



October – December 2025

The Ground Before The Present

The following talk was given by Kwong-roshi at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center on August 22, 2025 during the summer Ango sesshin.

This talk is dedicated to Zenobia Tetsuro Barlow. She was a member here in our early days who helped us raise money to stabilize the temple. I remember her telling a business group, “They must be doing something right.” I always remember that. She and her husband, Obie, renovated the Sangha House, and she suggested that I should sit in a special chair. I thanked her for that. She is on her way to passing right now. It must be difficult for her because she was a fluent speaker. Now she can't speak, and can't see, but she can hear. I hope she's listening. Her niece said she is moved by the talks. You know there are other people who are in hospitals at this very moment. And when we sit, we should sit with everyone, including the people on Zoom. Furthermore, I'm thinking there should be some etiquette for people on Zoom. You need to show up. You can't just display your name. You need to be on time. You should not drink water or wear your pajamas. You need to be as if you were in the Zen Hall. This is what I request.

It's really profound and wonderful to have a chance to study the Lankavatara Sutra. Sutra means Buddha's Teachings, which gladden people's hearts and satisfy their longing and sufferings. Because in this sutra, it says the Five Dharmas, the Eight Consciousnesses, and the Two Kinds of No-Selfs are the entire Mahayana teaching. I was not aware of these principles. People are hooked by Zen sayings and stories, which inspire them to go after the carrot. But, most likely, they have no idea

that there are principles, the correct knowledge that leads them to their direct experience of Buddha's knowledge. This is very important. During our beginning days, from the 1960s even to this day, people are mostly hooked on the carrot. But you need to know these three principles because you could say they are the Relative that supports the Absolute.

You can find the Eight Consciousnesses in a small but dynamic, pure Zen book called *The Way of Zazen*. It is out of print, but you can find it on your computer. It describes the Eight Consciousnesses and how they are dissolved through sitting. That's the essence of sitting—it dissolves opposites. It dissolves everything, and this is called non-dualism

Today, we will focus on the Eight Consciousnesses. The first five are the senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, taste, and touch. The sixth includes the mental consciousness of the first five. The sixth form of consciousness reifies the five senses into conceptual consciousness: volition, will, discrimination, and memory. The seventh is self-consciousness. And the eighth is what is called the repository consciousness, which is much deeper than psychological consciousness. Every thought, word or deed are like seeds from the past that drop into this repository. While it remains in this repository consciousness, which has no form but is the action of grasping and being grasped, which causes karma, when conditions are right, these seeds blossom. Habit energy is very subtle. Humanity is caught in habit energy; we are ignorant and haven't learned anything. From the great suffering of our past, we needlessly

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continue fighting and killing each other. We're really foolish and ignorant people. We need to be aware of what we do, what our habits are, because it ingrains our suffering.

When we sit, there is a place we go that you have not recognized. People like to sit because they arrive in a place that is profoundly calm and quiet, where the mind is not scattered nor activated. You may even call it quiet thinking. That's why people become attached to sitting. The mind in itself enjoys the calmness and stillness. But still you haven't recognized it. A teacher needs to point it out. In sitting, thinking begins to dissolve naturally—if you are where you are, not somewhere else. In the Zendo, out of the Zendo, you need to be where you are. This is why the forms and rituals are strictly followed here, to remind you of where you are.

Look at the first five kanji in the Heart Sutra: *kan, ji, zai, bosatsu*. *Kan* means contemplation, which is not reflecting on something, but it is just like clearing the calculator before you use it. That's contemplation. You have to clear it, and you can do it expediently by breathing. It's *tanden kikai* breathing. That's proof that you can do it. You need to learn it and mature in it. *Ji* is self. *Zai* is where you are. *Kan ji zai*, contemplating where you are. And then *bosatsu* is an enlightened being, which refers to you. You are the enlightened being who realizes yourself. How could you realize yourself if you weren't already enlightened? This is not a premise; this is the Dharma of reality. That's been proven over and over again throughout history.

The wondrous thing is that these eight consciousnesses dissolve, from the constancy of our sitting, into the four wisdoms. Your five senses and your mind are the first six. The seventh one, which is written on the stupa post where our future zendo will sit, is the self-consciousness that is dissolved into impartiality. Everything will have equal value, without distinction. Which means no duality. It's impartiality that transforms or dissolves into compassion. The eighth consciousness, the repository consciousness, is also dissolved into the *Tathāgata-garba*, or Buddha's womb, also referred to as suchness, or ultimate reality, the Great Round Mirror. And when all of these transform, you become free from the idea of yourself, which is realization and non-duality.

There is the metaphor of our inherent jewel wrapped in a soiled rag thrown by the side of the road, which you may pass by every day. The rag could be the eight consciousnesses. It could be the five skandhas. It could be an idea of Zen practice. It's wrapped in the cover of how we think, our concept of what Zen practice is, and tossed by the side of the road. In other words, it's right in front of you. Koreans have a saying about the Dharma, "Dharma down, right in front of you."

These three realities, not concepts, are the Five Dharmas, the Eight Consciousnesses, and the Two No-Selfs, which is actually no self and what belongs to the self.



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It's wrapped in the cover of how we think, our concept of what Zen practice is, and tossed by the side of the road. In other words, it's right in front of you.

These are the three principles of the entire Mahayana tradition, and we should know each one through our sitting, because this is how greed, hatred, and ignorance are dissolved. Everything is a projection. Zen is a projection. Everything in your mind is a projection until you realize it. Whatever you think is a projection. What is not a projection is space, nirvana, non-duality, ungraspable suchness: these five are uncreated, unproduced. A very important proclamation Buddha gave was “ye-dharma.”

*“Ye dharma”
Of the phenomena produced through causes,
The Tathāgata has proclaimed their causes (Hetu)
And also their cessation (Nirvana)*

Ye means primordial or our original pure mind. In ancient times, “ye dharma” was very sacred. It served as a mantra as well as a verse that substituted for the relics of a Buddha.

Another name for the Buddha is the Tathāgata, which translates to “thus come, thus gone.” But in thusness, which means muchness, which means ultimate reality does not come nor go, there is no coming or going. It’s like when you are taking care of an infant, you don’t know if the baby is coming or going, right? When she is walking, not even the baby knows. So no coming and no going. And then Tathāgata proclaims that there is a cause. This is really profound. There is a cause and there is an end to it, an end to producing suffering. You understand this not by thinking, but by direct realization of Buddha’s knowledge. Then your life begins to change completely. You could say that’s the whole purpose of the Dharma, which cannot be learned or taught. It can only be realized. You cannot produce or create, knowing. You allow the thinking mind to release it from its habitual condition. This is the only way. It’s the entrance to the Sanmon Mountain Gate.

“Suchness” is an interesting word. It’s not used much. Usually, you hear the word “emptiness,” which is a minus—a projection. Suchness is a plus. I wrote down here that suchness is what transcends projection. It’s a more positive way to say emptiness. In Japanese, it’s “neyo neyo,” it’s real, it’s true, it’s certain. It’s ultimate. That is its self-existence or self-nature. But when I say it to you, it still is a projection, because you need to realize it.

There is not much more to say. Just sitting or being where you are. (Looks at watch) Just a half hour; you need to sit more. What I mean is, please ask me something.

Student: *So when you first sit down...*

Roshi: It’s before you sit down. “The ground before the present.”

Student: *Before you said you arrive, and now you’re in the Zendo, you’ve interacted with the sangha, and then you’re sitting. And of those first seven of the eight conscious-*

There is a cause and there is an end to it, an end to producing suffering. You understand this not by thinking, but by direct realization of Buddha’s knowledge. Then your life begins to change completely. You could say that’s the whole purpose of the Dharma, which cannot be learned or taught. It can only be realized. You cannot produce or create, knowing. You allow the thinking mind to release it from its habitual condition. This is the only way. It’s the entrance to the Sanmon Mountain Gate.

nesses, it feels like most of the running of the mind is in six and seven. And that is where the breaths become kind of a balancing or a tool to help your awareness know where you are.

Roshi: What?

Student: *The breath at that point sort of feels like the start of the process.*

Roshi: Actually, if you sat a long time—not just devotionally, but within the deep sincere resolve of just sitting—that is the most important thing in your life. It's not about philosophy. It's about ultimate reality. It's not about thinking. You need to do it. If you have that kind of spirit and resolve, not just getting out of bed to do something, but deep resolve. “How much suffering will you create for yourself today?” I used to say this to myself. But you need to have the foundation of sitting to enact a strong container, and then when you get up, you're already there. It's not when you sit. The word “wisdom,” or *prajna*, means before knowledge. It's not the name or the appearance; it's before that.

Student: *Sometimes I'm noticing the breath, and it's just breath happening. And sometimes I feel like I'm here, I'm breathing, this is my breathing process. I feel myself here breathing. I wonder if that's a good time to bring attention to that sense of self, investigate, and notice what that sense of self is. What's it doing? How is it even here?*

Roshi: In breathing, the exhalation is letting go of the idea of self. You have no problem with the self. On the exhalation, as you let it go, your thinking will stop. And when your self returns, let it go again through the exhalation.

Student: *Sometimes I'm exhaling and I'm letting go of my self and it's creating more self. My effort to let go of the self is just creating another act of me.*

Roshi: But still, whether it's more or less, it's the self that you have to let go of. You have to struggle with that until you overcome it. Because it's not the physical self, it's the idea of self. There's a difference. I always thought it was the physical self—I'm going to disappear. That makes everyone afraid. But it's the idea of who you think you are that you need to release. Because the idea of who you think you are contains greed, anger, and ignorance. Basically, that's it.

Actually, I have never given this kind of talk—the entire concept of projection. Everything is a projection because ultimately everything is non-arising. That's the essence of *zazen*. Non-arising is cessation, which is *nirvana*, nonduality, freedom.

Nothing has arisen.

Nothing arises now.

Nothing will arise.



Nothing has arisen.
Nothing arises now.
Nothing will arise.

You can demonstrate it, or be with it at will, by strong resolve and training, which forms a great container. You have to have that foundation, which involves your breath, body, and mind.

Student: *I appreciated the protocols requested of Zoom participants. Are they also able to ask questions?*

Roshi: *Zoom people, any questions?*

Student: *Faith and trust and letting go?*

Roshi: Good luck (laughs). The faith and trust are in letting go. Letting go means non-arising. You don't produce it; it dissolves by itself. Anything produced causes karma. Anything you create causes karma. So you can't say, "I am doing this." You and the objective world have a non-dual relationship. The table is part of you. You know "form is emptiness, emptiness is form." But I am I, and the table is the table. Those four steps are very important. I could be walking down the street and get hit by a car if I am not I, and the car is the car. Okay?

I found out that one kalpa is 432,000 years. So this means we have a very rare opportunity to be living in a human body. I think they say it's not just one but myriad kalpas after your body perishes. So, we have this rare chance to not only free ourselves, but also free other people as well.

Student: *Roshi, could you say something more about the two non-selves?*

Roshi: That's a whole subject. But briefly, the self does not exist. For instance, the chain of dependent origination, which they say is how Siddhartha received His great awakening, proves that there is no self-existence. If everything is dependent on another, there can be no separate self-existence. We create it. The idea that this self is not real because it contains the characteristics of desire, anger, and delusion.

Student: *Yet each thing has its own virtue?*

Roshi: Each thing has its own virtue, yes, even greed, anger, and ignorance, but you need to find out what their opposite side is. Driving down this mountain, there is a sign that says "Please help us keep the roads clean." We have to ask people to help because we don't have any foundation for virtue anymore. Goodness, that is what we are trying to bring back. It's there, but we're losing it.

Convenience makes us lazy, separated, and also comfortable. When we get too comfortable, delusions climb in with us. That's true. I have a squirt bottle that sprays cleaning fluid for my glasses. That's pretty good, you know. But what happened to my breath? I use my breath now, because that's using my body. We don't use ourselves anymore, because we have all these conveniences.



Student: *How can we use tenderness to find this place of letting go?*

Roshi: Tenderness is a kind of softness, an opening of what we're holding onto so tightly. And what is it we're holding on to? We need to release, relax, and soften ourselves in receiving. Tenderness is one of its characteristics. In fact, true warriors are known for their tenderness and the virtue of kindness. As we let go of everything, the barrier dissolves by itself. The softness is its quality. When I eat, I need to relax my clenched fist. Then everything becomes more enjoyable. ♦♦

Post-Ango Shuso Exchange

This dialogue between Summer Shusos, Fugan Chris Johnson, and Kakuryu Noel McKenna took place shortly after the close of Summer Ango, reflecting on their shared experiences of the summer practice period.

Fugan: Kakuryu, how's your heart? Your heart had an experience while you were Shuso! How are you doing?

Kakuryu: My heart is still beating normally. It's also quite full from the Ango and Sesshin experience. Today my local Sangha had a zazenai, and I was asked to talk about Genjoji and Ango. It was unplanned, but somehow I managed to talk for 45 minutes. I loved sharing my Genjoji experiences and sharing gratitude. They loved hearing about the wakeup bell and night fire watch. I'm back at work, checking blood pressures and giving flu shots. 'Tis the season.

So Fugan, among the endless experiences that unfolded during your time at Genjoji during Ango, what are three that are particularly memorable?

Fugan: Yes, endless experiences to pick and choose from. Really, though, more like one beginningless, endless experience where picking and choosing drops away. How can I separate into three? Good question, Kakuryu, you've stopped me in my tracks! So I'll follow up on this when I can offer the other side of the response by naming three. And for you?

Kakuryu: Well, I don't think I can answer without talking about my heart, especially since you've asked about it. On the morning of the fourth day, I got up and brushed my teeth. Returning to my room, I sat on the bed and opened a book to look for some inspiration for my next talk. As I opened the book, my heart went into atrial fibrillation, beating very erratically. My first thought was "Now? Here? Yes!" Tokan took me to an ER in Santa Rosa, and about 30 minutes after arriving, I was being prepped for a cardioversion to shock my heart back into rhythm. The ER doctor injected a sedative into the IV line, and within seconds my face started tingling. Here we go, I thought. In what seemed like the next moment, my eyes were opening, and I said out loud, "Wait, I'm still conscious." The doc put his hand on my foot and said, "It's OK, we're done." My heart was back in normal "sinus" rhythm.

As I was being wheeled into the cardiac bay for that procedure, the words of Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who gave me monk's vows in 2001, were clear in my mind. He would often say, "Whenever you arrive at a place, you must think, I may die here." Though I was trying to comfort myself with thoughts of not being in immediate danger, in those moments I realized the truth of his words. I could only relax into the weight of my body on the bed, breathing down into the soles of my feet and fully feeling the irregular heartbeat. If this is it, OK. It was a bit of a breakthrough, in that again the only answer was yes, and releas-



ing the struggle against what the moment was offering. It revealed the preciousness of life, practice, and the path. My conditioned mind can be very stubborn, so this was such an important teaching.

But all the experiences were memorable: ringing the wakeup bell, fire watch/night watch, scrubbing toilets, and every moment of letting go. I can't really separate them. The Mondo is very much in my heart. I was apprehensive about it, thinking I'd be asked difficult philosophical questions or about Dogen fascicles that I was unprepared for. My heart was in my throat. However, as soon as the

Sangha began asking questions, I was struck by how whole-hearted they were. Each Sangha member came forth so intimately. It felt joyful. These were questions about the reality of life, and it was an honor to have them shared with me. I'm teary-eyed thinking about it. The whole exchange felt heart to heart, not separate, and we all witnessed each other so very intimately.

How did the invitation for you to serve as Shuso come about for you?

Fugan: From the absolute, big-mind perspective, I truly don't know! And from the relative, everyday-mind perspective, the short version has three parts. First, I traveled to Genjoji and met Hojo-san last year, sensed a strong affinity, and conveyed my intention and direction in practice. That's when I began meeting with Hojo-san and Roshi for dokusan. Second, I took it to heart when I heard Hojo-san say, "One step at a time, Fugan. Feel your feet on the ground, recognize the opportunity of each appropriate next step when it appears, and completely take just that one step with full willingness." Third, about a year later, I received the totally unexpected invitation to serve as Shuso. When I read that email, two things happened immediately: Tears came to my eyes, and I responded yes without thinking. So how did it come about? Suddenly, as a big surprise, almost like it didn't have anything to do with me. And gradually, one small, intentional, complete step at a time.

How about you?

Kakuryu: I've been reflecting on priest ordination for several years, so back in spring, I brought it up with Hojo-san. He suggested I serve as Shuso for two weeks during Ango as a way of fulfilling and honoring this intention that has been germinating, and to take a step in that direction. The only answer was yes, as you have said. Tears came to my eyes, too. Reality has its way of giving us these invitations, as surprising and often unsettling as they are. It's funny, I told my partner Shane about the invitation, and he said, "Looks like you need to go!" Actually, I had already said yes. Then the second thought, that persistent conditioned voice, asked, What did I just get myself into? But I had already jumped off the cliff. As the following weeks unfolded, I recognized a great deal of this conditioned self in my sitting, walking, and working, seeing this habitual energy and letting it simply move. Here it comes. There it goes. So this invitation to serve was (and constantly is) an invitation to jump off this cliff of conditioned self. We just land where we land. So much of finding our way is in the not-knowing and in the trying. The way is right here under our feet, on the cushion, or in an Emergency Room, for that matter.

Fugan: And how did you choose your theme?

Kakuryu: After I said yes to serving as Shuso, Hojo-san asked me to start thinking about a theme. I'd been revisiting Dogen's Tenzo Kyokun (Instructions to the

Cook), the edition with commentary by Uchiyama-roshi. I thought I might talk about the three kinds of mind, and mentioned it to Hojo-san. He suggested I read the foreword to Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community, saying I would find a lot there. As soon as I received the book, I read the foreword written by Ikko Narasaki-roshi. I kept coming back to this sentence: "With everything you encounter, without separating self and others, become one with that thing with your entire body and





mind, dealing with it most thoroughly.” It stuck. I found myself getting excited about it and communicated this to Hojo-san. His reply was, “You have found your theme!” I wrote that sentence down on a piece of paper, kept it in a pocket, and would read it throughout the day—at work, at the supermarket, on a walk in a park. I worked with it in a similar way as with a koan, which is to bring it to life by bringing it into daily life.

What struck me, and what still strikes me, is that this simple sentence expresses the entire path of recognizing nonseparation—not only in formal zazen and working with the forms, but also within the ordinary activities of daily life.

How did you choose your theme for the first half of Ango? Our theme choices were quite a match!

Fugan: Yes indeed. Two Shusos, two themes, intimately not separate. One suchness! Dogen’s Bodhisattva Shishobo (The Bodhisattva’s Four Embracing Actions) was in my heart from the beginning. I’m fond of it after spending about eight months working with it as a dharma project a few years ago. But I didn’t immediately follow that intuition, because I felt that diving into something else could be a good exploration and practice. So I let it simmer. Then Hojo-san sent me your theme. And that was it—bam! Lines from Shishobo leapt to mind: “Identity-action means nonseparation. When we realize identity-action,

self and others are one suchness.” That’s your “without separating self and others, become one with that thing.” And “This is why identity-action is the practice and vow of a bodhisattva. We should simply face all beings with a gentle expression.” That’s your “with everything you encounter” and “dealing with it most thoroughly.” So it was a done deal at that point! For an Ango with two Shusos, pairing these themes seemed meaningful, because what the words express was going to be lived in a vital way.

Before we end, I owe you three memorable moments as Shuso: Arriving. Meeting. And departing. I felt joyful and connected upon arrival, just to be at Genjoji. It’s like, welcome home. I felt it completely. Another kind of arrival happened later, as my feet found how to walk. Meeting with Sangha members during Shuso interviews was delightful, encouraging, and supporting one another in our summer practice period and in our lives. I definitely received that from everyone as much as I hope I offered it. Plus, meeting unexpected visitors and unexpected events, doing my best to completely meet the unexpected. Finally, departing. Our Shuso transition, as I was preparing to depart and you were arriving, was at once extraordinary yet completely ordinary. As I simply and quietly conveyed a few things to welcome and support you entering as Shuso, there was also an unspoken, intimate sense of the extraordinary. Boundless yet palpable. Also, just before departing, I was in the Sangha House sitting quietly, and Hojo-san said, “You’re thinking about how you can return.” He was exactly right.

Kakuryu, I appreciate our conversation. It’s been a pleasure. Thank you, Shuso!

Kakuryu: Yes, really wonderful. Thank you, Shuso! ♦



Photos from Summer Ango



Oct 25 **Sonoma Mandala Coming Alive:
Zen Conversations for a New Era**
On-site + Online (Zoom)
10:00AM – 12:00PM PDT

A special conversation between Nyoze-oshō, Abbot of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and Jakushō Kwong-roshi, Wisdom Holder and Founder of SMZC. Conversation will be moderated by special guest Peter Coyote. Special lunch to follow afterwards.

Oct 28 **Fall Study Group (Week 4 of 8)**
On-site or Online
7:30PM –9:00 PMPDT

Explore the fundamental teachings of Buddhism and build a foundation for daily practice through discussions on the book “The Roots of Goodness: Zen Master Dogen’s Teaching on the Eight Qualities of a Great Person” commentary by Koshō Uchiyama Roshi, translated by Daistu Tom Wright.

Oct 31 – **‘Peacefully Settling Down’**

Nov 1 **1-Day Sitting**
On-site + Online (Zoom)
Oct 31, 6:00PM PST – Nov 01, 5:30PM

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

Nov 3 **SMZC Closed**

Nov 4 **Fall Study Group (Week 5 of 8)**
On-site or Online
7:30PM –9:00 PMPDT

See description in previous event, Nov 28.

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

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

Nov 8 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
9:00AM–12:00PM PDT

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

Saturday Community
(Talk by Nyoze Kwong-roshi)
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.

Nov 11 **Fall Study Group (Week 6 of 8)**
On-site or Online

7:30PM –9:00 PMPDT

See description in previous event, Nov 28.

Nov 15 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
9:00AM–12:00PM PDT

See description in previous event, Nov 8.

Saturday Community
(Talk by Nyoze Kwong-roshi)
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.

Jukai (To Receive The Precepts)
On-site + Online
2:00PM–4:00PM PST

Please join us for our Jukai Ceremony. Jukai is the ceremony of formally becoming a Buddhist and of taking the 16 Bodhisattva precepts as guidelines for life. Free admission. Open to the public. Please bring celebratory snacks/finger food.

Nov 18 **Fall Study Group (Week 7 of 8)**
On-site or Online

7:30PM –9:00 PMPDT

See description in previous event, Nov 28.

Nov 22 **Meditation Instruction**
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)
9:00AM–12:00PM PDT

See description in previous event, Nov 8.

Kids Community Monthly
On-site

10:00 AM–1:30 PM PST

Join us for a delightful morning here on the mountain. For children ages 1–7 yrs. Led by sangha member Kristin ‘Misan’ Nichols. \$15 admission/person (child or accompanying parent).

Youth Community Monthly
On-site

10:00 AM–1:30 PM PST

Join us for a morning of mindfulness and discovery at the Zen Center, designed for youth ages 8–18. While parents participate in meditation and Dharma talk, children and teens will engage in fun, age-appropriate activities that foster. Led by our sangha member Alexandra Thomas. \$15 admission/person.

Saturday Community
(Talk by Tom Jakuryu Huffman)
On-site + Online

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Calendar

Best to check website or call in case of changes –smzc.org • 707.545.8105

Talk will be given by Tom Jakuryu Huffman, following 10:30–11:00am zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Talk.

**Nov 25 Fall Study Group (Week 8 of 8)
On-site or Online**

7:30PM –9:00 PMPDT

See description in previous event, Nov 28.

Nov 27 SMZC Closed

**Nov 29 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00AM–12:00PM PDT

See description in previous event, Nov 8.

**Kids Community Monthly
On-site**

10:00 AM–1:30 PM PST

Join us for a delightful morning here on the mountain. For children ages 1-7yrs. Led by sangha member Kristin 'Misan' Nichols. \$15 admission/person (child or accompanying parent).

**Saturday Community
Talk by ZenkiAstvauldur Traustason
On-site + Online**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

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

**Dec 1–6 Rohatsu 5-Day Sesshin
(1 to 5 Overnights)
On-site or Online**

Dec 1, 7:30 PM PDT – Dec 6, 6:00AM 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. \$200 admission to attend any length between 1 and 5 days. 10-20% discount for members. (Log in first to receive the member discount.)

**Dec 6 Founder's Sunrise Ceremony
On-site**

Dec 6, 6:00 AM – Dec 6, 8:00AM PST

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

**Dec 13 Meditation Instruction
(Includes Saturday Community)
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00AM–12:00PM PDT

See description in previous event, Nov 8.

**Saturday Community
(Talk by Nyoze Kwong-roshi)
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.

Dec 15– SMZC Closed

Jan 1

**Jan 2–3 New Year's Entering The Gate
1-Day Sitting
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

Jan 2, 7:30PM – Jan 3, 5:00PM PST

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.



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>.

Zen Center residents VIP Donum Estate Winery Art Tour

invited by Allan and Mai Warburg

Right: Ejo, Nyoze Kwong in front of Swedish artist, Carl Frederik Reutersward's "knotted gun" called non-violence

Below Left: Zen Center residents VIP Donum Estate Winery Art Tour Zen Center residents VIP Donum Estate Winery Art Tour

Bottom: Nyoze and Kashin blessing Sanford Biggers' Oracle' (25 feet, 7 tons) Donum Estate winery Sonoma



*Above: Sanford Biggers, Kashin Kwong, Nyoze Kwong Oracle Blessing Donum reception
Below: Roshi watching Louise Bourgeois original spider in the costume made gallery space at Donum*



New To The Sangha

We offer a warm welcome to our newest members.

Catherine Kelley, Southern California

I am joining the sangha from Southern California, where I work for the local school district part-time and care for my elderly father. I'm an ESL teacher by trade and have taught in six countries in Asia and the Middle East, including Thailand, where I was introduced to Theravada practice, and South Korea, where I had to do 108 bows in quick succession during a temple retreat!

Living in Muslim countries opened my eyes to the beauty of Islam as it is practiced by those who truly love God and want to be better people, and I have since become very pro-religion. I joined a Zen sitting group in the early 1990s when I had an eating disorder; meditation, along with Jungian-style therapy, enabled me to recover. My eating disorder led to an obsession with food and cooking, and I decided many years ago that one of my goals for this lifetime was to become Tenzo at a Zen Center, although I'm not currently disciplined enough for such a demanding job. In 2020, I took the precepts and received the Dharma name Unwa (Cloud Harmony). After my dad passes, I hope to live at a Zen center and practice more intensively.

Sharon Barncord, Sonoma, CA

I have already had a full and interesting life. I was raised in the Bay Area and graduated from UC Berkeley, and at age 50, received my MA from the University of San Francisco. I have studied, lived, and worked in Switzerland and Germany, and traveled extensively through Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. For eight years, I worked as an international flight attendant, followed by five years supervising flight attendants. I went on to have a 40-year career in Human Resources leadership, retiring from Kaiser Permanente in 2014. Since childhood, my greatest passion has been ballet. I wrote my Master's thesis with the San Francisco Ballet, and have spent much of my life in Opera House audiences.

I was married for over 40 years to the love of my life, Jay "Cyrano," who passed away in 2023. My family now includes five stepchildren, eight grandchildren, ten great-grandchildren, two brothers, three nephews, a niece, and my remarkable 100-year-old mother. I've lived in Sonoma for over 23 years.

After Jay's passing, I sought comfort in grief literature, which led me to Buddhism in 2023. I have since immersed myself in reading and study, and participated in Saturday Community at SMZC earlier this year. I look forward to deepening my understanding and practice with the SMZC community. ♦



Because we have so much useless rubbish in our mind, it is hard to share our feeling with people, with things, with trees, or with mountains. Even though we are right in the middle of the woods, it is still hard to appreciate the feeling of the woods. When we can really appreciate the feeling of the woods, that is zazen

—Shunryu Suzuki-roshi,
from *Becoming Yourself*

Mountain Gate (Sanmon) And Sangha House Remodel Update

by Mitchell Hoden Katzel and Cam Shunryu Kwong

Recently, there has been great energy focused on constructing the Mountain Gate. If you visit the Zen Center, you will see construction staking installed by our surveyors, marking the corners and posts of the Mountain Gate foundation and the exterior walls of the Wisteria House. A group from SMZC met to review the temporary stakes and decided that the Wisteria house needed to be moved 8 feet east to provide more distance from the Mountain Gate.

Visitors may also notice deep excavation of exploratory trenches on either side of the staking, which was required to locate the exact position of a utility conduit trench that runs under the Mountain Gate foundation. It was discovered that three of the gate's post piers would hit the utility conduit trench, so structural engineer Cullen and Associates worked with the geotechnical engineer to modify the foundation design and eliminate the conflict.

At the Hermitage Woodworks shop in Richmond, our contractor, Lucas Benjamin, and his crew have been actively shaping, planing, and cutting cedar lumber to size for the posts, walls, and roof of the Mountain Gate. Meanwhile, in Kyoto, traditional Japanese Kawara roof tiles are being manufactured by the Daibutsu Company in an area of Japan known for its gray tile clay. The process is more than 1,400 years old, and involves firing the tiles at high temperature, then removing oxygen and introducing a gas during the firing to create the tiles' distinctive weatherproof luster. The Daibutsu Company was founded by the grandfather of the current leader, Tatsuma Shoji. More than a thousand tiles will be needed for the Mountain Gate. Tatsuma is also preparing a special set of Kamon (family crest) tiles imprinted with the Genjoji Wisteria crest. These are traditionally placed along the eaves, gables, and at either end of the roof ridge line.

One of our next steps will be to pour the concrete foundation of the gate in the next couple of months. We anticipate having a community gathering and celebration when a date for this mile-



*Top - Tokan Stepanek supervises Sanmon foundation trenching
Bottom - Sanmon gate preparation (photo: Hermitage Woodworks)*



stone has been set. Construction is on track for completion by March.

The Sangha House Remodel is undergoing a second set of responses by Dorman Associates to the county permit comments. The county is also reviewing construction estimates received in September. Construction on the Sangha House Remodel is scheduled to begin in January and finish in early summer 2026. ♦

Upcoming Event



SONOMA MANDALA COMING ALIVE *Zen Conversations for a New Era*

Saturday / October 25, 2025 / 10:00 am–12:00 pm / RSVP at www.smzc.org

A special conversation between Nyoze-oshō, Abbot of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center and Jakusho Kwong-roshi, Wisdom Holder and Founder of SMZC. Conversation will be moderated by special guest Peter Coyote.

Join us in discussing the importance of maintaining the Buddha's teachings. Zen practice and the Buddha's teachings are relevant and important right here, right now. SMZC's Sonoma Mandala offers a sacred Mandala container for the good of humanity, merging the Buddha's practice with our everyday lives and sharing this with the world we live in.

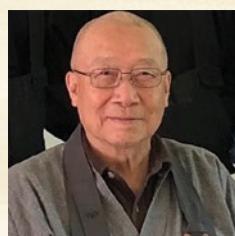
Sonoma Mountain Zen Center's commitment to build a Soto Zen temple offering the everlasting Spirit of Zen for generations to come. We will discuss the Sonoma Mandala, its history, current update, its timeline and its deeper meaning. In April 2026, the raising of SMZC's Sanmon Temple Gate will mark a threshold into Zen Conversations for a New Era.

Enjoy Music Sounds of Elliot Kanshin Kallen on shakuhachi. One Taste Sumptuous Japanese Lunch prepared by our beloved Genjoji's Temple Tenzo (head cook) Koten Price following the event. Corner Bakehouse Treat by Hien Pham. You can

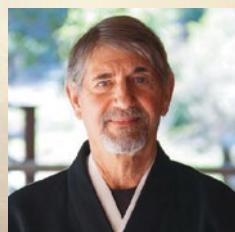
often find Hien cooking up a storm on Saturdays for community lunch at SMZC. Currently Hien is working at Troubadour Bread & Bistro in Healdsburg, CA.



Nyoze Kwong-oshō was installed as the 2nd Abbot of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center in 2023, recognized as a Kokusaifukyoshi (international zen teacher) of Shumucho Soto Zen School in Japan. 2011 trained under Hoitsu Suzuki at Eiheiji, one of the head training monasteries of Soto Zen School in Japan. 2000 Nyoze returned to Sonoma Mountain from his engaged Buddhist studies at Upaya Zen Center with Joan Halifax and Bernie Glassman of the Zen Peacemaker Order in New Mexico.

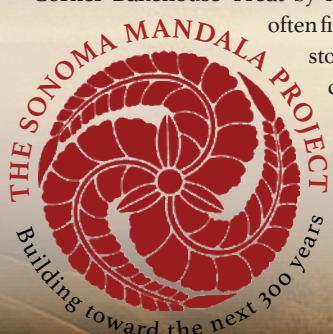


Jakusho Kwong-roshi began studying Zen with Shunryu Suzuki, author of Zen Mind Beginner's Mind in the 1960's and has dedicated his life to Soto Zen, Wisdom Holder and Founder of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. He was ordained in 1970 by Shunryu Suzuki, who was a direct spiritual descendant of Eihei Dogen. In 1973, two years after Suzuki died, he founded Sonoma Mountain Zean Center in the mountains near Santa Rosa CA, as an expression of gratitude to his teacher and his commitment to continue the unbroken lineage of Soto Zen.



Hosho Peter Coyote (an American actor, author, and narrator of films and theater) is best known for his work on the film E.T. (the Extra-Terrestrial) and narration for Ken Burns documentary mini-series. Coyote performed audiobook recordings of Shunryu Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind and Paul Reps's Zen Flesh, Zen Bones as well as narrating the documentary Inquiry into the Great Matter: A History of Zen Buddhism.

He was ordained as a priest in 2012 by Lewis Richmond, one of Suzuki Roshi's senior student and transmitted as a dharma holder in 2015.



From Your Board Of Trustees October to December 2025

The quarterly meeting of the board took place on October 11. We reported that SMZC continues to move forward with remodeling the Sangha House, installing the new Sanmon (Mountain Gate), fundraising efforts in support of the Sonoma Mandala Project, and that our financial condition is stable. The Saturday Community and sesshin practices remain strong.

We would like to pay tribute to Janet Myoho "Subtle Dharma" Buckendahl, who passed away on July 26 at the age of 91. It was our great privilege to know Janet, the first person to be recognized as a "Dharma Treasure" on Sonoma Mountain, to practice with her, and to witness her quiet, loving strength and unwavering support of our sangha and SMZC.

Board President Tensan remembers her in the Zen Dust store the first time he came to SMZC 25 years ago. Not only did she sew the cushions he sat on over the years, but also lovingly sewed the Koromo for his ordination in 2014—the "winter" robe he still wears today.

Her quiet presence offered the undeniable example of a life lived in pure practice.

Your board of trustees would like to express our gratitude to the sangha for continued support and commitment to a life of practice on Sonoma Mountain. ♦

With Three Bows,
Tensan Chuck Ramey, President
Lizbeth Myoko Hamlin, Secretary



Theme for Summer Ango 2025



Shuso – Fugen (Universal Vow)
Fugen Chris CJ Johnson
August 2–16

"When we realize identity-action, self and others are one suchness—This is why identity-action is the practice and vow of a bodhisattva. We should simply face all beings with a gentle expression."

*from Dogen's Shobogenzo Bodaisatta-Shishobo
(The Bodhisattva's Four Embracing Actions)
in "Adding Beauty to Brocade: Expressing the reality
of life through the Four Embracing Actions"
by Shohaku Okumura*

Shuso – Kakuryu (Awakening Dragon)
Kakuryu Noel McKenna
August 17–30

"With everything you encounter, without separating self and others, become one with that thing with your whole body and mind, dealing with it most thoroughly."

*from the forward of the book
"Dogen's Pure Standard for the Zen Community"
by Ikko Narasaki Roshi*

Shissui Work Report

by Tokan Stepanek

As western North America begins to display its grand autumn mantle, marking the transition from summer to fall, I'd like to recognize the hard work of Sangha members in samu throughout the summer. First, much remodeling and refurbishing has been completed at Suzuki-roshi's and Tungpa Rinpoche's stupas. Lori Zarr and Andrew Penners continue their diligent weekly maintenance of both stupas, while Ron Berger and friends have rebuilt the tool storage shed at Suzuki-roshi's stupa to complement their efforts. Tom Huffman, Michael McCulloch, and Dave Friselli have begun an ambitious project to restore the health of forest areas adversely affected by the wildfires of 2017.

Dorota Majcherowicz, a longtime member of our sangha in Poland, has been working tirelessly to complete her painting of the three concrete well-water storage tanks near Kwong-roshi's residence. Dorota stayed with us for three months in spring/summer 2023 to begin this project, and was able to complete one of the tanks, with help from Rick Sparks and Tom Huffman. She has returned to complete the other two tanks, with the same experienced crew, on another three-month stay that began in July. The project requires meticulous effort, applying multiple layers of paint and pigment to achieve the desired effect, blending these large concrete structures into the landscape. We are inspired by Dorota's seamless integration of artistic creativity and devotion to Zen practice.

Meanwhile, Alexandra Thomas combines caring for the garden with raising a young family as an active member of our local sangha. Her spirited presence is a joy to see in the garden, sometimes enhanced by her children, Adrien and Pierce. A family that grows together, grows together.

The Zen Center will break ground this fall and install the Mountain Gate (Sanmon), the formal entryway to the Mandala Project. We will also be remodeling the Sangha House and re-roofing the Zen Dust store. The garden will also see some changes, including replacing the wire fencing and preparing the soil for winter dormancy.

We invite Sangha members to join us in the spirit of samu as we celebrate a life of active participation in manifesting Genjoji's vision for generations to come. ♦

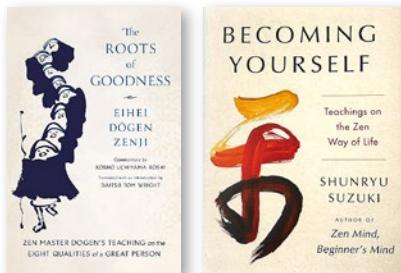


*Top - Dorota Majcherowicz and Rick Sparks setting the initial design for water tank painting
Bottom - Completed water tank in foreground*

Zen Dust News

by Carol Seizen Adams

This report is dedicated to Janet Myoho Buckendahl, longtime Zen Dust store manager and sewing team member, who passed away on July 26 after a short illness. Myoho was a beloved Sangha treasure for 30-plus years, during which she diligently managed the Zen Dust store for more than two decades. Myoho tended to all aspects of the store with devotion, creating an ocean of zafus, zabutons, oryoki cloths, jubons, and custom-made Buddhist robes for practitioners. Her life was a sincere expression of service, springing from her unshakable resolve to uphold the principles of goodness. Janet Myoho spent her early adulthood as a flight attendant for the now-defunct TWA. After marrying, she ran a children's daycare center from her home for about 40 years, served as a Girl Scout leader, volunteered for the Petaluma Swim Club, ran numerous marathons, and was an avid cyclist and outdoor enthusiast. Her boundless energy and bright presence in the dusty world are greatly missed, yet remain deeply felt through her many gifts and contributions that continue to inspire and serve.

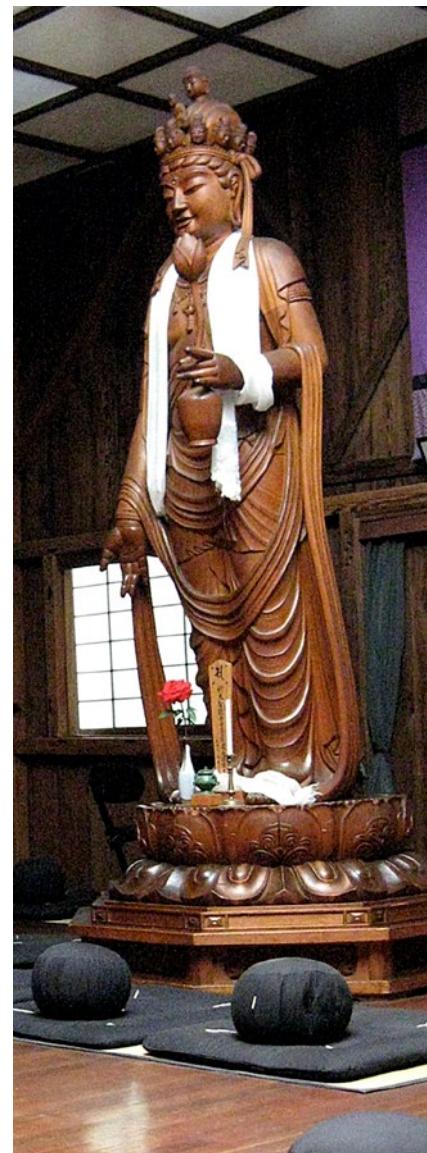


We continue to meet all your meditation needs with Zen-made items including zabutons, zafus, jubons, support cushions, and more. Please visit Zen Dust after Saturday Community practice, from noon to 1:15 p.m. For orders or questions, email zendust@smzc.org, or call (707) 545-8105. ♦

The Zen Dust Team:

Carol Seizen Adams (admin and sewing)
Lin Naylor (store steward)
Lori Zarr (sewing)
Alex Thomas (sewing)
Pat Preston (sewing)

*Janet Myoho's Jukai Ceremony, July 1995.
Janet is third from the right, next to husband Bob
Mumonbo.*



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

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

ONLINE RESOURCES ~ Dharma Talks & Events

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

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

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

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

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“For the Beneficial Protection
and Awakening of All Beings”



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