

Mountain Wine

January – March 2026

The Purpose Of Our Living: The Three Refuges

On November 15, 2025, at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center, Jakusho Kwong-roshi delivered the following teisho, given before the Jukai Ceremony, in which practitioners receive the precepts.

I came to the conclusion a few days ago that the purpose of life is to realize the Three Treasures. Have you ever thought about what the purpose of your life is? This is it (strikes table). Can you believe it? You don't have to look any further than that. However, it requires a lot of training and resolve, because our lives are not that long.

Today I'm bringing you the *Zenkaisho*, the essence of Zen precepts. The Three Treasures are your most intimate nature. It's like Dzogchen (in Tibetan Buddhism), complete perfection. This book was written by (the 18th-century Zen teacher) Banjin Dotan (who wrote about zazen and the precepts). There was a downfall of the Dharma at that time, just as there is now. Banjin came out of his cave and went to a temple in the nearby village, where the roshi handed him the teaching of Indra's Net, a canopy hung over us in the sky. It's a net where in each eye there is a jewel that reflects the other jewels, a myriad of jewels all connected, as we are basically. Banjin read it maybe a hundred times, and he got a glimpse of what it meant. Then he wrote this book, which was to be destroyed within ten years. Somehow, we were fortunate enough to get a copy. Someone must have snuck it out.

All of these teachings didn't begin in libraries. Great hardship brought the Dharma to the West. Suicide, annihilation, starvation, that's how the Dharma came here. Through difficulty and compassion, the teachings were preserved so we could live a happy life. Basically, all the sutras and

teachings and the Dharma are to gladden our hearts and resolve our suffering. Sutras are often complicated to read, but the only way you can truly understand is through sitting, where the thinking mind begins to stop. I'm not saying thinking is a bad thing. It's good to think, but thinking straight is better than crooked thinking.

Buddha and the founder of Tendai Buddhism stressed breathing from the lower abdomen. That's very important. When you begin to learn how to breathe that way, it leads to cessation. And what does cessation lead to? Liberation. You're thinking one thought for one hour. Two thoughts are thinking; one thought is not. That dissolves greed, anger, and ignorance. Hojo-san has said we are in a new era now. I mean, how bad can things get? They say that from a satellite they can see blood on the streets in Sudan. How bad does it have to get until it forces us to do something with ourselves?

So these are the Three Refuges: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It's a great honor for me to find out the real meaning of the Three Treasures. These Three Treasures are the most precious thing you could ever have. Because we don't own it, we have it, we already have it, but we have yet to realize what we have. Someone told me that in Silicon Valley they make AI chips and make trillions of dollars, but that money or jewels can never satisfy you. They are objects; they cannot create your inner happiness. These are really the three jewels of our life.

One is the Buddha. I'm reading Banjin's writing here. Refuge, it says, in taking the precepts, *pre* is before, *cept* is to receive, so it's something you already have. That's the whole point: You have it already. After you were born, you were

continues next page

trained not to have it. When you're born, your nourishment comes from the outside: conditions like education, tradition, culture, and our ignorance and karma continue to teach that reality is out there. That's why all the grasping, attachment, desire for things to get from out there, not from within (points to self).

To take refuge could be home, it could be a harbor, some place you know you are safe. This refuge is the historical Buddha, and also the Buddha within yourself. Dharma, the teaching, and Sangha, the people who practice it. The Triple Treasures have three kinds of merit and virtue. People don't even understand the words, merit and virtue. I don't even hear these words spoken anymore. But because you are training or practicing the Buddhadharma, there is merit. Goodness promotes goodness. And the nature of virtue is innate goodness. When we see suffering, or even something like a shoe on the street, we naturally pick it up. Goodness and virtue are innate within us.

These three—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—are called the One Body, Three Treasures. They're also called the Manifested Triple Treasure and the Abiding and Maintaining Triple Treasures. These are divided into three areas. The first is Annutara samyak sambodhi (supreme perfect awakening), which is Buddha's enlightenment. Annutara means highest, supreme. Samyak means complete. Sambodhi means complete Buddha's realization, which is different (in Mahayana) from other schools of realization. This is called the Buddha treasure, annutara samyak sambodhi: purity and freedom from dust. Freedom from dust, because if you don't have delusion, you can't become enlightened. If we don't have dust, we can't become pure. We want to get away from dust, but in the dust—exactly what you think every day, in everyday life—is our realization. It's as simple as that. When you use your cell phone, looking, doing, getting, going somewhere, you are not where you are, here (pointing to self). Annutara samyak sambodhi: This is the Buddha treasure, your treasure. It's purity and freedom from dust, it's the Dharma treasure, the teaching, which we may also call the law. It's the way that human beings live.

The second one is manifesting and verifying your awakening. That's interesting, you can't just say it, you have to manifest awakening, and someone has to verify it. This is the Buddha treasure. That which is verified is the Dharma treasure. And when some are practicing, or training, in the Buddhadharma, this is called the Sangha treasure. Sangha means to have peace and harmony.

These are called the Manifested Triple Treasures. So you have the realization, the manifestation of that, and the third one is the Bodhisattva's joy or delight, sharing his or her knowledge, wisdom, insight, and compassion with humanity. One of the marks of a Buddha is non-doing. What does non-doing mean? You're living without greed, anger, and ignorance. That's non-doing. That's sacred. You see pictures of the Dalai Lama or of bodhisattvas, and their shoulders



Because if you don't have delusion, you can't become enlightened. If we don't have dust, we can't become pure. We want to get away from dust, but in the dust—exactly what you think every day, in everyday life—is our realization. It's as simple as that.

are round. Because when they are broad, you're doing. Non-doing is really a wonderful word, because we are taught doing, doing, doing. This is just the opposite. That way, you are free from your self. It's not maintaining precepts if there is nothing to maintain. That nothingness is the true mark, the ultimate reality, which means nothing to possess. "Suchness" is the opposite of emptiness; it's something (bangs lectern). "Emptiness" is nothing, but they mean the same thing. It means nothing to hold on to. When there is nothing to hold on to, you hold everything. It's the opposite of what we are taught.

[Reading from *Zenkaisho*] "And converting human beings. Appearing in the vast openness of beings or appearing within dust is the Buddha treasure. The process of being transformed into the ocean storehouse, or being transformed into the sutras, and thus converting or changing animate and inanimate beings. Relieving all suffering and being free from the house of the three worlds is the Sangha treasure. These are called abiding and maintaining the Triple Treasures."

So I don't use the word "converting" because there is no conversion in the Dharma. But it says here, "converting celestial beings." I like that, because you have to put something in there that's not just straight, but (gestures crooked line) crooked. The crookedness contains everything; the straightness leaves out everything. The three worlds are the world of desire and thinking, the world of form, and the world of formlessness. Different schools do not include these, but these three are the dust of the world, where our realization is found. But then the three worlds, the world we live in, our everyday world. "This is called abiding, dwelling, and maintaining the Triple Treasures."

I'll read you Kyogo's interpretation. He was a Zen master under Dōgen Zenji. It says that starting with the atonement procedure—that's the ceremony we'll do this afternoon, where people are taking precepts—these three refuges and the ten precepts are not separate from delusion. Emancipation is attained in the midst of delusion. Or one may say that before the deluded aspects have departed, the true aspects have arrived.

Emancipation or liberation is attained in the midst of delusion. Before the deluded aspects have departed from ourselves, the true aspects are there. This is the meaning of the Zen saying, "Before the donkey leaves, the horse has arrived." (laughing) It means you have it already. The horse is here, and if it weren't so, we couldn't realize ourselves. How could you realize it if it weren't already here? How could you know what beauty is if it wasn't here before? It's here first, then out there, but completely different. I struggled with that for a long time. You guys got the impression pretty quickly (laughs). Yet you still have to realize it to make it true. That's the whole point.

"Whole ocean of karmic hindrance." This is our habit energy. I explained this before. Habit energy drives humanity because of our ignorance. We're still killing each

"Suchness" is the opposite of emptiness; it's something. "Emptiness" is nothing, but they mean the same thing. It means nothing to hold on to. When there is nothing to hold on to, you hold everything. It's the opposite of what we are taught.



other; we're not civilized. We never learn the lesson. Think about your own life. Habit energy is karma. That's what makes it the ocean of karmic hindrance—it's huge, it's everywhere. So this ocean of karmic hindrances may give the impression that we should throw them away, since they are the three worlds, which bring suffering. And sitting upright, contemplating true marks may seem what we are supposed to do. But just because we sit upright and contemplate true marks doesn't mean we're true people yet. We have to know what we're doing. We have to awaken from our delusion of sitting upright. It sounds good, it sounds like the true mark, but the true mark means ultimate reality, which is "suchness," with nothing to possess. You have everything, but you don't have to possess it. Because there's nothing to possess, and when you have nothing to possess, you have everything (laughs). The Dharma is the great perfection.

So precepts are based on these three jewels, and these are the most valuable things in the entire history of humanity; we need to realize what they are. They're ever so close. And this is the purpose of our life. There are still the precepts themselves, and maybe some other time I could talk about that. So, any questions? Or do you all understand everything?

Student: *I kind of got a cold sweat when you said that, sitting, year after year, even though it's so-called "good" sitting, that's not going to do it. Since my habit is grasping after things, I'm thinking, OK, what's going to do it?*

Roshi: I've been around for a long time. I started in 1960. I've seen people sit for 20 years, like robots, you know? How come we struggle with that? But they have to have a good teacher to, you know, hit with the stick (bangs on desk). Maybe we hit with the stick, going around. We stopped using the stick because people took their aggression out on people (laughs). Maybe we should bring it back for those dozing off.

Student: *But then Uchiyama said that, you know, the stick is a toy.*

Roshi: The stick is a toy. Yeah, it could be a toy. It was a toy. That's why he doesn't use the stick. Uchiyama-roshi's schedule of sitting is nothing but sitting. I think fifty-minute periods the whole day. You don't need a stick. That is the stick. Our schedule isn't that way. We're Americans, so we have to know how to adjust. Also, when you get old, you can't do that anymore. There should be a way that old people like me can still sit. And when you get old, you need to sit, because you're going to die. That's a guarantee. We need to sit.

Student: *Happy birthday. You said sangha—and I don't know if I captured it right—was living in peace and harmony. Is that what you said?*

Roshi: Yeah. That's what I read. The essence of a sangha is peace and harmony.



The ocean of karmic hindrance is the opposite of peace and harmony. Meditation is basically where you are. If you can just do that, that's something. No one is where they are. Meditation is to unify the scattered mind. The scattered mind creates the karma—the ocean of karma, the ocean of unhappiness.

Student: *That's very profound. Can you say more about that, as the world is not operating as that?*

Roshi: It's interesting, the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. The word is "noble," or *arya*. When I read that, I thought it was a good philosophy, but I had no idea what noble meant. Noble means it's only for those who realize it. Then it's truth! That makes sense, right? If you don't realize it, it's not true. For most of humanity, the Four Noble Truths is not truth.

Student: *The "ocean of karmic hindrance," what is that? I'm trying to understand that.*

Roshi: The ocean of karmic hindrance is the opposite of peace and harmony. Meditation is basically where you are. If you can just do that, that's something. No one is where they are. Meditation is to unify the scattered mind. The scattered mind creates the karma—the ocean of karma, the ocean of unhappiness.

So, I actually avoided the precepts when I began studying Zen, because they deal with bad and good, like the commandments. But we're not trapped by yes and no. This duality is the main cause of our suffering, but we must not be caught by the duality. It is this table, and it isn't this table: That's beginning to transcend yes and no. Everything is a duality; everything is separated from us. We create that. We're living in it, we die in it. But that's not reality.

Student: *The way that I have to work in the world is we always have these goals, we're going to accomplish something. That's how I've been in my life, and so that's my world. And then when I come to meditation, I'm very impatient. I want to achieve something, so I have a problem, because it's hard for me to sit and be accepting of the moment.*

Roshi: You can sit in a chair, you don't have to sit cross-legged. Do you live nearby?

Student: Yeah, Sebastopol.

Roshi: Very close. It's important to sit with people. When you sit by yourself on Zoom, we're all separate from each other. When you're sitting on Zoom, you should look around and see who you're sitting with. Everybody's a Buddha. Well, you know, you can come talk to me sometime, OK? I'd be happy to talk with you.

Student: *I like what you said about the need for there to be dust before you can get to enlightenment. Dust has to be present, I guess. How do we not try to create that dust, because we're not intentionally trying to create the dust, right? So we continue to practice as we get older, how do we try to minimize that? Or just observe it?*

Roshi: It's not beneficial. It's as simple as that. Our habit energy continues; we're preoccupied with it. So we have to have some kind of training to reverse it.

Student: *I wanted to ask about the dust of our lives and*

bringing it to our zazen. Bringing our mistakes, our striving, the dust of our lives, to our sitting.

Roshi: That's what happens, and sometimes we're just kind of preoccupied with that. But you can reverse it by breathing. The technique of breathing below the navel allows us to reverse it, and it takes training to realize the cessation of thinking. We're taught to keep thinking, to keep on breathing in, to live. It's not true.

Student: *What am I to understand or appreciate when you say that a table is a table and that a table isn't a table?*

Roshi: That's how we see things (laughs). Of course, it's a table, but at the same time, it's not a table. Once you name it, you separate your existence from the table. This is a table, and this is me. But actually, you and the table are the same. And then, this is a table, and this is me. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Form is form, I am I. That's it, you know? Understood?

Student: *Roshi, you mentioned earlier that insight can come from delusion and from sitting. And the impression I get is that the delusion is there; it's part of you, it's part of us. But you don't want to accentuate that, so you're not really striving or grasping for insight, but at the same time, you're not holding on to delusion. That grasping for insight is delusion itself.*

Roshi: Yeah. One thing I always thought is that when we go to sleep, we always wake up, unless we're dead (laughter). But this is innate; if you can wake up from a dream, you can wake up from delusion. If you couldn't do that, we wouldn't be human anymore. Isn't that something? You can wake up. You can always wake up. ❖

Sonoma Mountain Mandala Coming Alive

The Sonoma Mountain Mandala is a place of authentic practice where people from all walks of life realize their basic goodness. Sono Ma means Ancestors capable of grinding and polishing. Mandala means when one wholeheartedly encounters their life as it is. In that very moment, something happens, wisdom arises and liberation from greed, anger, and ignorance occurs.

—Nyoze-osho Kwong, Abbot of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center

On Saturday, October 25, Sonoma Mountain Zen Center hosted “Zen Conversation for a New Era,” a dialogue between Nyoze-osho and Kwong-roshi moderated by Hosho Peter Coyote. The event kicked off a campaign to rejuvenate and energize the Sonoma Mountain Mandala temple-building project. The discussion between the founder and the current abbot of the Zen Center covered the history of the project and SMZC’s commitment to sustaining a place of practice holding the spirit of Soto Zen for generations to come.

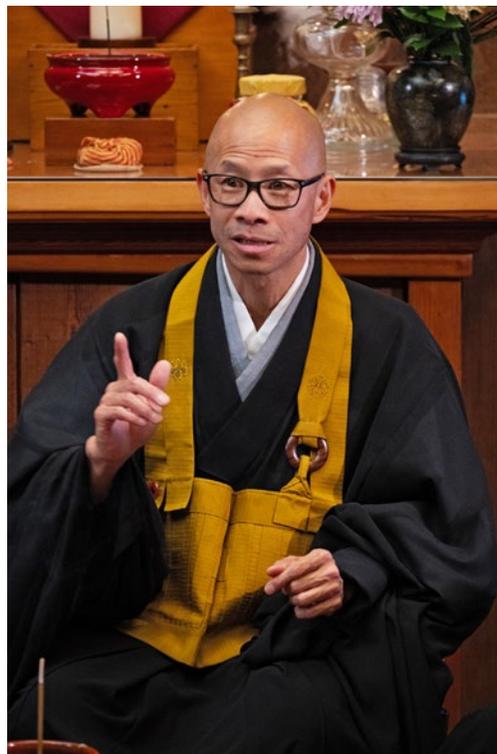
Temple residents and overnight guests opened the day with early-morning zazen, while volunteers worked in the kitchen, cooking and packaging bento boxes for lunch. Camera, sound, and lighting equipment were set up the night before. Around ninety of SMZC’s Maha Sangha (main congregation) gathered in the Zendo, wrapped in white morning fog and blanketed by a light rain, protected by the surrounding redwood grove. As guests arrived and entered the building, the mandala began to shine.

Kwong-roshi opened with these words:

“*Mandala* is like a sacred word for the universe. The universe includes everything, and it includes every non-thing. It includes the bad and the good. It doesn’t discriminate. But what makes something sacred is the absence of greed, anger, and ignorance. So meditation basically is to be where you are, always. The mandala is always where you are. We have to be where we are! This is the most difficult thing. Where we are is the entire mandala. Each one of you here, believe it or not, is a buddha or a bodhisattva. And actually, the purpose of your life is to realize who you are, where you are, and to help people.”

Peter Coyote, sounding a set of Tibetan bells, brought sharpness and calm to the zendo space. In his distinctive voice, he moderated the conversation between Kwong-roshi and Nyoze-osho, offering two hours of engaged discussion about the project and how Roshi’s vision of the Mandala had come to light. Father and son described the vision, meaning, and history of the Sonoma Mountain Mandala, illuminating its deeper meaning.

“To build a place of practice,” Nyoze-osho explained, “is to actively become involved in the mandala, and to become involved in the life you are living now.” He added, “We must upgrade our facilities so we have a sacred place to practice. It is incredibly important to have a sacred place to practice during this time of instability in the world. A sacred place of practice is to protect the Buddha’s wisdom and the Buddha’s teachings.”



Hosho summarized the purpose of the gathering and the project, as the practice of “actual imagining and extraction of a zendo, a Zen gate, and a place of study for the ages, ringing it out of emptiness into actual form.”

The main reason we are embarking on this project,” Nyoze-osho emphasized, “is that our practice on the mountain is being significantly impacted by stringent county codes requiring urgent building updates, and we need everyone’s help.” While SMZC runs its daily operations, programs, and events, it is vital that the Sonoma Mountain Mandala project continue to move forward as well.”

He noted that much of this construction over the years has already been accomplished in Phase 1: a new water supply, a new agricultural building, two new guest buildings, demolition of substandard cabins from the 1970s, a new septic system, and infrastructure in compliance with recent, additional stringent county building codes. “We have to renovate, upgrade, and build new structures because the county says we must,” Nyoze-osho explained.

However, he added, “The working of the Mandala is that you transform the obstacle or hindrance given to you—not begrudgingly, because we’re told we have to, but with the energy of compassion and wisdom for the sake of practice, moving into new conversations with the self. In this way, the obstacle of the county becomes a beacon of light for us to sustain and maintain SMZC’s practice container for people far into the future. A bad situation turns into a good situation.”



The working of the Mandala is that you transform the obstacle or hindrance given to you—not begrudgingly, because we're told we have to, but with the energy of compassion and wisdom for the sake of practice, moving into new conversations with the self.





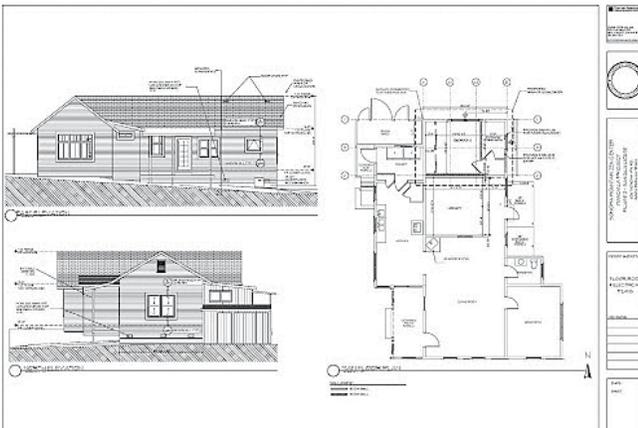
The Sanmon three-portal gate is a symbolic threshold entering into the intimate heart of Zen, inspiring together-action and bringing powerful, fresh energy to the Sonoma Mountain Mandala project and the world. “The Sonoma Mandala coming alive is the newness that we bring to each moment,” Nyoze-osho explained. “The mandala is a roadmap you walk, and being awake to your self-centeredness, you work with the obstacles of the self, right on the spot, showing you the Way that is in harmony with the universe.”

The discussion was framed by opening and closing dedications by SMZC’s geido, Kashin Kwong; Elliot Kallen’s performance on the shakuhachi, the Kwan Seum Bosal chant (Hearing the Cries of the World) by Korean nun the Venerable Bohyun Lee, and a bento box lunch prepared by Koten Price, SMZC’s tenzo. Big thanks to SMZC’s members, sangha, and volunteers from near and far who brought this special event to fruition.

Sincerely,
Tensan Chuck Ramey
President, Sonoma Mountain Zen Center

Chris Fugan Johnson
Sonoma Mandala Project Coordinator

Since the event, \$27,272 has been donated to the Sonoma Mandala project on our GiveButter platform.



The Mandala is happening now! As the Sanmon Gate goes up, our next step is to direct our energy toward funding the Wisteria House (kitchen, dining, community, and administration building). “The Gate is a symbol of the Zen conversation for a new era,” Nyoze-osho added. “Once the gate goes up, it is liberation upon seeing, and when there is liberation upon seeing, the mandala is created inside of oneself. You see it, you feel it, and all the people who have supported it see something go up.”

*When the mandala governs
People are hardly aware that it exists
The mandala doesn’t talk, it acts.
When its work is done,
People say, “Amazing! We did it all by ourselves!”
—Tao Te Ching*

To give or for further information:



givebutter.com/smzc
OR
Text SMZC to 53-5555



SPECIAL THANKS TO SONOMA MANDALA DONORS

OCT 25 – DEC 19, 2025

May each of us bring the Sonoma Mandala to life with wisdom, compassion, and collective focus for the good of humanity for generations to come. May the spirit of the Sonoma Mandala continue to unfold within each of us, reminding us that every act, every moment, is an offering for the good of all things. In gratitude, we bow deeply to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and to this precious life, ever turning, within the great Mandala of awakening.

Carol Adams,
in honor of Celebrating 90 Years of
Jakusho Kwong-roshi

Ken & Karen Adelson

Megan Backus,
in honor of Roshi's 90th Birthday

Brion Baer

Brad Bernard,
in honor of Carly Bernard

Russell W. Bradley

Belinda Burnside,
in honor of Happy 90th Birthday, Roshi

Edward Cadma,
in honor of Tensan Chuck Ramey

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in memory of Katherine Gratke

Richard Johnson

Kashin Kwong

Nyoze Kwong

Lu Ann Lashua (Lulu & Roxy)

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John Moorhead

Susan (Jo) Morohashi

Eiko Mouri

Kristin & Jason Nichols

Keiko Ohnuma,
in memory of Sho & Toshi Ohnuma

Gail Payne

Pat Preston

Laury Rappaport (Laury & Wayne),
in honor of Roshi 90!

Nancy Reder,
in honor of Roshi's 90th Bday

Richard Santoro

Tina Schragar

Kevin Souza (Shindo)

Kurt & Elain Swenson,
in honor of Roshi's 90th Bday

Alan Wilkerson

Fidelity Charitable (Seirafi Giving Fund)

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**Feb 6 February Fusatsu Ceremony
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

7:30–9:00 PM PST

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.

**Feb 7 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00AM–1:30PM PST

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.

**Winter Ango Shuso Talk
by Shuso Alex Hokan Perrotti
On-site (in Zendo) + Online (Zoom)**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Join us for Winter Ango Shuso Talk with Shuso Alex Hokan Perrotti. 10:30–11:00am Zazen 11:00–12:00pm Shuso Talk.

**Feb 14 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00AM–1:30PM PST

See description in previous event, Feb 6.

**Winter Ango Shuso Talk
by Shuso Alex Hokan Perrotti
On-site (in Zendo) + Online (Zoom)**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Join us for Winter Ango Shuso Talk with Shuso Alex Hokan Perrotti. 10:30–11:00am Zazen 11:00–12:00pm Shuso Talk.

**Feb 15–22 “Actualizing the Self”
7-Day Sesshin (1–7 Overnights)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 15, 7:30 PM PST– Feb 22, 4:45 PM 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. \$85/night & up (based on room type). 10-20% discount for members.

**Feb 17 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Fugan Chris C.J. Johnson
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 17, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PST

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Chris Fugan CJ Johnson, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Feb 18 Sesshin Shuso
Talk by Nyoze Kwong-osho,
abbot of SMZC
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 18, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PST

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

**Feb 19 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Fugan Chris C.J. Johnson
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 19, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PST

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Chris Fugan CJ Johnson, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Feb 20 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Jakusho Kwong-roshi, founder of SMZC
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 20, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PST

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Chris Fugan CJ Johnson, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Feb 21 Sesshin Shuso Talk by
Fugan Chris C.J. Johnson
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 21, 2026, 3:00 PM–4:30 PM PST

Sesshin talk will be given by Shuso Chris Fugan CJ Johnson, following one period of zazen. 3:00pm–3:30pm Zazen 3:30pm–4:30 pm Sesshin Shuso Talk.

**Feb 28 Winter Ango Closing Ceremony & Mondo
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Feb 28, 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Join us for Winter Ango ‘Revealing the Dharma’ Closing Ceremony & Mondo with Shuso Chris Fugan CJ Johnson. 10:30–11:00am Zazen, 11:00–11:45am Closing Ceremony & Mondo.

Mar 2–4 SMZC Closed

**Mar 6 March Fusatsu Ceremony
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

7:30–9:00 PM PST

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.

**Mar 7 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00AM–1:30PM PST

See description in previous event, Feb 6.

Mar 7 **Saturday Community**
Talk by Nyoze Kwong-oshō,
abbot of SMZC
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

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

Mar 13–14 **‘Just This Moment’**
1-Day Sitting
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 Mar 13, 7:30PM PD –Mar 14, 5:00PM 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.

Mar 16 **SMZC Closed**

Mar 21 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PST
 See description in previous event, Feb 6.

Kids & Youth Community Quarterly
 10:30 AM–1:30 PM PST

Join us for a morning of mindfulness and discovery at the Zen Center, designed for ages 1–7 and 8–18 yrs. While parents participate in meditation and Dharma talk, children and teens will engage in fun, age-appropriate activities, led by sangha members. \$15 admission/person (child or parent)

Saturday Community
Talk by Mitchell Hoden Katzel
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Talk will be given by Mitchell Hoden Katzel, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

Mar 22 **Spring Workfest**
& 23 **On-site**
 Mar 22, 8:30PM PDT–Mar 23, 12:30AM PDT

In the spirit of together-action, come help breathe new energy into the center with friends and families of the Sonoma Mountain Sangha. Bring a pair of work gloves if you have them. Vegetarian lunch will be provided afterwards. RSVP to offer your hands of compassion!

Mar 27–28 **Spring Temple Stay**
On-site
 Mar 27, 3:00 PM PDT–Mar 28, 1:30 PM PDT

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

Mar 28 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
 9:00AM–1:30PM PST
 See description in previous event, Feb 6.

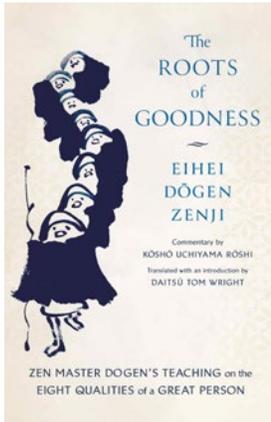
Saturday Community
Talk by Michael Daizan Lyons
On-site + Online
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST
 Talk will be given by Michael Daizan Lyons, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.



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>.

Fall 2025 Book Study Reflection: The Roots of Goodness

by Nikos Leverenz



I've participated regularly in SMZC's book study since it was first offered online some years ago. It is a rewarding way to explore aspects of the Buddhadharmā with others who have a range of experiences and backgrounds, including the Sangha's "first family," seasoned residents and practitioners, and those interested in a deeper understanding of the Dharma and Soto Zen. I participate in other book groups too,

and typically have multiple volumes on my active reading list. I appreciate SMZC's consistent dedication to group study around a key text that may not be on one's radar. As a group, we read deliberately, engage in dialogue, and often pose questions that have no clear answers. Zazen comes up quite a bit.

This fall, we read *The Roots of Goodness: Zen Master Dogen's Teaching on the Qualities of a Great Person*, a volume of talks delivered by the late Koshō Uchiyama-roshi toward the end of his life. It explores the last fascicle of Dogen's Shobogenzo, "*Hachi Dainin Gaku* (The Eight Qualities of a Great Person)."

These eight qualities are: having few desires; knowing one has enough; appreciating serenity/quietude; making diligent effort; not losing sight of true dharma; concentrating on settling in dhyana; practicing wisdom; and not engaging in useless argument. Each quality is addressed through a lively mix of learned Dharma insights, personal reflections, and commentary on contemporary Japanese life.

A former abbot of Antaiji, a rural temple 150 miles northwest of Kyoto, Uchiyama has greatly influenced the propagation of Soto Zen in America. His legacy includes books that are worthy of continual exploration: *Opening the Hand of Thought: Foundations of Zen Buddhist Practice* and *How to Cook Your Life: From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment*. His lineage of students includes Tom Wright, this volume's translator, and Shohaku Okumura, an eminent Dogen scholar, prolific author, and founding abbot of the Sanshin Zen Community in Bloomington, Indiana.

The Roots of Goodness is an expression of Uchiyama's lifetime study and practice of the Buddha Way. There is a felt sense of urgency in his presentation, particularly in his critique of post-WWII Japanese life, which can be rather terse and even caustic. His criticism extends to Zen priests in Japan who say that zazen can't be explained in words: "In doing zazen there must be an aim... We have to appeal to people's intellectual or rational capacities and explain as much as possible what can be said in words" (p. 216-17).

In his final comments, Uchiyama underscores the expression *monshisho* in the chapter on practicing wisdom—"realization based on hearing the teaching well, deeply contemplating, and sincerely practicing" (p. 250). Further, "the true reality of the life of Jiko cannot be comprehended by oneself" (Id). Jiko is roughly defined as "individually living out a self that fills the entire life of the universe [with] a definite aim" (p.151).

In the boundless praxis of listening-contemplating-practicing with others, the last two lines of Uchiyama's final poem resonate with a poignant vitality:

*All things come together as one—just sitting precious
Life becoming life—just sitting precious*

New To The Sangha

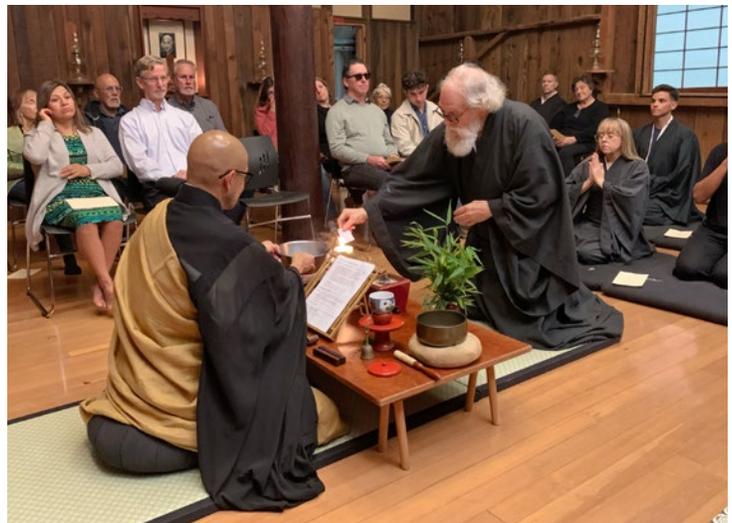
We offer a warm welcome to our newest member.

Paul Ippolito, Petaluma, CA

I am retired now, and live in Petaluma with my wife of 21 years. I worked in New York finance for 14 years, but moved to California after an early midlife crisis in 1999 that drastically changed the direction of my life. I immersed myself in Buddhism and psychotherapy, and eventually became a high school teacher in Marin, specializing in college-level economics. I taught for 19 years before retiring.

Outside of work, I am an avid mountain biker and enjoy construction and landscaping projects around our home. I also love spending time with our two crazy dogs. Reading continues to be a passion—I'm especially drawn to books on Buddhism, psychology, philosophy, and religion. ❖

Jukai at SMZC — November 25, 2025



Megan Backus	Bright Mind	Myoshin
Russell Bradley	Profound Ocean	Genkai
Belinda Burnside	Full Moon	Engetsu
Ejo Kwong	Eternal Purity	Ejo
Andrew Penners	Pure-hearted Fragrance	Junho

明心
玄海
明月
永淨
淳芳

Icelandic Sangha Report

by Zenki Traustason

As winter deepens, the hours of daylight grow shorter and the shadows grow longer. Our Sangha continues its steady rhythm of practice. As I write these words, we are approaching the winter solstice on December 21, the shortest day of the year. The quiet darkness of winter makes a vivid contrast to the restless bright lights of the holiday season. After the solstice, the days start to grow longer, and the shadows get shorter by the day.

On November 29, we signed new bylaws for the Icelandic Sangha – Nátthagi. The previous bylaws were very outdated, and it was time to create a new framework from scratch. Taking the time to carefully craft the bylaws allowed us to establish a structure that honors the spirit and needs of our Sangha while ensuring clear and proper communication with Icelandic authorities. We recognize that strong, clear bylaws are essential for the Dharma to thrive here in Iceland.

The new bylaws clarify the roles of both the Director of the Board and the Abbot.

We were delighted to connect with Roshi via Zoom on his birthday. It was a joyful gathering, a time to honor Roshi and reflect on his remarkable annual trips to Iceland for close to forty years to teach the Dharma. He holds the distinction of being the very first teacher to introduce the Dharma here. Roshi's dedication and deep practice have inspired us profoundly and laid the foundation for the Dharma in Iceland. Happy birthday, Roshi, and thank you for being an inspiration to us all!

Roshi's book *No Beginning, No End* is being released in Icelandic, a fitting tribute for his birthday. The translation by Brynjar Shoshin will allow Roshi's teachings to reach Icelandic readers in their own language. This marks an important step in making the Dharma more accessible within Iceland, and reflects the continued maturation of practice here.

Iceland is a nation of literature and has a very rich language. It is a challenge, however, to write about the Dharma in Icelandic, since many of the concepts have no direct equivalent and require



careful consideration. If the Dharma is to thrive here, it is essential that we be able to express it in our own language. I congratulate Brynjar Shoshin on his excellent work as a significant step for the Icelandic Sangha.

I extend to the wider Sangha my warmest wishes for a peaceful holiday season and a prosperous New Year.

In closing, here is a poem by Zen Master Man Gong. In Iceland, we have a lot of wind. Where does the wind come from? Where does it go? The wind is a great teacher, expressing the ever-changing quality of this moment.

*Everything is born by following the wind;
Everything dies by following the wind.
When you find out where the wind comes from,
there is no life, no death. ❖*



Kannon Sangha News

by Myoju Sieradzka-Imhoff and Jarek Kaiin

The Polish sangha is experiencing some positive changes! The opening of a new house in Kaçiki initiated a special chapter in our sangha life. We held an opening ceremony before the Rohatsu sesshin began. A formal part of the ceremony included chanting “Buddham Saranam Gachami” while circumambulating the house, accompanied by short talks and numerous thank-yous. It would not have happened without the great efforts of many members. Special recognition goes to Darek Wiczorek from Poznan. According to Uji, the house was established only because everyone involved had the interest of the sangha in mind, instead of their personal goals.

Rohatsu took place in this new Sangha House, which served as a zendo that fit all 20 participants. The house has two bathrooms, a few bedrooms, and a big room connected to the kitchen, which did not disrupt zazen. We didn’t lack anything! It didn’t snow or rain, and the temperature stayed around 6 degrees C (48 degrees F). Sesshin was led by Kaiin as hoshi, with participation by our roshi, Uji. We had a four-hour Tetsuya (all-night sitting), ending with a beautiful ceremony. This was our first practice together, which helped to warm the new house.

Warsaw Zen Center is still growing and is quite active. We organize regular meditation sessions that are happily attracting more young people. In November, we had a one-day sitting with Roshi Kuun, during which he translated a talk by Kwong-roshi. A week later was an “open day” with Roshi Uji, a great opportunity for anybody to learn or review the fundamentals of Zen practice. Every other month, Myoju Małgosia leads the Hidden Lamp study group, which was established almost five years ago. We have many plans for 2026.

In Gdansk, monthly one-day sittings are led by Hoshi Kaiin. However, two pillars of the Gdansk sangha are transitioning to Kaçiki. Genzen Piotr has been living in Kaçiki since the summer, and Jarek Kaiin is in the process of slowly moving his life there.

We had a significant change to the board of directors when Joshin Jacek became the new president of the Kannon Sangha. We can definitely feel fresh energy with Joshin’s new ideas on how to improve our organization. We are very grateful to him!

Christmastime is coming. Although covered in grey, Poland glimmers with lights warming our sleepy hearts, bringing hope for summer days. ❖



All the Hemispheres

Leave the familiar for a while.
Let your senses and bodies stretch out
Like a welcomed season
Onto the meadows and shores and hills.
Open up to the Roof.
Make a new watermark on your excitement
And love.
Like a blooming night flower,
Bestow your vital fragrance of happiness
And giving
Upon our intimate assembly.
Change rooms in your mind for a day.
All the hemispheres in existence
Lie beside an equator
In your heart.
Greet Yourself
In your thousand other forms
As you mount the hidden tide and travel
Back home.
All the hemispheres in heaven
Are sitting around a fire
Chatting
While stitching themselves together
Into the Great Circle inside of
You.

—Hafiz: from ‘The Subject Tonight is Love’
Translated by Daniel Ladinsky.

Jukai Ceremony In Mexico

by Katsuzen King

On Sunday, October 19, Centro Zen Tijuana held what may have been the first Soto Zen Receiving the Precepts (Jukai) ceremony in the city's history. The ceremony honored Aurora Cati Boreal, a long-time member of Centro Zen Tijuana, who was joined by several friends and family members as she received her rakusu and the Buddhist name Anshin, meaning "Peaceful Heart."

Preparing for the ceremony presented a number of logistical and practical challenges, but collective effort brought it to fruition. All the liturgy and chants were translated into Spanish, and the required instruments and ceremonial materials transported from Sonoma County to Tijuana. We were also fortunate to secure a welcoming, supportive venue in the Dakini Center. One of the relatively few Buddhist groups in Tijuana, this Tibetan Buddhist temple under the guidance of Lama Lhanang Rinpoche of the Jigme Lingpa Center in San Diego graciously offered us its space for the afternoon.

This Jukai ceremony represented a significant milestone in our work along the U.S.-Mexico border, opening the way for Centro Zen Tijuana to deepen its practice and strengthen its connection to the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and the teachings of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi.

Centro Zen Tijuana is a fledgling Zen group that meets every Tuesday morning via Zoom for meditation and discussion in Spanish. For more information about our work, or to participate in our weekly Zen en español gatherings, contact me at flacoking@aol.com. ❖



In receiving the precepts, you are making a public statement to the sangha, openly asserting before all of us that you're no longer narrowly preoccupied or clinging to your small self. Constantly attending to that small self has no real benefit. In asserting big self, you're helping others emerge from their own darkness, because they are also you. Big self is beyond the duality of self and other.

—Jakusho Kwong-roshi, "Jukai," Mind Sky

Above: Main shrine room, Casa Dakini, Tijuana, B.C.

Below: Aurora Anshin Boreal with daughter Sara following the Jukai Ceremony on October 19.

Words From The Work Leader

by Tokan Stepanek

It's been a season of finishing off summer projects and preparing the Zen Center for winter. At the end of the growing season, we went through final harvests for many garden crops, then removed the various trellises and crop-support structures to ready the garden for winter cover crops. We are still in search of a full-time resident gardener/caretaker. More important than experience or knowledge as a gardener is the spirit of working with the Dharma and contributing to the life of the Sangha. If you are at all interested in this possibility, don't hesitate to contact the office for more details.

Firewood becomes a priority in the fall, and fortunately, we are blessed with an abundant supply of fallen trees on the property. The biggest issue is which ones to salvage, and getting help to handle the workload. Volunteers are always welcome, at all times of the year.

We have worked diligently over the last couple of years to clear flammable understory shrubbery like poison oak,

blackberry, and invasive non-native brooms from our extensive forest land to minimize the risk from wildfires like the one we experienced in 2017. We have been coordinating with the Sonoma Land Trust to ensure our work conforms to best practices for forest management. This has left us with copious amounts of forest debris, which we manage with chipping/shredding, firewood salvage, and permitted burn piles. We have recently undertaken our first few burns of the season, taking advantage of the early rains to keep the ground moist while burning. These efforts help manage the vitality and health of our treasured forest lands.

The work of the Zen Center does not happen without the amazing efforts of our dedicated volunteers to fulfill the precious life of the Buddhadharmā. Please consider how you might join us in this wondrous activity for the benefit of all beings. ❖

Mountain Gate (Sanmon) And Sangha House Remodel

by Mitchell Hoden Katzel and Cam Shunryu Kwong

The Hermitage Woodworks crew is nearing completion on all the beautiful Japanese joinery for the Mountain Gate at their workshop in Richmond. The cedar wood pieces will be delivered to the Zen Center once the concrete foundation has been poured. We are hopeful that foundation construction will happen early in the new year. Our architects and structural engineers are working on refining the design details for site drainage and for the steps up from the parking lot. With assistance from our electrician, Eric Scudder, who has graciously volunteered his expertise, we are developing a lighting plan for the steps, both sides of the gate, and inside the bays where the Nio guardian statues will be housed. The Kawara roof tiles imprinted with Genjo-ji's wisteria crest are nearing completion at Daibutsu tilemakers in Kyoto and will then be shipped to the port in San Francisco.

Sonoma County has filed comments on the Sangha House Remodel permit resubmitted by Dorman Associates, and is working on its response. We are waiting to receive the last construction estimate and will then select a contractor for the project. It is now anticipated that construction will begin in the spring.

The remodeling project will remove the Zen Dust store, including its roof and foundation, and replace it with a new room by extending the building's roof, walls, and floor. Materials will match the existing Sangha House. The new room will be a bedroom with a half bathroom. ❖



Zen Dust News

by Carol Seizen Adams

This morning, gentle raindrops fall through misty fog, infusing the ground with replenishing streams of water. This past Sunday, Mother Nature produced a different sort of offering when the heart of Sonoma Mountain shook with such force that it dashed many items in our Zen Dust store off their shelves and onto the ground, breaking statues and incense burners along the way. Similar damage was sustained around the temple grounds, the most serious being a broken water line to one of our tanks. We are grateful that the damage was not more severe and that everyone on the mountain remained safe. Thanks to many helping hearts and hands, the store and temple grounds have been restored and are ready for reopening in the new year.

As we move into the Year of the Fire Horse, the Zen Dust team looks forward to supplying you with all your meditation needs: Zen-made zabutons, zafus, jubons, support cushions, and more. Please visit Zen Dust after Saturday Community practice, from noon to 1:15 p.m. For orders or questions, email zendust@smzc.org, or call (707) 545-8105. ❖

The Zen Dust Team:

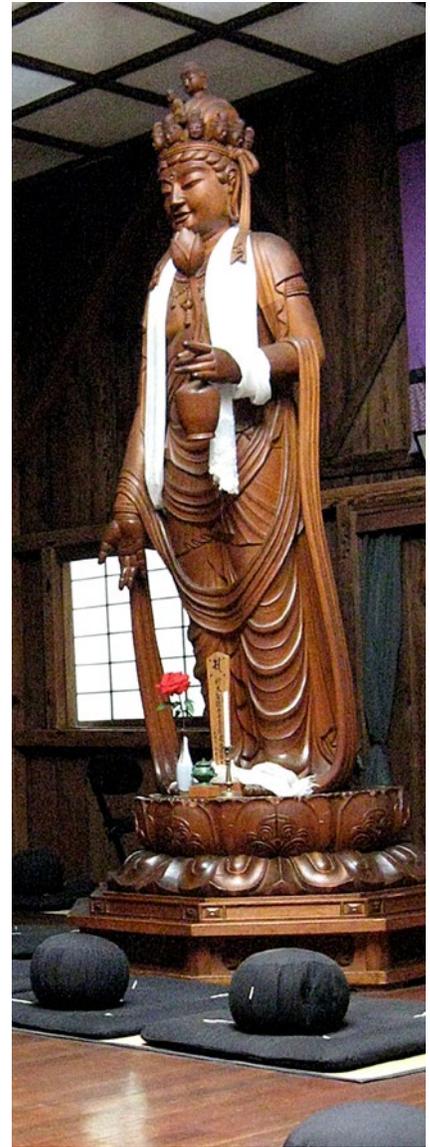
Carol Seizen Adams (admin and sewing)

Lin Naylor (store steward)

Lori Zarr (sewing)

Alex Thomas (sewing)

Pat Preston (sewing)



All Contributions
Help Maintain
the Buddhadharma!

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

Membership



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

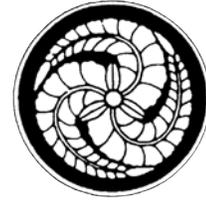
ONLINE RESOURCES ~ Dharma Talks & Events

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

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

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

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



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SONOMA MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER MISSION STATEMENT

“For the Beneficial Protection
and Awakening of All Beings”



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