You have to clarify the mind, not just to help people but even for the end of your life. How can it help at the 'end of your life'? It is thru Personally Clarifying the Mind by practicing ZAZEN & Selflessness which acknowledges

the REAL WORLD of IMPERMANENCY or uncertain times that people all over the world are struggling with now. Your intimate Zazen should prepare you for the end of your life—literally and symbolically because the EXHALATION BREATH is WHEN YOU GIVE YOURSELF AWAY—HERE is WHEN YOU DIE!!! It is the end of your ego/atman, creating selflessness, so that your complete self returns to its MOTHER/SUNYATA.....

So today is a very happy day, and I was really moved and actually emotional that Biden won the presidency. Within these dark four years, there's a light and now it's reversed. It's a great celebration, and also people are in the streets jumping and dancing, honking their horns and waving flags. It's just fantastic. Something about humanity, whether you are spiritual or not, it doesn't matter, but there is a goodness in humanity. The goodness in humanity is always there. In our practice we direct it further, we deepen it even more to find out where it comes from, and what it actually is and how we can offer that to society. I'm happy today, congratulations to everybody. Have a beautiful day. It's not just an easy road for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, but we can help them go forward. Okay. Thank you very much. ❖

MESSAGE FROM SMZC'S PRESIDENT

WEATHERING THE STORM TOGETHER

It's been a difficult time for Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and, not to mention, the rest of the world. Just yesterday Gov. Newsom announced another full shutdown beginning today to lessen the curve in California. I am sure whoever reads this is going through a similar situation as well. Definitely a time of uncertainty!

On the other hand, even though the pandemic has separated everyone on so many levels, it has brought people closer together more than ever before. As many of you know, SMZC's online programs have made it possible for members and new people who are interested in participating and connecting from around the world. It's been wonderful to practice on a daily basis with people joining us internationally from Iceland, Poland, Denmark, Canada, England, Kenya, Israel, Japan, Mexico, and the United States.

With the distribution of the COVID vaccine, we are hoping to reopen in Fall 2021, welcoming everyone back safely to practice at SMZC together again. We are envisioning that our online programs will be integrated and available for those who would like to continue to join us from far away. We plan to return full steam ahead by continuing with our strategic plan—maximizing the use of our new guest facilities, welcoming new robust practice programs, guest practice, residency programs, personal retreats, special events, and hosting large groups to financially sustain SMZC far into the future.

We anticipate 2021 will be a hard mountain for us to climb. Since March, the beginning of the pandemic, SMZC has been closed to onsite programs resulting in a 75% income drop. Through drastic wage cuts and generous wholehearted support, we have so far skillfully managed the storm with everyone aboard safe and healthy.

We are confident that by enriching and expanding our online programs, inviting volunteers and visitors under our safety protocol, implementing a strong plan for safe reopening along with the support from SMZC's members, families, friends, and maha-sangha, we will continue to navigate these treacherous waters through 2021. However, we cannot do this without you!

The Mandala Project will, in the near future, complete the construction and renovation of our new practice campus to serve our sangha and the broader community worldwide for generations to come. Not only will we provide a place of authentic Soto Zen practice, but we will be committed to preserve Shakyamuni Buddha's unbroken lineage from Bodhidharma to Eihei Dogen, and, from Shunryu Suzuki to Jakusho Kwong-roshi onward in an endless chain of Dharma transmission and teaching.

However, since we are focusing on shoring up our finances to sustain SMZC's operating fund during this time, unfortunately, we have decided to greatly cut back on Mandala Project fundraising and construction for 2021. In addition, currently we do not have sufficient funds in SMZC's Mandala Account to finish what we have permits for and /or complete the County Phase 1 requirements.

As we all live this present moment, it is our wholehearted participation, contributions, and our endeavor together that ensures the future of this ancient practice of Zazen "Just Sitting" on Sonoma Mountain. This is how we actualize the Dharma together!

Deep Bow,



Tensan Chuck Ramey

President, SMZC Board of Trustees

by Erik Zenjin Shearer

The Sangha at SMZC continues our online practice, meeting over Zoom for daily zazen, talks, study, and workshops. Our online practice continues to be well attended by members from across the globe, creating a new and vibrant practice space from our own homes. While we miss the textures, scents, and sounds of in-person practice at Genjo-ji, we are fortunate for the opportunity to engage with the broader Sangha so regularly. Saturday talks are attended by members from across the United States, Canada, England, Iceland, and Poland. Faces and names that we might only see and hear every couple of years during Ango are joined together in practice, in real time, each week. It has been a deep blessing to see and sit with everyone.

In September and October, SMZC scheduled three online Sangha Community Gatherings to provide an informal opportunity for members of our community to hear about SMZC's response to the pandemic, plans for the coming year, and maintaining our practice in challenging times. These gatherings also provided an opportunity for members to ask questions and provide feedback on how the Sangha is experiencing all of the changes that have happened this year. As if to underscore the unpredictable nature of our times, the first scheduled meeting had to be cancelled due to the major wildfires that revisited Sonoma and Napa this year, but the remaining two gatherings provided a much-needed opportunity to deepen our connections. Deep bows to everyone who was able to join and participate.

As we move into the winter season and the new year, our online programming will continue with a one-day sitting in January, Saturday dharma talks, and our winter Ango. The practice period will begin on January 30, 2021 and run through the Mondo ceremony on Saturday, February 27. Ania Eko Mills will take the position as Shuso (head student). Eko is a long-time student of Kwong-roshi and former resident of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. She joins us from Kannon Zen Center in Warsaw, Poland. Ango will include daily periods of meditation and talks from Eko and Kwong-roshi. The practice period will include a seven-day sesshin from February 14 through 21. Please watch for a detailed schedule and registration information for this practice period.

VOLUNTEERING

While we are continuing our practice online, we still have need of volunteers to work on projects at Sonoma Mountain and from home. Volunteer work on the property is governed by strict pandemic protocols and does not involve working inside or with other members. Volunteer opportunities at home include helping the office with projects and possible phone trees as we work to stay connected with all of our members. Please contact SMZC at office@smzc.org if you are interested and have the time to help out.

NEW MEMBERS

Bart Bloomberg joins our Sangha from Santa Rosa, California where he is a husband and father of three children. He was raised initially in Southern CA but moved to Germany with his family until the age of thirteen returning to California in time to start high school. He found his way to Sonoma County in 1999 to attend Sonoma State University. Outside of two years in Flagstaff, Arizona and two years in Seattle, Washington, he has lived in Sonoma County his entire adult life. He enjoys being outside with his family at the beach and taking walks at Spring Lake. He began practicing seated meditation a year ago to aid with stress reduction and to find balance in his life. He became interested in Soto Zen Buddhism shortly thereafter. He found SMZC and after a short visit, found a deep connection to his practice. He looks forward to meeting everyone once the health orders permit.

Dan Gigi joins us from London, England where he is a Rabbi. Before he was ordained, he came across Roshi's teachings. Dan had been practicing meditation from the ecstatic Kabbalah and had reached a point in his practice where all the pieces began pointing to the same thing. By chance he came across Roshi's audiobook *Breath Sweeps Mind* from an interest in eastern spirituality (at the time there were only a few books available on the topic on Audible). Roshi's pointing to this very moment through his explanation of Suzuki-Roshi's phrase "things as it is" expressed what Dan was beginning to experience through his Kabbalistic practice of penetrating silence but lacked the language to express. After finishing the book,

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he thought to himself (the only time this has happened after reading [listening to] a book) “I’m going to have to listen to that again.” Zen, as expressed through Kwong-roshi and Suzuki-roshi, became the language of the spiritual for him, until he discovered the same language from his own tradition after becoming ordained. The worldwide pandemic was a hidden blessing for him because it enabled him to connect with Roshi and with the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center community, for which he is incredibly grateful. The Jewish tradition has largely lost its contemplative tradition, but as Roshi told him, the Soto lineage itself would have been lost were it not for a master from another lineage. Dan is honored to be able to join the sangha and looks forward to practicing together this year.

Nicole Holmes joins us from Santa Rosa, California where she works as an Occupational Therapist and lives with her family. She enjoys reading, hiking, gardening, and painting. Nicole has visited Sonoma Mountain Zen Center previously and decided to join our Sangha as a member to deepen her practice with other members and our teacher.

Halden Levin joins us from Chapel Hill, North Carolina where she is on a gap year fellowship at UNC-CH. She loves running, reading / writing poetry, learning languages, and reading / analyzing disability

rights legislation. Halden has practiced at the Chapel Hill Zen Center where she was encouraged to reach out to Zen centers, including SMZC, to pursue volunteer opportunities in the Soto Zen community. Halden joins our Sangha virtually through our online programs for now, and we hope she is able to join us for in-person practice when we are able to gather together at Genjo-ji in the future.

Robert Saccomanno joins us from San Clemente, California where he has lived for many years. Robert is an avid sailor and enjoys music and art. Robert is active in the Sangha at the Deer Park Monastery outside of Escondido California where he practices and volunteers. Deer Park was founded by members of the Plum Village Monastery and operates under the guidance of Thich Nhat Hanh. He came to our Sangha through videos of Kwong-roshi’s talks he found on the internet and has joined our practice through online zazen.

We would also like to welcome **Claudia Conlon** who is re-joining as a member of the Sangha after many years living outside of California, practicing at Zen centers in France and at a Vipassana meditation center in Massachusetts. She has been able to rejoin the Sangha in practice through our online zazen and other programs.

On behalf of the Wisteria Wind Sangha, welcome! ❖



SMZC Landscape by Angus Choan Atwell

SONOMA MANDALA - YEAR-END UPDATE

by Cam Shunryu Kwong

The pandemic has made this year a difficult one for the Zen Center and the Sonoma Mandala. In spite of many hurdles, the Zen Center was able to move towards completing a few of the Mandala projects this year.

The site grading and drainage work was completed, and the Zen Center received a final permit approval in June. This work included trenching and laying of a few thousand feet of electrical lines for the future buildings, future building pad preparation, site drainage system installation, and new driveway and parking areas.

The Zen Center's new water system received final permit approval in November. The State Water Board is reviewing the last section of the Zen Center's application, and we are awaiting inspection. Once the water system passes inspection, the system can be used by the public. The new water system consists of over 4,000 feet of pipe that feeds all the structures and fire hydrant systems, three 11,000-gallon concrete water tanks, a 450 foot deep well, and pump house.

The Sangha Cabin is nearing completion. Angus recently completed the site drainage, interior painting, and door installation. Mark Peterson is finishing up the interior door and window trim. In the next few weeks, contractors will complete installing the outlets, switches,

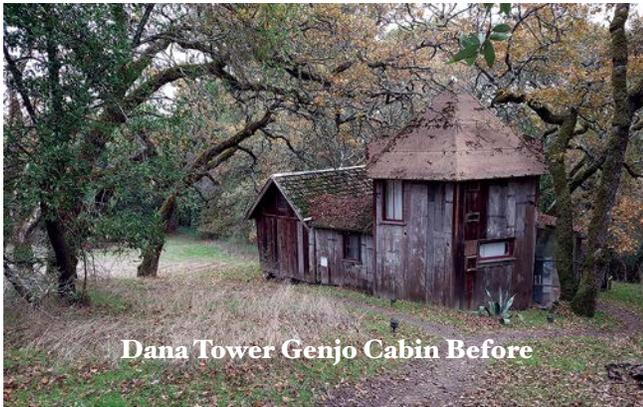
lights, and the heating system. The cabin will be completed shortly and ready for use once the public can return to the Zen Center.

As part of the County Use Permit requirements this summer, the demolition of the cabins began. Koten has been leading this effort and with the help of many volunteers has completed 85% of the work. It was sad for me to see these buildings taken down as these structures have helped support and shelter many sangha members since the founding of the Zen Center. However, the spirit of the cabins lives on in the new Ando Quarters and Genjo Building!

Thank you to all the volunteers that have helped move the Mandala projects along!

The financial strain of a projected 75% income cut has caused the Zen Center to greatly scale back the Sonoma Mandala projects for 2021. The Zen Center's main focus in the new year will be raising income and soliciting donations for its operations.

The vaccine signals the start of controlling the pandemic. We are hopeful that by the end of the year, the Zen Center can open and welcome all of you back. Please continue to join us on Zoom and volunteer. ❖



Dana Tower Genjo Cabin Before



Dana Tower Genjo Cabin After



Sangha Cabin

- January 2** **New Year's "Entering the Gate" 1-Day Sitting Online**
Deepen your practice and join us from 6:30 am to 12 pm.
- January 3** **Ring in the New Year: Welcoming 2021 Year of the Ox (CANCELLED)**
CANCELLED due to Stay-at-Home Restriction
- January 9** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Jakusho Kwong-roshi**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- January 13** **Special Evening Dharma Talk: Rev. Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi**
7:30 pm to 8:30 pm Special Guest Teacher Hoitsu Suzuki-roshi gives online Dharma talk from Rinso-in, Japan.
- January 16** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Zenki Traustasson**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- January 16** **SMZC Board Meeting**
1:00 pm to 3:00 pm PST Board of Trustee Meeting
- January 23** **Kids Community (CANCELLED)**
CANCELLED due to Stay-at-Home Restriction
- January 23** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Nyoze Kwong**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- January 29** **Ox Meeting: Business Strategy Meeting**
- January 30** **Winter Ango Practice Period: January 30 to February 27 Online**
Opening ceremony begins at 11:00 am, following 10:30 am zazen
- February 6** **Saturday Community Shuso Talk: Eko Ania Mills**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- February 13** **Saturday Community Shuso Talk: Eko Ania Mills**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- February 14** **"Actualizing the Way" 7-Day Sesshin Online**
February 14 at 7:30 pm to February 21 at 11:00 am PST
- February 20** **Saturday Community Shuso/Dharma Talk: Eko Ania Mills & Jakusho Kwong-roshi**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- February 27** **"Revealing the Dharma" Closing Ceremony**
10:30 am zazen; 11:00 am Closing ceremony and mondo.
- March 1–2** **SMZC Closed**
- March 3** **Introduction to Zen 4-Week Course**
Wednesday, March 3, 10 & 17, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm PST (Online)
Saturday, March 27, 1:00 pm to 2:30 pm PST (On Site)
- March 6** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Jakusho Kwong-roshi**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- March 9** **Spring Study Group (12-Week Course)**
Tuesdays 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm PST, March 9 to May 25
An opportunity to explore the fundamental teachings of Buddhism and build a foundation for daily practice through discussions on the book "DOGEN'S GENJO KOAN with Three Commentaries" by Eihei Dogen.
- March 13** **"Just This Moment" 1-Day Sitting Online**
Deepen your practice and join us from 6:30 am to 12 pm.
- March 20** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Katsuzen King**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- March 27** **Saturday Community Student Talk: Erik Zenjin Shearer**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- March 28** **Spring Workfest**
8:30 am to 12:30 pm Breathe new energy into the center with friends and family of the Sonoma Mountain Sangha. Come and join us in maintaining temple grounds in the spirit of togetherness.
- March 29** **SMZC Closed**
- March 31** **Buddha's Birthday 3-Day Sesshin Online**
March 31 at 7:30 pm to April 3 at 12:00 pm PST
- April 4** **48th Flower Festival Celebration/ Buddha's Birthday Online**
1:00 pm TBD (Details to follow)
- April 5** **SMZC Closed**
- April 10** **Special Guest Dharma Talk: Shohaku Okumura-roshi**
10:30 am to 12:00 pm PST (Details to follow)
- April 17** **Saturday Community Student Talk: Gyda Myoji Tryggvagottir**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen
- April 17** **Ordinary Beauty IV Online**
1:00 pm to 2:00 pm PST The heart of Zen is in everyday action. It permeates our waking life in simple acts. Kashin Kwong will continue her exploration of ordinary beauty in our daily lives. Register at office@smzc.org. / BY DONATION
- April 18** **Board Meeting**
1:00 pm to 3:00 pm PST Board of Trustees Meeting
- April 24** **Saturday Community Dharma Talk: Nyoze Kwong**
11:00 am to 11:30 am PST, following 10:30 am zazen

Morning Zazen: Monday – Saturday 6:30 – 7:00 a.m.
Evening Zazen : Tuesday – Friday 7:30 – 8:00 p.m.

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

RESIDENT REPORT – DECEMBER 2020

by Susan Gesshin Frey

It's been nearly a year of going within so that something new can emerge. We do not know what will come, but it seems likely that in the next year we will see a clear path. Not everything will be the same; we will be different for the experiences we shared this year. Roshi said it has always been this way, but we are not usually aware of impermanence.



Rev. Master Leandra Robertshaw

It was an honor and privilege to have guest teacher Reverend Master Leandra Robertshaw give the Saturday Dharma talk from England on November 14th via Zoom. Rev. Master Leandra is the Abbess of Throssel Hole Priory in Northumberland, England. She is in the Soto-Zen lineage of Houun Jiyu-Kennett who founded Shasta Abbey in Northern California. Master Leandra's connection with SMZC began through Kwong-roshi's book, 'Breath Sweeps Mind.' She visited SMZC a few years ago when she came to the US to visit Shasta Abbey, staying here for a couple of days with one of her students. Since then she has continued to connect with Kwong-roshi and SMZC, sending us many kind words during the fires and the pandemic. Her message: "The purpose of spiritual practice is to realize our true nature, which is also the true nature of all of existence, and to express this with our body, speech, and mind."

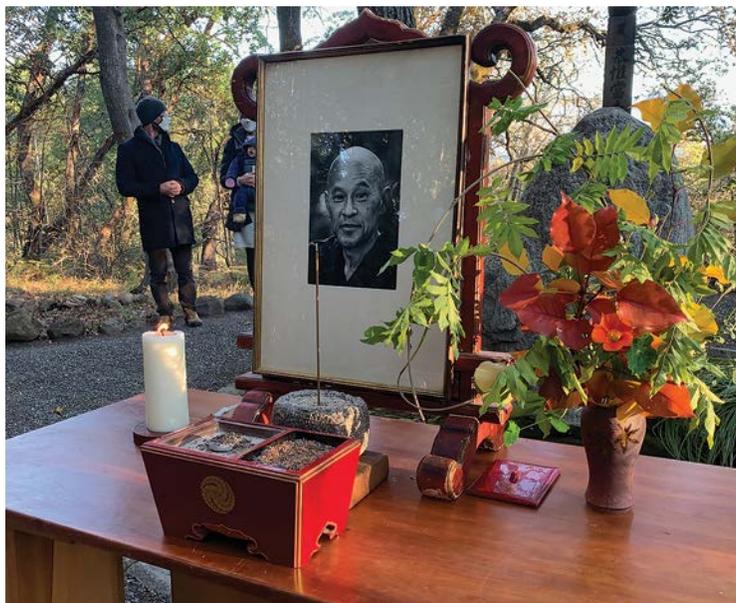
In her talk, Rev. Master Leandra spoke about the effect of the pandemic on loss, including the loss of loved ones. She emphasized if we truly love life, we can't avoid grief; it is a natural part of life. Trying to escape loss creates suffering and chronic restlessness, which is really just our survival instinct. Letting go into the truth that nothing can be relied on or last forever does not negate existence; instead we are "welcomed into the spacious, vast expanse" which is "empty to the brim, still to the core." Arriving in the present moment, there is "sufficiency." You don't have to be somewhere else. When we accept our circumstances, we are grateful rather than angry, not "free from but free within."

RESIDENT UPDATE

We are continuing to finish the work on the buildings, and we are going forward with our practice. We held the nearly week-long Rohatsu sesshin online, including the midnight to 4am continuous sitting. That same morning a small group of members, led by the delicate sound of inkin bells, walked in procession down the winding path to Suzuki-roshi's memorial site. There we held our traditional ceremony in honor of his passing on December 4th, 1971. This year it was a bit later in the morning than usual—instead of being in the dark, it was barely light as we performed the ceremony. The golden leaves from the big leaf maple trees seemed to shine. The sunlight filtering through the trees at the memorial site was reflected by the gravel, the moss, and the very large stone that Kwong-roshi brought from Tassajara. We formed a circle and softly chanted the Great Light Dharani. Each person was able to offer a pinch of incense and say a few words of gratitude to Suzuki-roshi.

Lately flocks of starlings have been flying in clouds, close to the ground, whooshing overhead, so many that their thousands of wings beating make a sound like pounding rain. Wonderful! ❖

Alter at Suzuki-roshi's memorial site





Above: Procession to the memorial site / Below: Sunrise Ceremony



HUGARFJALLIÐ MOUNTAIN OF MIND

Að koma hægt
inn í birtuna

To emerge slowly
into the light

Eins og að leggja frá
sér vasaljós
á döggvotu
túni um nótt
að haustlagi

Like putting
down your flashlight
in a field, wet of dew
at night
in the fall

Og stíga hikandi
inn í geislann.

And step hesitantly
into the beam.

—Girðir Elíasson

—Girðir Elíasson

This poem was read both in Icelandic and English during the January Dharma talk given by Zenki Traustasson, leading teacher of Natthagi Zen Center, a SMZC affiliate in Reykjavik, Iceland.



BOARD OF TRUSTEES UPDATE

by Lizbeth Myoko Hamlin

The Board of Trustees wants to thank every one of you for your generous donations that are allowing us maintain and sustain Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. Many of you have been able to participate, join our online programs, and return without having to travel. This has allowed for our worldwide sangha and community to grow. This has brought a richness of connection with one another along with the deepening of our Buddhist Zen practice.

Our primary focus has been how to adapt, survive, and vision for our future. COVID-19 has altered each of us in numerous ways, and knowing that we can join together gives us comfort for our immediate lives and the future of SMZC. The efforts which have been numerous by residents, the Kwong family, and the many sangha members who have participated have been heartfelt.

We decided to contribute the least amount of contribution to bring the Mandala Project up to date to conclude Phase 1 the best we could. When the board returns in 2021-2022, we will continue to work towards the immediate needs of sustaining our online programming and gathering funds to support SMZC and vision for our future as we look to return in person in 2022. ❖



View from Sangha Cabin interior

*November Workfest photos by
Marisol Muñoz-Kiebne & Matthew Murray*



VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

by *Koten Price, Shissui (Facility Manager)*

The Zen Center wishes to offer a deep bow of appreciation to the following members and friends who have assisted with many projects this summer, fall, and winter. The work has included caring for the garden, working the land, the demolition of five cabins—the Sila Cabin, Genjo Cabin, Monk's Cabin, Dana Cabin, and the Kanzeon Cabin, and office work. A deep bow to:

Demolition

Moving & Hauling Construction Debris

Brion 'Butsuden' Baer

Jinbun Brunette

Jundo Farrand

Gary & Marisol Kiehne

Matthew Murray

Jason 'Shinmei' Nichols

Doug Weihnacht

Garden

Pete Estabrook

Land Steward

Weekly Weed Whacking

Tom 'Jakuryu' Huffman

Jeff 'Sokai' Moore

Office

Accounting & Budgeting

Ryokan Kwong

Daily Office Operation

Greta 'Chonen Anglo' Canton

Coco Mellinger

Weekly YouTube Video

Greta 'Chonen Anglo' Canton

Megan Backus

Website Calendar Update

Halden Levin

Special Project

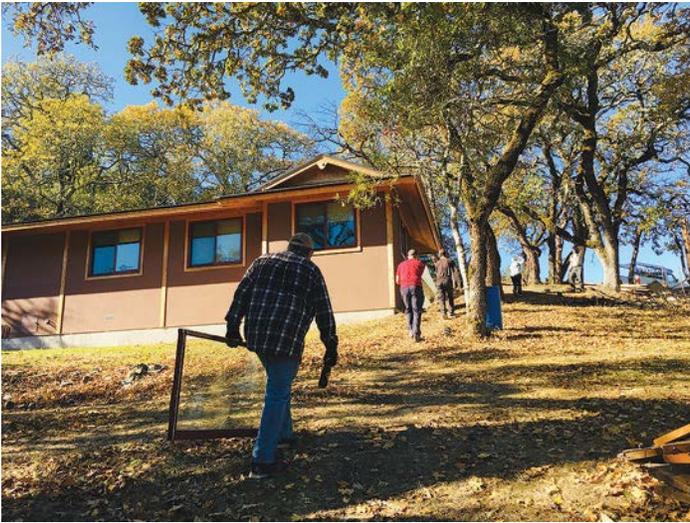
Wood Carving Gegyo 掛魚 & Construction

Mark Peterson

Zen Dust Store

Weekly Store Upkeep

Janet 'Myoho' Buckendhal



ZEN DUST NEWS

by Janet Myoho Buckendahl

It would be wonderful to see everyone in person again, but we can meet for Zazen on Zoom, and Zen Dust is still able to fill online requests for store merchandise. We have already shipped zafus, zabutons, books, and other meditation supplies—just contact me at janet@smzc.org if you would like to order or need further information.

Sending everyone very best wishes for the upcoming holiday season and good health in the New Year.

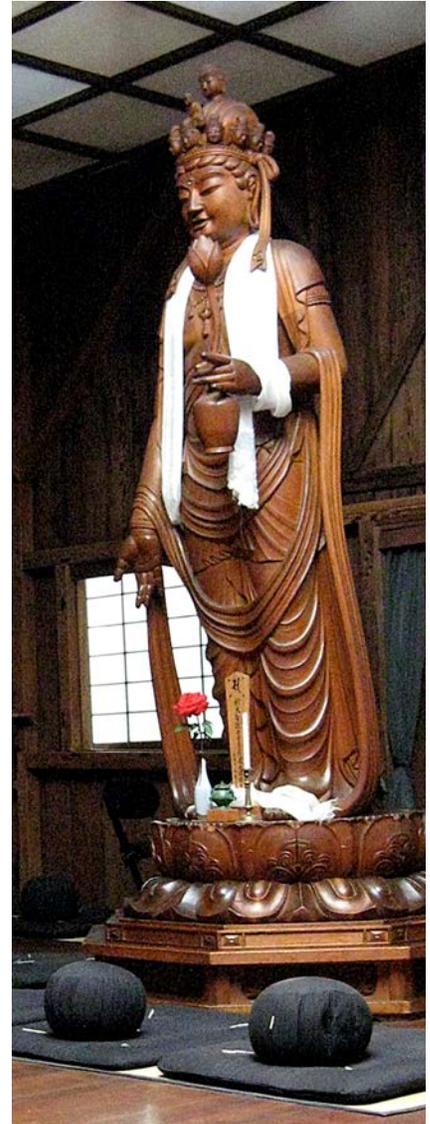


ZEN DUST STORE HELPER WANTED

We are looking for a couple of weekly volunteers who can stuff zafus and are good at sewing (or willing to learn). On-site training will be provided by our volunteer Zen Dust Store Manager Janet Myoho Buckendahl with regards to our Covid-19 guidelines and safety protocols. Please email Janet at janet@smzc.org to get started today! ❖



Sleeping Beauty by Marian Schmidt



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.

"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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NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

Mountain Wind 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 smzc.org and donate via Paypal. When subscribing via Paypal, once you have made your donation please contact us and provide your newsletter format preference (print or electronic), and your contact information. If your subscription is due to expire, please renew. We also welcome submissions of poetry, prose and art relating to the Zen experience.



SONOMA MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

“FOR THE BENEFICIAL PROTECTION
AND AWAKENING OF ALL BEINGS”



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