dharma CONNECTION

The Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji

2011

Daily Schedule

Sundays, 9 a.m.- noon: chanting service, zazen, teisho or dokusan
Mondays, 7-7:45 a.m.: short service, zazen
Tuesdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m.: zazen
Wednesdays, 6-7:45 a.m.: chanting service, zazen
Thursdays, 7-7:45 a.m. and 6-8 p.m.: short service, zazen
Fridays, 7-7:45 a.m.: short service, zazen
First Thursday of the month: tea and discussion following zazen
Second Sunday of the month: Dharma Study, 7-9 p.m.
Tibetan practice: Saturdays, Noon - 1 p.m.; Mondays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.
First Saturday of the month: Tibetan Dharma Study, 1:30 p.m.
Newcomers welcome; please arrive at least 20 minutes early

Sesshin Schedule 2011-2012

Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi, abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji in Syracuse, NY, and Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji in the Catskill Mountains, leads sesshins at both settings. Each retreat begins at 7 p.m. on the first day; sesshin concludes at 5 p.m. on the last day at Hoen-ji (ending times differ at DBZ). For details, fees or to purchase Jihatsu (meal bowl sets), e-mail admin@hoenji.org. More information is available on the website, www.zencenterofsyracuse.org or www.zenstudies.org .

Rohatsu 2011
Sesshin Nov. 30-Dec. 8, 2011 at DBZ; daily morning and evening sittings at ZCS

Zen Center of Syracuse 2012 sesshins
Winter Sesshin: Jan. 26-29
Spring Sesshin: April 19-22
Summer Sesshin: July 26-29
Anniversary Sesshin: Oct. 18-21

Dai Bosatsu Zendo 2012 sesshins
Martin Luther King Jr. Sesshin: Jan. 13-15
March On Sesshin: March 7-11
Holy Days Sesshin: March 30-April 6
Nyogen Senzaki Sesshin: May 5-13
Anniversary Sesshin: June 30-July 8
Samu Sesshin: Aug. 3-8
Golden Wind Sesshin: Sept. 29-Oct. 7
Harvest Sesshin: Nov. 3-11
Rohatsu Sesshin: Nov. 30-Dec. 8

Dharma Connection

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Table of Contents

Letters

Dear Sangha,

Today, the day after Shinge Roshi's birthday (October 2), I want to share the wonderful warmth and celebratory feeling at the potluck party for her last night. About fifty people attended, and the food was great! Three families with young kids attended, and we got a great deal of pleasure from playing with them and watching them explore the dynamics of other families. Nikyu had fun with 18-month-old Alia, Fugan Sam and Julia Gordon's youngest daughter, playing peak-a-boo and making faces.

Roshi and I had just gotten back from Dai Bosatsu Zendo, having completed Golden Wind sesshin. Upon our arrival, the trees were in full beautiful foliage. Matt Russell, a Hoen-ji resident who is now a fall kessei student at DBZ, and Erin Mackie, from Hoen-ji's jukai class, who was attending her first sesshin ever, were among the participants.

Seven-day sesshin at DBZ is rigorous. Erin said at the post-sesshin brunch, when first-timers speak, that she was surprised how much her legs hurt, despite her physical training in dance and yoga.

Matt is really enjoying his time at the monastery; he decided to do kessei after spending the month of August there as a volunteer.

How wonderful the Hoen-ji grounds looked when we returned, thanks to Sangha and ESF student efforts. What a treasure.

Gassho,
Jisho Judy Fancher

Caroline Savage holds out the German chocolate birthday cake she made Roshi. Also pictured: Nikyu Robert Strickland, Myotan Pat Hoffmann and her husband, Bill Cuddy, and Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz
photo by Kaity Cheng

Dear Sangha,

Out here in Portland, Oregon. Far from the Syracuse Sangha, waiting for some extraordinary seismic happening.

Well OK.

Morning, a little chanting from the Sutra book. Zazen, followed, if possible, with yoga, zazen in the late evening and a little reading from *Eloquent Vow*, Dogen or Suzuki Roshi on the Sandokai, perhaps just chanting silently Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo. Goals and practices. These are the spaces between living in various worlds.

At home, grown children and their significant others trying to make their lives. Out here at Gales Meadow Farm, a very hard-working, visionary wife: Annie is recovering from eye surgery. There is produce to deliver, weeds to pull, and eager young people, workers to pay attention to. Planted a half-acre of crimson clover which I was able to get covered just as the first rain of the season started, perfect timing, last minute as usual. Tomato sauce is being cooked down on the stove. Victor, a young man who works here, brought fresh cider he made and is warming it up as well. Must be fall.

Hey, we ain't no spring chickens, reminders everyday. But then, a favorite poem, flowers in the spring, a cool breeze in summer, the moon in autumn, snow in winter; if there are no vain clouds in your mind every season, every day is a good . . .

On other days there are the wonderful encounters with students of music, string to string, heart to heart. They are a joy. Finding a voice through music and sharing it with others, especially children who are so open, a great treasure.

However innumerable all beings are, I vow to free them all. Oh if I could even help family, maybe even myself a little . . .

However inexhaustible delusions are, I vow to extinguish them all. They are thistles bringing up nutrients from the deeper soil. They will never go away but maybe we can rearrange them a little.

However immeasurable Dharma teachings are, I vow to master them all. Suffering, illness, as well as joyful things, may I follow their guidance.

However endless the Buddha way, I vow to follow it. Life a dew drop, a flash. I vow to stay the course as long as I am able.

I can picture the beautiful Hoen-ji neighborhood changing colors, Onondaga Creek moving swiftly along, and the feel of frosty air on the nostrils in the early morning, walking along West Seneca Turnpike or doing kinhin on the lawn.

Grateful for our teacher-mentor-master and friend, Shinge Roshi, Sangha, and friends. We miss you all.

Gassho,
Chogen Rene Berblinger

The Blue Cliff Record, Case 35: Manjusri's "Three by Three"

A Teisho by Shinge Roshi Given July 21, Summer Sesshin, Hoen-ji

Shinge Roshi
photo by Jishin Betsy Robson

ENGO'S INTRODUCTION

In distinguishing dragons from snakes, jewels from stones, black from white, irresolute from decisive, if you do not have an eye on your forehead and a talisman at your side, time and again you will miss the point. At this moment, seeing and hearing are not obscured, sound and form are unadulterated reality. Tell me: is it black, or is it white? Is it crooked, or is it straight? How do you discern it?

MAIN SUBJECT

Manjusri asked Mujaku, "Where have you just come from?"

Mujaku said, "From the south."

"How is Southern Buddhism faring?" Manjusri asked.

"Few monastics observe the precepts in this age of deterioration," Mujaku replied.

"How many are practicing?" Manjusri asked.

"About three hundred here, about five hundred there."

Then Mujaku asked Manjusri, "How does Buddhism fare in your part of the world?"

Manjusri replied, "The worldly and the holy live together; dragons and snakes are intermingled."

Mujaku asked, "How many are practicing?"

Manjusri said, "In front, three by three; in back, three by three."

SETCHO'S VERSE

The thousand peaks coil and turn, blue as indigo.
Who can say he conversed with Manjusri?
Laughable, "how many?"
Admirable, "in front, three by three; in back, three by three."

Bunki Mujaku lived from 821 to 900. Mujaku means "no attachment," and was an honorific name given to him in the later part of his life by the emperor. In his youth he traveled to seek out many teachers, and eventually became a student of, and received transmission from, Kyozan Ejaku, who was the principal Dharma heir of Isan. Isan and Kyozan established the mystical I-Gyo School (the "K" is pronounced "G" after "I," thus I-Gyo), which employed sacred symbols as teaching devices, particularly circles (as in *Blue Cliff Record* Case 33).

When he was young, Bunki Mujaku made a pilgrimage to sacred Mt. Gotai, where Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, was said to reside. Many temples were dedicated to Manjusri on Mt. Gotai, or Five Peaks; in the *Gateless Gate* Case 31, "Joshu Investigates An Old Woman," monk after monk would stop at a tea shop and ask the woman who ran it, "What is the way to Mt. Tai?" Each time she would answer, "Go straight on!" and each time the clueless monk would take her response as a mere geographical direction.

Mujaku got there late in the day, so he went to the temple at the foot of the mountain to spend the night. The head priest greeted him, and they had the dialogue related in this case. Next morning, when Mujaku was about to leave, the priest sent a boy novice to see him off. Mujaku asked the boy who the priest was, and what the temple's name was. The boy said nothing, but pointed to the mountain. Mujaku looked up and saw the mountain soaring up, a beautiful indigo blue. He looked back, and there was nothing but an empty valley: temple, boy, everything had disappeared. He realized that the priest had been Manjusri himself, manifesting for his sake. That old woman in the tea shop, who was she? None other than Manjusri! This happens all the time in our lives, and we miss it. Do we realize that the person checking out our groceries, or delivering our mail, may in fact be a great bodhisattva, manifesting for our sake? Mujaku did understand, and stayed on in that valley, practicing for a long time in a place known as the Diamond Sutra Cave.

The diamond, or *vajra* in Sanskrit, is a symbol of wisdom – it can cut through everything. Vajrayana, as in Tibetan esoteric practice, means Diamond Vehicle.

Manjusri images show the Bodhisattva with a sword in his right hand, to cut through delusions, and with a volume of the *Prajna-paramita Sutra* (the Sutra of All-Surpassing Wisdom, which includes both the *Diamond Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*) in his left. Manjusri represents the wisdom of the undifferentiated – not dualistic, conceptual views, or intellectual understanding, but the wisdom that is prior to discriminating consciousness.

"Wisdom does not allow us to settle for our habitual involvement with sensory objects (as just being 'given,' 'out there'), and causes us to learn and practice probing beneath the surface of apparent 'reality' to gain direct awareness of the ultimate reality of all things," notes Robert Thurman in his Introduction to *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti.*

In his Introduction to this case, Engo says, "In distinguishing dragons from snakes, jewels from stones, black from white, irresolute from decisive, if you do not have an eye on your forehead and a talisman at your side, time and time again you will miss the point." Can we discern dragon monks from snake monks – those who are actualizing their Dharma potential from those who are mere snakes, whose karma keeps them from opening to THIS, from offering themselves unconditionally? All of you are dragons – just by virtue of the fact that you are here, attending sesshin! You are decisive. You are resolute. It takes diligence, courage, persistence, and conviction to do this practice, and sesshin is essential. What we see in deep, concentrated zazen is life-changing. New pathways form in the brain, a new consciousness no longer bound to old habits. One day, the old stuff simply does not apply.

The "eye on your forehead" is the Dharma eye, the eye of One Mind, of penetrating insight. Sometimes in samadhi you can feel this third eye; you may become aware of a subtle vibration there, a kind of silent humming in synch with the universe, a stillness vibrating outward, on and on, like the sound waves generated by the Sound of One Hand.

To distinguish dragons from snakes, real jewels from stones – Rinzai speaks to this when he says, "At last my Dharma eye became clear; thus I could discern all kinds of teachers under heaven, and tell the true from the fake. This discerning eye was not with me when I was born from my mother. But rather, after extreme discipline and ceaseless investigations, one day, all of a sudden, I could clearly see who I am."

We are doing Zen practice, sesshin after sesshin, engaging in "extreme discipline and ceaseless investigations," and one day we, too, all of a sudden, may clearly see with this Dharma eye.

What does Engo mean by "a talisman at your side?" When you see with the Dharma eye, every act is exactly appropriate, like an arrow hitting the bullseye. There's a freedom to your actions that may seem magical, as if aided by a secret talisman – and this freedom is none other than true wisdom, which is always "at your side."

Engo continues, "At this moment, seeing and hearing are not obscured, sound and form are unadulterated reality." You are not fooled by superficial aspects or past conditioning. Every sound and form is nothing but this reality, manifesting as it is. With direct seeing, direct hearing, with nothing in the way, what is black, what is white? What is crooked, what is straight? At this moment, how do you discern IT? In the realm of nonduality, black is completely black; white is absolutely white. Thurman says we must realize that "relative reality *is* the ultimate, perfect reality: that matter is voidness."

In *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, Chapter 9, Vimalakirti asks the assembled bodhisattvas, "Good sirs, please explain how the bodhisattvas enter the Dharma-door of nonduality?" After many give their explanations, they ask Manjusri to respond. He says, "Good sirs, you have all spoken well. Nevertheless, all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing – that is the entrance into nonduality." Then Manjusri asks Vimalakirti to respond. Vimalakirti's response is a thunderous silence. And Manjusri cries, "Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the nonduality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas."

Now let's look at the Main Subject. *Manjusri asked Mujaku, "Where have you just come from?"* This is the million-dollar question, so often asked as a probing device by a teacher: are you lost in the dualism of now and then, here and there? Are you the slave of calendars, clocks and geography? The question is equivalent to the koan, "What is your face from before your mother and father were born?" or, "Who are you?" Manjusri is asking from his own realm: thus come, thus gone, or again as the *Diamond Sutra* says, "The Tathagata neither comes from anywhere nor goes to anywhere." But Mujaku answers from the commonplace, bumpkin perspective: *"From the south."* This gives Manjusri the opportunity to ask, *"How is Southern Buddhism faring?"*

Another question that is also easily taken at face-value. It appears to be a matter of evaluation, of judging whether Southern Buddhism is good or bad, successful or lacking in some way, but what is the intent? What is the Dharma door of nonduality that lies beneath this question? Southern Buddhism emphasized insight, the direct experience of Zen, as taught by the Sixth Ancestor, Eno (Ch.: Hui Neng). Northern Buddhism was entrenched in theoretical understanding, scholarship, taking the gradual approach toward realization. So here, while it may seem that he is asking about Southern compared to Northern, Manjusri is asking Mujaku about his own realization. How are *you* faring? Are you lost in conceptualization, in evaluation? Are you caught by the arbitrary distinctions of North and South, of geography and comparison? The bait is taken, the hook is swallowed: *"Few monastics observe the precepts in this age of deterioration," Mujaku replied.*

In the sutras we are told that during the first five hundred years after Shakyamuni's death, true Dharma was maintained; the next 1,000 years were less than genuine; and after that, there would be a ten-thousand-year-long age of deterioration. So, Mujaku was acknowledging that in his own degenerate era, few monastics even followed the precepts, let alone grasped the true meaning of Buddha's teachings. What about in our time, long after that of Mujaku? We have eight students who are deeply investigating the precepts as their personal koans, preparing for Jukai, which will take place at our January 2012 sesshin. How is each one of us doing, observing the precepts? We all know how good intentions so frequently go awry. We all have experienced how our preferences easily turn into addiction.

"How many are practicing?" Manjusri asked.

Again, he is setting a trap: coming from absolute reality, how can there be "the many"? What relevance could such an estimation have? There is just the One. No many and few, no birth and death, no coming and going. And yet, if Mujaku truly understood, there would be no problem with the response he gave:

"About three hundred here, about five hundred there."

With true understanding, he would have realized that each manifestation is nothing but the one reality; each part is nothing but the whole, just as one strand of DNA contains the information for the entire organism. However, his responses, "Few monastics observe the precepts" and "About three hundred here, about five hundred there" were answers from the world of duality, of discrimination.

Then Mujaku asked Manjusri, "How does Buddhism fare in your part of the world?"

Mujaku asks Manjusri about Buddhism in his part of the world! Where is Manjusri? Is he in the North? In the South? On top of a mountain, or right here in Onondaga Valley? His "part of the world"? In the non-discriminating mind of absolute reality, every part is the whole. The sacred mountain is nowhere but the whole world, the universe, the cosmos!

Manjusri replied, "The worldly and the holy live together; dragons and snakes are intermingled."

Manjusri cuts through the veils of discrimination as he answers from the wholeness of being, the root source, true wisdom: "The worldly and the holy live together" (integrally one, no part separate from another part); "dragons and snakes are intermingled." Those who are enlightened and ignorant are all mixed together too. This is the realm of the real and the apparent: worldly are fine as worldly; holy are fine as holy. Dragons live as dragons, and snakes as snakes, together as one, in the realm of non-duality. Dragons are perfect as dragons; snakes are perfect as snakes. New students are practicing sincerely, just as they are. Old-timers are sitting diligently, just as they are. The tenzo's meals are just right. The jishas' tea is perfect, too.

Still Mujaku is lost in discriminating mind, and evidently he thinks he is having a conversation! So he asks the same question Manjusri had asked him, not understanding its underlying thrust: *"How many are practicing?" Manjusri said, "In front, three by three; in back, three by three."* Here again, we are in the realm of numbers – the many and the one – but for Manjusri, the numbers mean something quite different. In ancient China, the number for perfection was 9. This answer, therefore, is much admired. The implication is that wherever you go, what you see in front of you, what you've left behind you, is perfection itself. In his poem "On Believing in Mind," Sosan Zenji wrote, "The way is perfect, like unto vast space, with nothing wanting, nothing superfluous. It is indeed due to making choices that its suchness is lost sight of. Pursue not the outer entanglements; dwell not in the inner void. Be serene in the oneness of things, and dualism vanishes by itself."

Hakuin commented on this response of Manjusri's: "Three times three is nine, two times nine is eighteen; is that what it means? If you want to know this, refer to the number of last night's stars, and the number of this morning's raindrops." One of the first koans often given a student is, "How many stars are in the sky?" And of course, it's not a matter of celestial computing.

There's another way to appreciate this line: imagine, with your eye of samadhi, the eye on your forehead, your inner eye, an assembly of practitioners walking three by three, walking before you in an endless progression into the future; and behind you, in threes – an endless succession from the past. All these ancient buddhas and bodhisattvas and ancestors, all these spiritual friends in your present life, all these future generations of followers of the Way. Whether you count from the front or the back, the number is infinity itself. Setcho, in his notes to the koan, says, "Even the Great Compassionate One with a thousand hands (Avalokitesvara, or Kanzeon) could not count them all."

Setcho's Verse: *The thousand peaks coil and turn, blue as indigo.*

This scene, seen with the Dharma eye, is a reference to Setcho's beautiful verse from Case 20 of the *Blue Cliff Record*: "Overwhelming the evening clouds, gathering in one great mass; Endlessly arising, the distant mountains, blue heaped upon blue." The sacred mountain, the clouds gathered in one great mass: this is nonduality, this is Manjusri. Endlessly arising, at once becoming one and many, taking now this form, now another form, coiling and turning in numberless ways and directions, this is freely manifesting, freely responding, as if with "a talisman at your side."

Who can say he conversed with Manjusri?

Mujaku thought he had been conversing with the head priest of a valley temple at the foot of a sacred mountain. He thought he was just having an ordinary conversation between guest and host. But because he was talking

from the world of discriminative understanding, and Manjusri was speaking from the source of wisdom, how can this be viewed as a conversation? Hakuin commented, "At just such a time, what 'Manjusri' is there? At such a time, if you meet the living Manjusri, you lose your life. To say that Mujaku met Manjusri is an affectation. Mujaku missed it."

Laughable, "how many?" Again, Mujaku is counting discrete, separate entities, coming from his dualistic intellect. It's laughable to ask how many are on this mountain. There is nothing that is *not* mountain, that is *not* Manjusri.

Admirable, "in front, three by three; in back, three by three."

This whole universe – endless dimension universal life – is it many; is it one? In every way it manifests, it is perfect and complete, revealing right here, now. □

WALKING MIND

Horse pasture trail climbs up from the road
you pass the blackened hull of a tree
from the hollowed trunk a lion's mane mushroom
grits its single fang.
Toyonne, lavished in berries, spray out
from the charred hand of its parent tree.
At times the trail cinches the waist of the mountain
like a thin belt. You're a strange straight thing
tight roping amidst dusty slopes. You left town
because you felt alone amidst built beauty.
Instead of a road there's just climb after climb.
Your thoughts crushed where the knee
meets the belly, and the brittle branches replace some of your stories.
On top of the ridge are rows of pink mammoth teeth –
sandstone, you're told, dropped from the mouth of a dreaming giant.
The stamp of difficulty you affixed to your chest.
Where did it go? The falcon is praying –
wings wide, eyes falling upon movement before it is made.

– Kaity Cheng

Stepping cautiously
through the thick layers of leaves –
treacherous walnuts!

– Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat
Fall kinhin, Hoen-ji

Lucky to Be Back at Dai Bosatsu

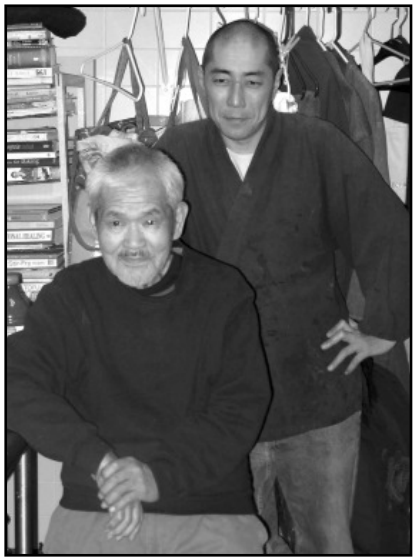
By Meigetsu Rebecca Beers

It's the crack of dawn a few days before the start of a new year and a new era at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. We hurry from our futons, don robes and race to the zendo, then on to formal breakfast and work assignments. I'll be in the kitchen, I'm told, along with my dear friend and longtime Hoen-ji student, Mokuon Karen Nezelek, and several others.

So much work to be done.

A dozen and a half workers from Zen Studies Society and Zen Center of Syracuse have joined the monastery's residents in advance of Shinge Roshi's installation as abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo.

In the tenzo, Seizan rules. He has humor, equanimity and, above all, industry. He directs us in broken English, and teases us about the hard R, R, R's of the English language.



Kyuu-san and Seizen in the tenzo
photo by Zensho Martin Hara

"Cut!" he says, handing over vegetables and demonstrating how to slice them. There are peppers to cut, greens to wash, cans of Japanese vegetables to open and quarter, and the preparation of a half-bushel of taro, a small, starchy corm that is a staple in Japanese cooking.

Mokuon, perched beside me on a stool, is focused on peeling, her small dark bun of hair pointed skyward. We peel, peel, peel. That's a lot of taro.

Lan and her partner, Manu, are cutting and chopping nearby, along with several recruits from New York City. Jodo, a monastery resident, hums in and out, giving directions, too. At any given time, several languages can be heard. Lan pauses for group sampling of her sushi, which is not sushi as I think of it at all, but a delicious rice and vegetable mixture from her Korean homeland.

A dozen Asian squash are plopped onto the big counter, and I am instructed to wash them, lop off the barnacles, quarter and scoop out the seeds. Manu and I cut them into careful trapezoids, per Seizan's specifications. Later, Manu and I wash dishes. Others come and go throughout the day. Endless dimension dishwashing.

In saunters Kyuu-san, a tiny Japanese man whose demeanor is as sweet at the mochi he concocts. When it is ready, he hands out a taste of the sweet, gooey rice cake, still warm. It's good luck to get the first taste of the mocha, I'm told. I have good luck. It's delicious.

Over the days, we work. As New Year's Eve approaches, more hands appear in the tenzo. More languages. Yusen sweeps in to take on a half-dozen Japanese dishes. In her wake, infectious joy.

Hoken, a wonderful German woman, dispenses marinated tofu, while I deal out tomato slices. Together we lattice together a pretty red and white dish, which Seizan drizzles with vinegary sauce. There is a purity to the connectedness of these dozen or so tenzo workers – scrubbing and peeling and stirring and cutting and arranging – putting together a beautiful buffet for New Year's Eve, and meals to be served for Shinge Roshi's installation.

Workers celebrate on New Year's Eve, including (from right) Lan, Manu and Hoken *photo by Zensho Martin Hara*

A festival of food precedes and follows the annual ringing of the bonsho 108 times. It is good luck, I am told, to eat the soup before midnight, and also afterward. Again, I have good luck.

On 1/1/11, at 1 p.m., Shinge Roshi is installed as abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo. The ceremony is simple and beautiful. Students from all three Sanghas, from all the decades of Dai Bosatsu, crowd into the Dharma Hall. Eido Roshi presides, for the last time. His gentle kindness toward his heir is palpable. He touches her hand, guiding her through the ceremony. The room is warm and sun-filled. In one suspended moment, a staff is passed from one roshi to another roshi. It is a simple, wooden stick, one you might find lying beside the path in the woods. It connects everyone in the Dharma Hall. We breathe together.

I am again lucky. Lucky to have been here for this.

* * *

I am back at Dai Bosatsu again, this time for March-On sesshin. March 10-13. The first time I ever came to Dai Bosatsu was for March-On sesshin 1995. I remember dokusan then – being stampeded by a hoard of visiting Japanese monks.

This sesshin, Shinge Roshi's second as abbot of Dai Bosatsu, is quiet. Dokusan seems gentle. When the bell calls, students meander to the Dharma Hall.

On the second day, jikijitsu announces that everyone should go to dokusan, every time. He cannot, he says, because it is forbidden. He has not yet been released to have dokusan with other teachers, despite the advent of a new abbot and a new teacher at the temple. I notice that none of the monks and nuns who reside at Dai Bosatsu are going to dokusan. Only the visitors go.

I find that I'm defensive, protective of my longtime teacher, saddened. Politics around the dokusan room. And, clearly, taking root on my cushion. Later that day I write in my sesshin journal, "This disturbed my mind, with all the politics of Eido Roshi leaving and Shinge Roshi taking over. … I'm so uncomfortable, knees hurt, sprained ankle hurts, mind all over the place. What am I doing here? …"

The next day is no better. Daylight Savings starts, so it's really 3:45 when we rush into the zendo. During morning service, my friend's off-key chanting irritates. I'm reminded of other off-key chanters. I grumble and growl, sulk and scowl.

Eido Roshi passes the staff to Shinge Roshi
photo by Zensho Martin Hara

"Then, oh, a holographic image turns and everything is completely different," my journal recalls. "Oh, I'm remembering the thing I always forget. That secret. That the things that annoy, the grievances, are really the gifts. Precious (peer's) imperfectly perfect voice. All the voices, perfectly imperfect, joined in perfection. One. Together. (A monk's) struggle to free himself from loyalties and emotions, … struggling along, such beautiful, sincere effort! Such love. This is compassion."

* * *

Once again, back at DBZ. This time for the July 2-8 Anniversary

Sesshin, in the 35th year of this Rinzai retreat center, tucked far up into the Catskills beside Beecher Lake, the highest lake in the mountain chain. We arrive early for a meeting that includes 45 Sangha from DBZ, New York Zendo Shobo-ji and the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji. Eido Roshi is here, for the first time since he was compelled to leave in January due to the ongoing barrage of accusations of improprieties, to make an announcement. He says that, after painful months and despite pleas that he continue teaching, he will desist.

"... After long days of thinking, I now have the following attitude: starting today, I highly recommend – I strongly suggest – that all of you become Shinge Roshi's students. That is the only way that One Sangha, like it used to be, can be created under her leadership. Of course, my style of teaching and her style of teaching are different, our personalities are different, and many other things are different. But the Dharma – which has been transmitted from Hakuin Zenji, to Gempo Roshi, to Soen Roshi, to me and to her – is not different. She is the only one ... who can take on this big task and responsibility. I have confidence in her, and we are also responsible for encouraging her growth. ...

"I have retired, but some of you may think, 'Are there any exceptions?' No. I will stop doing dokusan and giving teisho in a formal way. Some of you may feel uncomfortable at first because you are not used to Shinge Roshi. I have experienced this personally. When I first went to Heirin-ji as an unsui, the roshi over there was Shirosu Keisan Roshi. Three years later, I moved to Ryutaku-ji and became a student of Soen Roshi. Their teaching styles were very different, and for a while I was 'not together.' But ... later I thought that my period of confusion was a gift. By passing through that confusion I became stronger. ..."

"When I come here, Shinge Roshi and the residents always cheerfully welcome me. Although I don't attend sesshin anymore, and I will not do dokusan anymore – in any place – I do visit from time to time. This is my life! I gave my life to the Dharma and I hope that this can peacefully be continued here and at New York Zendo Shobo-ji. ..."

And so, here is the great commitment to the Dharma at Dai Bosatsu. This is most important.

A few hours later, sesshin begins. Everyone has dokusan with Shinge Roshi, at first hesitantly, then with increasing vigor.

On July 4, following morning service, everyone makes the annual trek around Beecher Lake. The sun brushes the horizon as we march down the lane between the tall pine trees toward Sangha Meadow. A doe and two tiny spotted fawns hop in the underbrush beside us, peeking out occasionally, curious and unafraid. At the 20th anniversary obelisk, we light incense and chant. A misty drizzle extinguishes the incense in my hand, and I try to light it again. We pick our way to the giant Buddha, with more incense. The beaver that resides there is swimming far out in the lake.

We continue through the wet and woods, treading the narrow path that rings the lake. We walk the zigzag planks at its tip, then turn to look into the dawning sun. Sunlight catches the dewdrops on a field of bending grass. Diamonds in the morning sun. My eyes briefly meet my teacher's, and we turn again toward the glittering marsh. Roko, I think, "Sparkling Dewdrop."

I'm soaked and cold. It's wonderful!

* * *

One more trip to DBZ on August 26-28, this time for a facilitated workshop led by three women from An Olive Branch. Sangha old and new, DBZ, ZSS and ZCS – everyone who's able and willing to slog through the emotional underbelly of DBZ's history and the alleged misdeeds of its founder – has come. There are 45 in all. Some are former Sangha, who left years ago, angry and disillusioned. Some are new to DBZ and Rinzai Zen, concerned that this pristine place and the practice it affords might wither.

As we arrive, we know there's a hurricane on the way, ironic given the task at hand and the dark weather of Dai Bosatsu's last year. Many people here have suffered over it. Yet they have the courage and the commitment to try to heal.

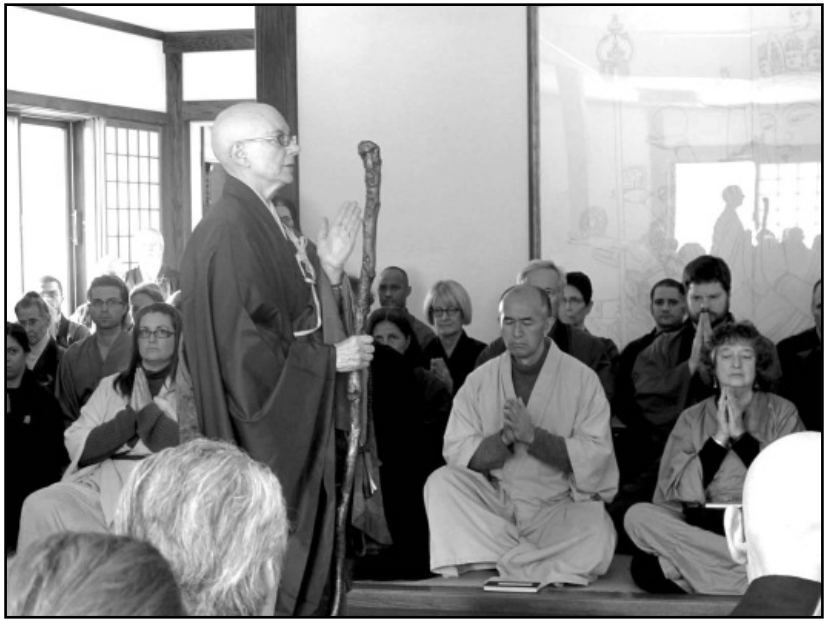
Kyoki, from An Olive Branch, begins by outlining the difficulty of the task we face. Frequently, temples are destroyed by such circumstances, she says. It is very hard to survive. She also points out that some states have outlawed the behavior in question; New York is not one of them. I see this as an attempt to clarify the seriousness of the accusations, but some people see it as bias. For a while, it seems, the meeting may be derailed. There are many views, many loyalties, much raw feeling. At last, we move on and develop rules for respecting each other as we talk about it.

Next comes an exercise to lay out the facts of the last 40 years. A timeline of events, culled from the archives by Shinge Roshi, Jokei, Shinkon, Jikyo and others, is placed on the wall, and participants are invited to add facts and questions, or identify particularly painful events. I find that I only have shards of information. The number of episodes and the years over which they spread surprise me. Manipulations that prevented the board from making changes also are revealed, as well as financial discrepancies. Again, I am surprised, saddened.

How could it be? Such a great teacher. All I know of him is kindness and concern that I discover my own Dharma Treasure. And patience, despite my karmic limitations. Yet people are citing facts, dates. I've known this. It's no surprise. But there's a sense: Who are they talking about? It's not someone I recognize.

My deepest personal struggle is with the treatment of Shinge Roshi, who has been maligned on blogs and elsewhere on the Internet since 2008. My own teacher, who has done nothing but work tirelessly to assure the future of Dai Bosatsu. This is painful.

I am silent during the Samoan Circle, listening, trying to hear everything.



Shinge Roshi, the newly installed abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo
photo by Zensho Martin Hara

Feelings are sometimes heated. It is important to understand. This is a process. A process that is "changing my mind" subtly, I find.

By Sunday, the last day of the gathering, we engage in a collective process to list issues and questions to be addressed in the future. There is much hope here. Ideas for recasting the Zen Studies Society board, so that this cannot happen again. Thoughts about how to let those who've been injured know that we care. Suggestions about changing what some call "the culture of secrecy" at Dai Bosatsu.

At the outset of the weekend, we were told that consensus might not be possible. But we find that it is, in the form of these questions that the board and Shinge Roshi must now address. Also, in our general will to assure the survival of Dai Bosatsu Zendo. This wonderful place. □

Geese have flown away –
Against the faded mountain
Red tree stands alone.

– Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat
October 12, DBZ

An Olive Branch at DBZ

The following letter from Shinge Roshi was e-mailed to Sangha members of Hoen-ji and Dai Bosatsu Zendo following a facilitated weekend gathering Aug. 26-28 at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, in the Catskills.

Dear Sangha,

Our Sangha Weekend Meeting, facilitated by three members from An Olive Branch, brought together a wide range of people with diverse points of view. The intensity of our discussions was mirrored by the weather: Hurricane Irene raged outside, the strong winds and rain purifying our hearts (as well as washing out our roads!).

We had planned this meeting with the goal of deeply hearing each other, knowing that no healing can occur when wounds are untended and left to fester; that we must have the courage to uncover them, facing our pain from the past in the present, so that we can work toward a strong, healthy future.

The most painful yet crucial aspect of the meeting was an adapted Samoan Circle. SoUn Joe Dowling and I, together with AOB facilitators, sat in the inner circle, and participants from the outer circle took an empty chair in turn to speak.

What we heard

First, letters were read from several people who couldn't be there; one in particular was extremely moving in its articulation of the hurt and harm experienced from an unwanted teacher-student liaison. Quite a few spoke of their feelings of betrayal, disappointment and disillusionment. Someone noted how harmful the culture of secrecy and silence in the Sangha has been, which can cause one to deny what one sees and hears – to question one's own truth.

Others stressed the life-changing significance of Eido Roshi's teaching, his founding of New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo, and the need to carry it forward authentically: "The Dharma is like holding water in one's palm; if it's held loosely, it will drain away. Our task is to offer this Dharma water to the next generation. We have to hand over exactly the same water. We don't want to color it, or it will destroy our tradition."

A woman who suffered deep sadness over losing Eido Roshi as her teacher said she has now been able to let go, and hopes others can as well, "so that we can go forward in the spirit of love and acceptance of each other, not allowing our views to fragment our Sangha. My attachment is to the Dharma, and to this place." Concurring, someone responded,

"This is an amazing place. I have come to understand something beyond my own thinking. It's easy to become angry, but doing zazen helps that anger go away. We can respect Rinzai Zen practice for what it is – a real treasure. In our hearts we can find compassion to forgive the person who betrays us, or who shouts at us. We're human beings. My stand is to say, I love you." And another said, "This is the only place I can go to discover what I have inside. One must judge oneself, not others. We each have stories; this practice helps me see what is much bigger."

Someone said, "It's clear that these board members care so much, and they've done a phenomenal job, but most have been hand-picked by Eido Roshi. The board membership should be made up of professionals, and should rotate every three years." Agreeing, another person said, "Now we need to help these women [who were harmed by relationships with their teacher] come back to the Sangha, and make this into a safe place for women." Someone expressed her joy at seeing people who left long ago who cared enough to return for this meeting, and her hope that they would come back to regular practice.

One of the newest Sangha members said, "I am beyond grateful. This is a magical place. Please don't let it be lost. My generation needs this. I know more young people will come. Please, please, keep it safe."

At the end of each person's comments, one of us responded by reflecting them back to show that they were deeply heard; and then the entire group declared, "We hear you!"

What came from our intense discussions was the realization that we are the beneficiaries of a rare and wonderful practice, Rinzai Zen; that deep listening to each other without crosstalk or snap judgments reveals the treasure of Sangha; and that we are responsible for shaping and guiding Rinzai Zen for future generations of practitioners on American soil.

Further reflections

Several people sent their further reflections to me in e-mails after the weekend. One person suggested that the attention and effort given to address the issues of the past, and to healing, could cripple the effort to establish a new vision, develop a new plan, and implement a sustainable future for ZSS. "There is a fine line between tending a wound and picking at it."

Another wrote, "All of us know that we are obliged to challenge dualistic moral judgment and appreciate the distinction – and lack of such – between the realm in which cause and effect are one and the realm in which they're separate. On the other hand, we must not forget that the world we live in is, thanks to media and pop-psychology, more materialistic, thus more addicted to such dualism and the simplistic moralism it produces. . . ."

Moving Forward

In the wake of this important weekend, I have done the following: Instructed the board to complete its review and revision of our bylaws to rationalize our governance decisions by October 15.

Nominated new board members with a broad range of backgrounds and professional skill sets to replace those who are stepping down. New members will begin serving in January 2012.

Ordered an in-depth financial audit to clarify our strongest sources of funding, get a better understanding of our operating and capital expense needs, and examine past practices that may not have been in the best interests of the Sangha. We are looking for this audit to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2012.

Begun to investigate ways to broaden our sources of funding, to create reliable income streams that are in line with our mission to offer Rinzai Zen in America. I plan on implementing these in the coming year.

To increase attendance at New York Zendo, I have planned an ongoing series of workshops and programs (like the one I organized recently at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in brushwork with Kazuaki Tanahashi), to include tea masters, bodywork practitioners, and traditional craftspersons, as well as lectures by visiting scholars to encourage study, in keeping with the vision of ZSS's first president, D. T. Suzuki.

To increase residency at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, I have begun work on a communication and public relations campaign to improve our visibility and make the world aware of what a great place this is for authentic Rinzai Zen training.

In these endeavors, I am receiving the enthusiastic support of Sangha and board members, and I look forward to your participation as well.

This past Sunday I led an all-day sitting at Shobo-ji, and the Sangha was invited to join in a potluck dinner afterward. It is my hope that many more such informal gatherings will take place there, to encourage a warm and mutually supportive atmosphere.

Please join me for upcoming sesshins at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, Harvest Sesshin, Oct. 29-Nov. 6, and Rohatsu Sesshin, Nov. 30-Dec. 8.

It is my intention to put the Zen Studies Society at the forefront of Zen in America once again. Our founding teacher has devoted his life to bringing the Dharma to the West. It is our job to uphold what we have received, and to improve upon the vehicle for actualizing it in our ever-changing world. I am completely dedicated to this.

Gassho,
Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat

Facilitated Weekend at DBZ: One Participant's Reflections

By Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz

The weight of what we were doing felt almost unbearably heavy at various points. Forty people – mostly long-term students of Eido Roshi and/or Shinge Roshi who've been coming to Dai Bosatsu Zendo for up to 50 years, but some who've studied for just a few months or who stayed away for many years – coming to the monastery to try to understand and process Zen Studies Society's painful history. I came away from the weekend with an even deeper admiration for Shinge Roshi, and with enormous appreciation for the three facilitators from An Olive Branch. This is my personal reflection on the experience.

I first came to Dai Bosatsu Zendo in 1997, have done kessei twice and have attended many, many sesshins there. For me, Dai Bosatsu Zendo is a place of beauty and liberation, and at the same time this past year has been one of learning about events, accusations, actions, dynamics, and injuries I may not have faced before. For a week before the meeting, I helped to develop a timeline of events in ZSS history for the group to use. This work opened my eyes. Also, we received mail that was very hard to read and deal with. This mail was read at the meeting, so each participant heard it. The preparation weeks were emotional and stressful, as has been the year since Eido Roshi announced his resignation from the ZSS board and the abbacy.

The process brought to us by An Olive Branch was uniquely suited to our situation. One piece flowed into another. Kyoki's "severe" opening, where she gave information about the seriousness of sexual misconduct by spiritual teachers, including Buddhist teachers, was criticized by some and welcomed by others. This led us to serious consideration of the question: What ground rules would we follow?

Next, the timeline exercise allowed us to examine and question the critical events of the last 50 years. Not everyone was familiar with the history, so this exercise was critical. Many people added events or questions to the timeline and shared deep feelings. This set the stage for the modified Samoan Circle, a moving exercise that took most of the afternoon on Saturday. This exercise gave me a greater sense of how others feel and think about the events and dynamics that have affected us so much. The Consensus Workshop on Sunday proved to us that regardless of our points of view, we could work together. Each section was effective in itself, and they flowed in such a way as to increase our understanding and commitment to each other.

The process provided a welcome container for my feelings and thoughts, allowing me to engage as fully as possible in listening, not responding or reacting. Often, it was only during a break that the "heaviness" of it all came to my awareness. I roomed with two young women, and I remember telling them that I wished that they didn't have to know about or grapple with all that we were hearing. Perhaps the spontaneous wish that others could be shielded (young or not) was my way of acknowledging the pain I felt. I am fully aware that youth is not synonymous with innocence or with freedom from pain and suffering, and they let me know that my concern was misplaced. They were just as much a part of everything as we old ones.

After listening deeply and openly to one another, the Consensus Workshop on Sunday allowed us to come together in new ways to frame questions for further consideration. First, we identified burning issues. Then, in pairs, we pinpointed important questions or issues. From that came eight overriding questions for the future. The process built trust and commitment among us. My most fervent hope is that we will find ways to involve caring Sangha and others in addressing these questions. □

WHAT IS THIS?

For Alexander and Amanda
June 5, 2011

When we took a leisurely walk
Around your neighborhood
One sunny afternoon

We paused at a stranger's yard.
What caught your joint attention
Was, itself, a stranger:

A green, globular fruit
Suspended from a vine.
You stopped to study it,

Questioning again
And again what it might be,
As though the mystery

Of all things yet unknown,
Unnamed, unclassified,
Had gathered in that yard.

As, indeed, it had.
And as the two of you
Extended into pure

Nothingness your lines
Of thought, not yet converging
But not diverging either,

You became not two, not one.
And what I would wish for you
Is not the enraptured gaze

Into each other's eyes
But that congruent look
At what the passing world

Is beckoning you to see.
What is this? I would bid you
Ask of what you meet,

Whether it be a fruit
Or fragrant foreign plant
Or inexplicable child.

– Shiju Ben Howard

Mom's Stroke

By Senju Dave Fisher

"I love you, David."

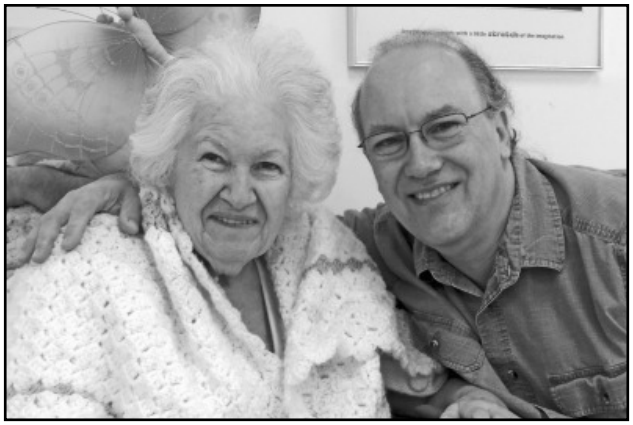
My mom, half-lidded, is lying in her hospital bed. We have been quiet and sharing long, unspoken minutes together.

"I love you, too, Mom."

Four weeks ago, she suffered a massive stroke. It is still difficult for her to stay awake. Most of her left side – face, arm and leg – is paralyzed. Speaking is exhausting, and yet, out of the quiet, she says, "I love you." Her gaze never wavers but is fixed on mine. I sit with her as she passes from sleep to twilight wakefulness to sleep again. But when she is awake, she is fully present and aware.

Both of my parents are devout, fundamentalist and evangelical conservative Christians. For many years, they applied pressure, either through direct conversation with me or through my wife and children, on me to turn away from Zen practice or any other form of spirituality and religion and return to my faith in Christ. In one phone call concerning my Zen practice a few years back, Mom was in tears and said, "I feel like I've lost you." My heart fell as I heard her anguish, pain and grief. There were no words or consolation I could offer her across the gulf of her non-inclusive beliefs, except "Mom, you'll never lose me."

Sitting with my Mom a month after her stroke, this obstacle in our relationship and the undercurrent of her fear and disappointment do not exist. She and I are simply sharing the undiluted experience of being fully present together. As a direct result of Zen practice, I am open and accessible. Had I been caught up in my own dramas or reliving the past in that moment, I would have missed this opportunity. Her disappointment and fears for me, my feelings of inadequacy, of not measuring up, and my pain from her and Dad's rejection evaporate in this unhindered communion. It is powerful and healing for both of us.



Senju and his mother, Elizabeth Fisher
photo by Deb Badera

As I shared some of my experiences of Mom's stroke with Meigetsu, she mentioned a book she read when her own Mom suffered a stroke: *My Stroke of Insight*, by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D. Jill is a Harvard-trained brain neuroanatomist who, at the age of 37, suffered a rare form of stroke – a major hemorrhage that decimated the left side of her brain. She was able to recover and share how her stroke changed her understanding of herself and her mind.

Jill speaks of the differences in the way our left and right hemispheres operate and process information. Highly analytical, the left hemisphere is all about discriminating, accomplishing (doing things), verbalizing, organizing details and ordering them in linear sequence. It slices and dices information in order to make sense of it. It uses words to describe and define. It creates our ego identity and sense of individuality. Our right hemisphere, on the other hand, experiences the Big Picture. It experiences life like the timelessness of dreaming, where everything is a montage of experience, fluid and seamless. It is fully concerned with the present moment. It does not care about "before" or "after." It is concerned with being rather than doing. It thinks in images rather than words and is more concerned about non-verbal communication than verbal. The right hemisphere is where we discover and experience deep silence.

Zen practice has played a crucial role in my reunion with my right brain, as well as appreciation and deeper understanding of my left. For quite a while, I considered my left hemispheric wordy and analytical mind The Great Enemy. Several years ago I had one particularly excruciating sit during sesshin. With its incessant chatter, fantasies and story lines, there seemed to be no stopping the internal monologue. No matter what I did – trying to return to my breath, trying to set up mental road blocks, trying to squash it with sheer will power – the chatter and story lines just became stronger and stronger. At one point, I was literally railing at myself in frustration, yelling inside, "Will you just SHUT UP!" And, at that moment, as though for punctuating emphasis – "Ding!" – the Jikijitsu rang the bell. The sit was over. And I was exhausted.

Nowadays, sitting is a wholly different experience. It is easier to experience the mechanics (and antics) of my left brain without becoming a slave to it. Chatty activity quiets and the samadhi of the right hemisphere blossoms. Jill writes, "Learning to listen to your (left) brain from the position of a nonjudgmental witness may take some practice and patience, but once you master this awareness, you become free to step beyond the worrisome drama and trauma of your story-teller."

I actually appreciate my left brain now. It is neither an obstacle nor The Great Enemy. Without it, I would not be able to accomplish the normal, daily functions that enable me to process linear tasks, such as putting on my socks and then my shoes. The entire idea of "sock" would not make sense. I would

not be able to recognize patterns or communicate verbally. I would not be able to type these sentences.

During one of my Mom's rehab sessions, I watched the occupational therapist try to show her how to pull the sleeve of a shirt over her non-functioning left arm. I watched her take quite a long time as she used her right hand to pluck and pull at the sleeve. Her entire attention was fully focused on this one task. Her brows creased and she seemed confused at what she was seeing and attempting to do. She would stop plucking at the left sleeve and start pulling her left fingers with her right hand. The therapist would guide her attention back to the sleeve and her brows would crease again in confusion as she pulled at the fabric, not seeming to understand the concept of a "sleeve" or how this was related to her "arm."

We are so fortunate to have the left brain facility of our minds. And by practicing nonjudgmental awareness, we can allow the left brain "pattern matcher and collator" and ego-centered "identity maker" to quiet and turn our attention to the deeper non-verbal knowingness experience of our right brain. This is what we mean by "stilling the mind." We can become deeply aware of our great and profound reality. In this way, we sit in the heart of the Dharma, or what the Psalmist means when he writes, "Be still, and know that I am God." The left brain cannot know this, but does a great job thinking about it. The right brain does know this and does a great job communicating this joyful and loving knowing "mind to mind." It simply leaves it up to the left brain functions to put it into the words you are reading now. Indeed, since you are able to read them, you are enjoying the wonderful function of your left brain. And your right brain? It just smiles and knows.

One of the other unforeseen blessings of Mom's stroke concerns my relationship with my Dad. Being of polar opposite personalities, we have never truly understood each other. I could never understand how he could be so authoritarian and dispassionate, and he did not know what to do with my emotional sensitivities. And yet, suddenly we are thrown together. When I travel to Maryland to visit Mom in the rehab center, I spend several days living with him. We have spent many hours talking as he processes this sudden and painful change in his life – an uncomplicated sharing we have never experienced before.

I'm standing at the side of my Mom's bed in the intensive care unit. It is the day after her stroke, and she cannot stay awake. I hold Mom's hand while she sleeps and my Dad, opposite me, holds her other hand. It is uncertain whether she will live. We are alone with her as we look up at each other. Tears stream from our eyes for this woman we have both loved. And in that unguarded moment, we fully understand and appreciate each other, heart to heart, mind to mind.

After one of my later visits, I gave words to my feelings and left a card on Dad's desk before I returned to New York. My Dad responded with this e-mail:

I also want to thank you for one of the most thoughtful cards I have ever received expressing your sentiments to your "Dad." It was heartwarming and brought a lot of emotion to the surface as I read it. Thank you again for your undiluted expression of your feelings.

What more can we do than love like there is no tomorrow? It is fleeting and ... it is beautiful. It is in the half-lidded gaze and soft smile of my mom.

"I love you, David."

"I love you, too, Mom."

I always will. You never lost me. □

Zen Mind on the Mountain

By Togan Tim Kohlbrenner

I climbed a mountain this summer. Not to the top – but as high as time permitted. Climbing the mountain was much like attending sesshin. Climbing long and getting tired. The skies ranged from tranquil blues to whiteouts that reduced visibility to your hand in front of your face. On one early morning hike, the sun swept across the horizon painting shades of yellow, pink and orange across the snow-covered faces of the surrounding mountains.

We flew onto the glacier on the evening of the summer solstice. After a day at base camp, we started the seven-mile hike across the glacier at two o'clock in the morning. For the first few days, we traveled at night when the glacier was frozen the hardest. Because the sun never fully set, it felt more like walking on a cloudy day than during the middle of the night. On the glacier there was a constant awareness that we were surrounded by crevasses that dropped down 50 feet or more. Almost every team on the mountain this season had someone drop into one of these crevasse, but we were fortunate. We always hiked roped together – traveling as one, supported and protected by our teammates.

Togan Tim Kohlbrenner at base camp on Mt. McKinley

We had days of clear sky and spectacular views, as well as days spent in our tents talking, reading, playing cards or meditating because of snow or high winds. My hiking partner and friend, Ray, and I had gone to high school together. This year was

our thirtieth high school reunion. After 23 years in Army Special Forces, Ray now lives in Colorado. Knowing we'd have a lot of time together in the tent, Ray said he wanted to learn to meditate. We had talked about zazen and my practice. On past hikes, I had told him that I didn't think I could climb if I didn't meditate, if I didn't have a way of getting past my mind telling me "you can't do this" or "it's too hard." He shared some of his experiences and some of the thoughts that keep him awake at night. Our time talking and meditating is one thing I cherish.

The third hiking day brought us into camp during a snowstorm. We couldn't see how beautiful 11,000-foot Camp was. Like sesshin, there was nowhere to go but here – this moment – this step. Nothing to see in any direction but white. We spent four days at 11 Camp. When the storm finally gave way to sunshine, we were in a bowl, surrounded by mountain faces covered with snow and ice that seemed to be peeling away. Over the days, we witnessed both a snow and a rock avalanche and heard a half-dozen more. It was the mountain letting us know just how impermanent everything is – including us.

During the climb from 11 Camp to 14.5 Camp, a member of our team struggled with the weight he was carrying and the change in altitude. In addition to our packs, we each pulled sleds with gear and food – a combined weight of 80 to 100 pounds. We ended up camping that night at 13,000 feet in an area where most teams try to avoid stopping. Several days earlier, a team got caught there and spent the night with seven people in a three-person tent because of high winds and snow. The next day we distributed most of the struggling climber's load among our six members and made our way to 14,500-foot Camp. He ended up going down with another team the next day. While he didn't have any physical injuries, it was clearly a blow to his ego.

After two days acclimating at 14,500-foot Camp, we made the climb to 16,500 feet to cache food and then return to 14.5 Camp in preparation for the climb to High Camp at 17,000 feet. The entire 2,000-foot climb was visible from the 14.5 Camp – a daunting sight. It turned out to be the most exciting climb of the trip. For the final 500-foot ascent, we were attached to a rope line fixed in the snow. The storms a few days earlier had caused the fixed lines to shift about five feet down the mountain face. At 16,500, we dug a hole in the snow and cached food for the next day's climb, and then returned to 14.5 Camp. The following day, we were supposed to climb from 14.5 to High Camp at 17,000 feet. From there it would be a one-day climb to the summit and return to 17 Camp. We never made the climb to High Camp or to the summit.

When we returned from the climb, I told someone that the whole thing just didn't seem all that hard. Much like the feeling after sesshin. Ray reminded me how it felt walking into camp hauling 80-plus pounds. There were days when it felt like we just wouldn't make it, if camp were any farther. But we would have and we did – one step at a time.

The 2011 climbing season turned out to be the second deadliest year on Denali. In all, nine climbers lost their lives. Two experienced climbers died in an avalanche just a couple of weeks before we arrived. Another was blown off the mountain on the day we hiked into 14,500-foot Camp as he tried to reach the summit. After three days of searching, his body was found within sight of our camp. He had fallen about 3,000 feet. An experienced guide from our company, Alpine Ascents, was killed when a climber on her rope team fell, pulling her onto a rock face.

Denali (Mt. McKinley) is in the Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska. The word Denali is Athabaskan for "The High One." It is the highest peak in North America, at 20,320 feet.

We spent 16 days on the mountain and climbed from 7,200 feet to 16,500 feet and back. Too many snow days and high wind days made our schedule too tight to attempt the summit, and we had to make the hard choice of coming down. Still, I am grateful just to have been on the mountain. No matter how I feel before sesshin, I am always glad to have been there. □

Climbers on Mt. McKinley

Hope Is Not a Plan

By Shiju Ben Howard

In "Letting Go," an illuminating article on care for the dying, the surgeon and author Atul Gawande examines the choices that terminal patients and their families face at the end of life. Contrasting hospice with hospital care, he reports a remarkable finding:

> Like many people, I had believed that hospice care hastens death, because patients forgo hospital treatments and are allowed high-dose narcotics to combat pain. But studies suggest otherwise. In

one, researchers followed 4,493 Medicare patients with either terminal cancer or congestive heart failure. They found no difference in survival time between hospice and non-hospice patients with breast cancer, prostate cancer, and colon cancer. Curiously, hospice care seemed to extend survival for some patients; those with pancreatic cancer gained an average of three weeks, those with lung cancer gained six weeks, and those with congestive heart failure gained three months.*

Reflecting on this finding, Dr. Gawande concludes that the "lesson seems almost Zen: you live longer only when you stop trying to live longer."

"Almost Zen" is an approximation, akin to the modifier "Zen-like," which often obscures what it purports to describe. But in associating this particular "lesson" with Zen practice, Dr. Gawande comes close to the mark. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, often admonished his students to have "no gaining idea" when practicing Zen meditation. Other teachers have done the same. Those Medicare patients who chose to forgo hospital treatment were indeed rejecting a gaining idea: that of a longer life at any cost. Ironically, by choosing hospice care, they not only improved the quality of their last days and avoided the debilitating side effects of hospital treatments, they also lengthened their lives.

Yet it is one thing to know that you have a fatal illness and another to accept that you are dying. "I'd say only a quarter have accepted their fate when they come into hospice," observes Sarah Creed, a hospice nurse quoted by Dr. Gawande. "Ninety-nine percent understand that they are dying, but one hundred percent hope they're not. They still want to beat their disease." Such hope is only human. Only a very cold observer would presume to judge it adversely. But to deny that one is dying, when that is in fact the case, is not a constructive way to prepare oneself or one's loved ones for the inevitable. Nor is it the way of Zen.

The late Charlotte Joko Beck, who was nothing if not tough-minded, once proclaimed that to practice Zen, we have to "give up hope." When that statement angered some of her students, she explained what she had meant:

> Sounds terrible, doesn't it? Actually, it's not terrible at all. A life lived with no hope is a peaceful, joyous, compassionate life . . . . [W]e are usually living in vain hope for something or someone that will make my life easier, more pleasant. We spend most of our time trying to set life up in a way so that will be true; when, contrariwise, the joy of our life is just in totally doing and bearing what must be borne, in just doing what has to be done. It's not even what has to be done; it's there to be done so we do it.**

Joko Beck's tone is blunt, and her perspective may be difficult to accept.

But that perspective accords with Dr. Gawande's, insofar as it admonishes us to accept the harshest of realities and to act accordingly. Addressing the question of hope, Dr. Gawande recalls the example of Stephen Jay Gould, who survived a rare and lethal cancer for twenty years. "I think of Gould," Dr. Gawande remarks, "every time I have a patient with terminal illness. There is almost always a long tail of possibility, however thin." There is nothing wrong with looking for that tail, he acknowledges, "unless it means we have failed to prepare for the outcome that's vastly more probable." What is wrong is that "we have created a multitrillion-dollar edifice for dispensing the medical equivalent of lottery tickets . . . Hope is not a plan, but hope is our plan."

As a wiser alternative, he advocates open discussions, funded by medical insurance, between terminal patients, their families, and their doctors. Conducted with patience and candor, discussions of this kind can clarify what is most important to the dying person. And having had such discussions, people are "far more likely to die at peace and in control of their situation, and to spare their family anguish."

Reading Dr. Gawande's prescription, I am reminded of the experience of Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi, abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse, whose mother recently passed away. During the days before her death, Shinge Roshi talked with her mother about books, art, and music. She edited her mother's memoirs – and helped her write the ending. Her mother, in turn, saw to it that her affairs were in order. Accepting her imminent death, she gave her daughter a list of things to do, people to call, and last thoughts. For Shinge Roshi, the experience of being with her mother during and after her passing awakened feelings of profound gratitude. It was, she said, as miraculous as birth. □

From Shiju's blog, *One Time, One Meeting*, at http://practiceofzen.wordpress.com/ .

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* Atul Gawande, "Letting Go," The New Yorker, July 26, 2010 (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/08/02/100802fa_fact_gawande).

** Charlotte Joko Beck, Everyday Zen (HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 66, 68.

winding jungle road
headlights pierce the inky black
suddenly – leopard!

– Saroj Rose DeVeve
(November 2010, from India)

A Child's Hook: Buddha's Birthday Dharma Talk

By Michael Shane Hale

This Buddha's Birthday talk was given on May 20, 2011, at a gathering of the Sho Shin Sangha, which Hoen-ji sponsors, at Auburn Prison.

Good afternoon! It's great to see everyone's smiling faces. . . This morning's Buddha's Birthday performance brought out your smiles and imagination. Of course, Jikyo's direction probably has that effect on everyone. This Dharma talk is about being childlike and being childish.

First, a story about incarcerated people befriending one another. Shane sees Rob doesn't have much and begins giving him food, makes him meals and even leaves him flavored coffee in the morning to make coffee for himself when he wakes up. Shane keeps a lot of food in his locker but notices food is getting low and worries how he is going to continue eating. A couple days later Rob receives a food package and Shane thinks, "We're going to be OK now." As Shane turns his head, not wanting to look at Rob's bag, he can't help but notice some chicken cutlets, and smiles. That night Rob prepares two bowls of food, just like Shane had before, but Rob gives one bowl to someone else and eats the other one himself, instead of sharing with Shane. Shane is hurt and can't understand Rob giving food to a nobody, someone who isn't going to give back, and doesn't so much as offer him a morsel. Shane feels used and sees Rob's selfishness. He is more than happy to take, but when he has, he doesn't want to give back.

Sho Shin

Later, Shane receives a food package. Rob stares at the flavored coffees in Shane's package and has the audacity to ask for some. Shane yells, "Fuck no, you can't have any!" Hearing Shane swear shocks Rob.

"Are you upset because I didn't give you anything from my package when I got it?"

"Motherfucking right!" Shane snaps. Rob swallows deeply before sharing.

"You gave me food when I had nothing. When I got food I gave it to others with nothing. If I owe you anything for the food you gave me, I'll pay you back." Rob's childlike behavior strikes Shane deeply because he initially gave to Rob in a similar state of mind. Yet Shane became childish. Why? I believe Peter Pan and Buddha's Birthday will help sort things out.

Peter Pan and his lost boys never wanted to grow up because they knew that grown-ups trade in their happy thoughts for the weighty responsibilities of the adult world. With this weight on their shoulders it's no wonder grown-ups can't fly. Shane begins like Peter Pan. Childlike, he responds to the need of the moment. Later, Shane turns into Captain Hook, Peter Pan's nemesis, and becomes hooked by the childish idea that giving provides him security with Rob.

In prison this happens a lot. As incarcerated people, we become hardened in order to survive. It's a part of being a man as well; the harder you become, the more manly you become. And the more manly you are, the more respect you get. There's very little incentive to give up this grownup way of thinking. We know that hardening ourselves is childish because it makes us selfish and self-serving. To maintain it, we have to disconnect from ourselves so that we don't come across as a nobody, perceived as weak or less than. As adults, we become hooked and weighted down by our egocentric selfishness, which puts us at odds with being open and childlike.

Likewise, Buddha's Birthday begs us to remember the lesson of being childlike. Only a child could proclaim, without ego, that he is the World-Honored One. One story of the Buddha's enlightenment relates that the Lord Buddha followed a very grown-up path to achieve liberation. He becomes an extreme ascetic. His intention was noble, but one grain of rice a day left Buddha emaciated. Buddha's friends reinforced the ideal that he must be hardened by discipline, not softened. The Buddha drinks some milk and his friends judge him by their ascetic standards. They are hooked on these standards and see the Buddha as hopeless, not serious about his practice. Buddha sits under a bodhi tree and is determined not to get up until he is enlightened. The Buddha experiences many things while sitting there but enlightenment eludes him. Then the Buddha remembers himself as a child sitting in the fields watching workers and nature. He re-experiences being childlike and wakes up.

So however we choose to engage with the world we can certainly learn something about being childlike by thinking of what we bring to our practice. Investigating our thoughts and intentions, ask: Are we Captain Hook or the ascetic? Are we engaging our practice looking for something in return? Or do we sit like Peter Pan, childlike with joy and wonder, simply sitting, flying in the moment?

By looking, all sentient beings develop courage and discipline to see ourselves as we are. Witnessing our motives begins the process of unhooking us from the childish, selfish, ego-centered reality that is forced on us in the adult world. Realizing this, we soften ourselves and become open to the mystery of the moment. On this Buddha's Birthday, may we fly like a childlike perception to embrace the liberation in this moment. □

Passing through the Forest

By Kaity Cheng

Lu and I were climbing Tassajara Zen Monastery's steep driveway. I breathed in the morning mist, and also absorbed my friend's vibrant energy – a professor of writing, a mother of two sons who are my age, a woman who exudes outer confidence and inner vulnerability. Tassajara Zen Mountain Center lies at the bottom of a deep valley. In my three months here, I never walked more than a mile beyond it, and felt as if it would take a great resolve to leave on my own two feet.

The climb from the valley bottom feels familiar, as if it mirrors how I get by in this life, stepping with great difficulty, exhilarated and/or exhausted from the effort. Buddhist philosophy tells me I made the mountain, that I make the mountain every day with my mind, that the steep valley bottom where I am stuck is of my own making. I think back to a few years ago, when I first read Kafka's short story, "The Gatekeeper." How chilled I was when the man, having waited years by the gate, finally asked the gatekeeper why no one else had ever tried to enter. The gatekeeper responded that the gate was meant only for him, nobody else could pass through that gate. Zen is rife with this gate metaphor. True zazen is said to be a gateless gate. How to get there? Effortless effort. Sometimes the closest I come to effortless effort is when I just cut loose and disappear into the woods.

By the roadside at Tassajara
photo by Kaity Cheng

At the trailhead, Lu decides she'd rather walk the road. She hugs me, and I begin the Horse Pasture Trail on my own. Getting on the trail involves a short climb, and then the trail levels off as it cuts a steady line around the foothills of the Santa Lucia Mountains. Tufts of grasses stood wild and wavy on these same hills last week. After this week's rains, the grasses have bowed down to the hillside, transforming it into the coat of a wet dog. I pass the now familiar blackened hulls of trees, roasted in the forest fires of 2008. Around each ashen skeleton rise vigorous green sprouts of new growth. Toyon juts up like a hand clasping the burned tree, its branches thick with foliage and red, red berries. With each step I note that my mind feels busy, as if the pages of the same old storybook were flapping in my head.

A lion's mane mushroom hangs from the hollowed basin of a burned tree trunk. Its white extensions look like fangs within the mouth of the burned tree. I wonder if an animal might sleep there, but have never seen any tracks near it. The Horse Pasture Trail bends sharply, and I am gifted with a wide view of the mountains – geologically young, resembling a field of green-gray cones. I pause and bring my attention to my eyes, feel them roll from left to right, taking in sky, mountain, a bird passing through. I do not see the traces the bird makes in the sky, but I draw in my mind a faint arabesque, and wonder if other birds can feel a slight difference in air that has been cut through with flight. Wildflower showing season has begun. Purple shooting stars dot the hillside, their delicate flowers suspended from long stems, aimed like fighter jets into the soil. Baby blue eyes carpet the borders of the trail, this footprint painting that will never appear in a museum. Poison oak, its smooth red stems, have emerged from their relatively incognito winter bareness with the first leaves; arranged in threes, slick with urushiol oil.

High up on the ridge, I'm delighted by the scattering of rocks, which resemble giant pink teeth. I weave around them, noting how everything is beautiful and there is not a trace of wonder in me. I have come to realize hiking has its own mysterious alchemy; whenever I'm sad, a long forest bath changes something, but not right away. I enter a forest with some unwhispered hope that I will hang my worries on the first suitable limb. But the thoughts hover, a cloud of uncertain, steady rain that accompanies me with each step. I accept this all and go for these long trail walks.

I continue to stitch footprints into the narrow path that hugs the mountain. A threaded needle comes in and out of fabric; where am I in between the steady stamp of left, right, left, right? The fiery blossom of Indian paintbrush nearly swipes me with color. Mugwort grows lavishly along the trail. I'm told sleeping with mugwort under the pillow brings you interesting dreams.

A ways ahead of me I see two women eating lunch on the trail. Unmistakably Joanna and Nada. They are laughing, wrapped snugly in raingear. I laugh too when I see them, happy as we often are when we bump into people unexpectedly. The three of us continue together on the downhill portion of this journey. We follow the trail's accommodating switchbacks, one by one, holding back the prickly branches of live oak, calling out the gopher holes and the sporadic profusions of poison oak. Our time together follows its own series of switchbacks. Walking in line, Nada in front poses a question, which I answer, while Joanna in the middle stops to acquaint herself with a single purple flower, coaxing its name from her vast mental herbarium. A new topic arises, until our leader returns to her original question, and a pause for a moment with the popcorn flowers. Like the switchbacks that ease our descent,

our conversation weaves through us, unhurried. Talking this way also feels as if we are knitting in the air, two purl stitches, then two knit stitches. A scarf forms and floats above us, warming us, wrapping us in the reality of our co-existence, one that true relationship requires to be knit again and again.

When I return from these expeditions, I continue to taste the forest. I remove my sneakers; the laces slip open. The old sliding glass windows, the faucets, the rickety drawers, all appear to comply a little more. I find a spot on the floor and relax. Sometimes it might be the first true rest I have felt in a long time. My hands cup around a mug of tea, and I feel close to everything, even the spaces under the eaves of drooping branches, where I had not thought to look. On the trail, I felt blocked at each step by my own mind, watching my weak ankle, vigilantly noting traps and poisons. Now the long trail that I faithfully followed meanders through me. The stand of pines that I noted, without wonder, are standing sharply in my mind's eye. The snake that lay sunning in the trail eludes me, but I reach back into memory to record its color, size, the pattern of its scales, and leaf through the reptile field guide. Maybe it was a gopher snake. It was long and yellow, and although it lay blatantly across the path, it was hardly in our way. The waterfall where we had stopped for cookies is still emptying faithfully. Its surge reverberates inside my ribs.

I don't always have the urge to hike. Sometimes I wake up with zero motivation for physical activity. And yet, I go even when I don't want to, trusting that the body appreciates having its bones and muscle touching and leaving the earth. Mysteriously, the hike wrings out all my wishes. I bathe, pull back my covers, watch a statue of dust twirling in the sun's last light. I'm wishless, infused by the trees and their shadows. I've walked through the forest and it has passed through me. □

Time to Study Books, Meditate on Precepts, Sew Rakusu

By Erin Mackie

At the core of my experience with jukai training stands astonishment backed by gratitude. In late June, I started to attend sittings at the Zen Center of Syracuse. On July 31, I had my first dokusan with Shinge Roshi during which, to my astonishment, she invited me to join the precepts study group scheduled to meet for the first time that afternoon. I was fairly swept off my feet. I never expected to be invited to dokusan, much less to a study group. I never even knew there was a precepts study group.

So, for a few moments I thought this was just a newly established reading group focused on the sixteen Buddhist precepts, much like the Dharma Study group that meets every month. It soon became clear that this is a much bigger deal: a group embarked on studying the precepts as

PATH

His doghood
ends
in anticipation:
a path,
a treat,
an odor,
love,
breath.

– Amy Doherty

training for the jukai ceremony, a kind of Buddhist confirmation. As I absorbed this, I felt stunned and excited in a not completely neurotic way. Anxiety had been elbowed out by gratitude. Shinge Roshi's generosity bowled me over. Finally, I thought, I might have a crack at getting it right.

My life as an academic has been vexed, inflamed, and stunted around ethical struggles. What is the right way to deal with bad policies, unethical or incompetent colleagues, unmotivated or wildly unprepared students? What does it matter, anyway? Maybe just go along to get along – a precept followed with great success in most institutions.

But the questions kept swarming: What is right action? Right understanding? Right speech? Right intention? How does one extricate one's self from the tug of one ethical principle – not lying, for example – against another – preserving group harmony, let's say? Where does self-respect end and self-righteousness begin?

What would a conversation free of fault-finding sound like? How might the critical spirit be preserved?

As a recklessly outspoken, highly principled academic, I frequently found myself in the midst of what increasingly felt like warfare – hot and cold, guerilla and conventional – usually with middle and executive management, occasionally with a colleague or a student. I had developed a certain expertise in rectitude both through my six years chairing English departments at two universities and through my service on professional ethics committees in the university senate and the Modern Language Association. Besides, I was fearless, my high-powered rifle always at the ready to take down any and every elephant in the room. Even so, my actions did not always feel true or have heartening consequences. When I limped away from the chair of my department on July 1 to take six months of leave, I had crashed twitching to the ground.

So, going to that first precepts study meeting, I was astonished, grateful,

needy, and preposterously unprepared. We were all given a reading list and a pattern with directions for making our rakusu. I received the list of readings cheerfully (Books! Studying! Just like a seminar – I can do this!) and the pattern for the rakusu with some unease. I had given sewing a go when I was twelve years old, eager to achieve sartorial distinction with my meager clothing allowance. But all that came to a sorry end one humid Baltimore afternoon in a tussle between my patience and some hard-to-handle cheap muslin for a peasant blouse (it was 1971). The cheap muslin won out; the Singer sewing machine was mothballed; I never looked back. At least not for forty years and that temperate Syracuse afternoon, sitting with six fellow precepts students, receiving the pattern for rakusu.

There are eight of us in the group; I have met six; there is one fellow nobody has yet set eyes on. We are a group diverse in age, personality, experience, and background. During the first meeting, Shinge Roshi asked each of us to speak about what brought us to the precepts group. Although everyone's primary concern was different, I recognized them all: the need for support through life's challenges; the gratitude at finding a clue that might guide one from lost to found; the relief that now, finally, is the time to get it right; the eagerness, among those of us in middle-age, to redeem time. Joe, in his fifties like me, expressed some real worries about memorizing sutras, precepts, and liturgy; but these were accompanied by real relief at the prospect of "getting some different voices" in his head. As I listened to such remarks, my uneasy awareness that I have the least Zen experience of any in the group began to fade behind the more substantial certainty of our shared apprehensions and aspirations. I take my proverbial hat off, especially, to the younger members of the group, Caroline, Matt, and Kaity. Their maturity, focus, and insight are astonishing.

These are early days. Although we have acquired fabric, needle, and thread for making the rakusu, to my knowledge, not one of us has actually cut the pieces and started sewing. We have met twice with Shinge Roshi and twice for more informal student-only sessions. These monthly meetings will continue through autumn and early winter, culminating at the late January jukai ceremony where we will formally receive the sixteen precepts. In the meantime, we must study books, meditate on precepts, and sew rakusu. We must hear what Shinge Roshi is saying and listen to one another. We must learn things by heart. □

Let everything go
Each fall leaf dropping away
'til there's no more tree

-- Jika Lauren Melnikow
Fall Sesshin

Meanwhile, Back in the Woods

By Myorin Catherine Landis

The sangha grove has undergone a remarkable transformation during the last year, from "weedland" to woodland. Last year at this time, the area harbored fields of Japanese knotweed and impenetrable masses of gallium, with its Velcro seeds latching to clothes and fur. The site's limited floral roster also included enthusiastic but breakable boxelder, as well as two of the area's worst invasives, Norway maple and European buckthorn.

This year, you'd have to look closely to find the few remaining sprigs of "Not Weed," while the garlic mustard covers only a few small patches. Moreover, small white pines stand along the back fence, poised to shoot up toward the sun, their soft foliage glinting in sunlight. Basswood and sugar maple look good to replace the senescing cottonwoods and tipsy boxelders when they go. Flowering and pagoda dogwoods grace the forest trail, bearing the promise of blossoms in springs to come.

Shinge Roshi and Myorin Catherine Landis, who cares for the Sangha's woods, as well as Roshi's dog, Nikita

Almost exactly a year ago we hatched a plan for the long-term vibrancy and ecological health of this precious forest patch, "the country in the city." The idea is to work with natural cycles of death, change, and renewal to direct the urban woodland to a more diverse and productive native plant community. Thinking long term, we hope to shift the plant community from short-lived or invasive trees and "weeds," to long-lived natives. We also hope to incorporate natural sculpture, as well as nut and berry production for food security.

Last fall Jim Engel of White Oak Nursery came to help remove some of the buckthorn. He also brought some 50 young trees and shrubs: black cherry, pawpaw, spicebush, serviceberry, sugar maple, white pine, bayberry, elderberry and other plants, as well as seeds to replenish the seedbank with natives.

But we didn't merely add plants; we worked with the forests' own fruits. Many an existing black walnut and hackberry were freed from the entangling grasp of grape and creeper, vines that had literally buried the saplings under mounds of green. Released, many of these younger

trees look good to reach the canopy in 10 to 20 years. Squirrels and birds have done their part all along, spreading black walnuts and hackberries throughout the woodland via their caches and droppings. We also plan to leave much of the boxelder (where safe), since it supports numerous caterpillars, woodwasps, mushrooms, and wildlife generally.

The Sangha has responded to this project wholeheartedly, with a sense of long-term commitment to caring for the temple grounds. Folks showed up on workdays, tenderly cared for plants they adopted, and practiced "contemplative weeding" before and after sittings. Many of you spent hours pulling garlic mustard and knotweed, dame's rockets and privet. During the late July drought, you hauled buckets of water to thirsty small trees, saving green lives. Many thanks to all!

Several Sangha members and friends also donated plants, fencing, and other financial support to grow this project. The family of the late Eishun Phyllis Berman, our beloved Dharma sister, donated funds to purchase six blueberry bushes in Eishun's memory. During their first season at the Zen Center, these plants produced copious amounts of fruit, their generosity mirroring that of the woman in whose memory they were planted. Our abbot, Shinge Roshi, donated white pines, guardian pillars beside Tom Huff's clan animal sculpture. Thanks also to Gyoshin Virginia Lawson, Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz, and Cynthia Landis, who provided gifts to support this project.

Beyond the Zen Sangha, the local community has stepped up to help. Janet Allen, of Habitat Gardening of CNY, donated stiff goldenrod, wrinkle leaved goldenrod, hyssop, and New England aster, plants beloved by butterflies and bees. These wildflowers survived their first temple year with almost no care, including the drought and heat. Carol Bradford recently shared more wonderful plants with us, including purple flowering raspberry, butterfly weed, Canada anemone, and Culver's root.

An army of student volunteers from SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry Campus Day of Service came to Hoen-ji October 1 and added these newcomer plants to the temple grounds. Despite cold and rain, this hardy ESF crew also yanked, clipped, dug, hauled, sawed Norway maple and burdock, buckthorn and mustard; collected black walnuts by the bucketfuls, and added protective fencing to blueberries. Many thanks to all of you!

With climbing global temperatures, the future is uncertain for plants and all of us. For now, however, we will continue work to create a diverse model forest community as an expression of our practice and commitment to all beings. □

sleeping in a tent
lullaby boxelder leaves
flyby heron crok

-- Myorin Catherine Landis

The Shape of the Maple Leaves

By Caroline Savage

Nearly every evening last fall, I stood on the han deck at dusk, striking the call of the day's end into a sleepy valley. Before picking up the mallet, I marveled at the changing colors and shapes of the Japanese maple leaves, how many fewer there were this evening than last, and how different life would be when the last leaf alit below.

This year, their edges and my mouth crinkle as we remind each other of how many changes have taken place at the residence. 2011 has returned to us our dear Kaity-san, radiating warmth from a year in California's Green Gulch and Tassajara monasteries. The summer winds blew in Matt with his fresh spirits and Dharma enthusiasm. Those same winds also blew away my Dharma brother Jikishin to California.

Caroline Savage photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

As the plummeting temperatures promise to deliver a new year, I recall the ringing of the bonsho last New Year's Eve at Dai Bosatsu Zendo and think of how life at our temple is different. I remember the residence schedule we posted in glittering January, with daily jōza (early morning sitting), recently instated Tuesday evening sittings, three residents group dinners weekly and jihatsu breakfast each weekday. In the midst of preparing for Martin Luther King Sesshin (many of us journeyed up the icy mountain to support Shinge Roshi in her first sesshin as abbot of DBZ) and our own sesshin, we did our best to maintain the structure. But by winter sesshin, three residents had fallen ill; the remaining three shifted their practice from rigor to subsistence.

During this year's transition, the Dharma has asked more of our dear teacher than any of the rest of us. As sworn stewards of this temple and supporters of Roshi and DBZ, I feel that we, too, have been strained. And while Roshi has been endlessly accommodating to and supportive of the residents, there's no erasing the fact that there is simply more work to do. Our training schedule never quite recovered from February's illnesses. Someone was always at DBZ, someone had exhausted

himself, or someone was consumed with basic temple care.

While all of this is perhaps the most immediate cause of slashing our schedule, I feel that this change – this coming unbound – is supported by the unbinding at DBZ. There, as here, many changes in the practice have come about in recognition that we simply can no longer sustain what we could last year. And maybe we wouldn't want to – after all, the only two remaining nuns at DBZ have worked themselves so hard that they can no longer physically sit zazen. In the Year of the Rabbit, a reminder to be gentler to ourselves.

I don't play the evening han anymore – sometimes I don't return from school until well past dark. But some shivering, too early nights, I pass the Japanese maple and stand in awe. The leaves, it seems, are again falling. □

My Hospital Chaplaincy Is My Practice

By Rev. Gyoshin Virginia K. Lawson

I began my Clinical Pastoral Education training (CPE) at Upstate Medical Center here in Syracuse at the same time I began Intensive Training Practice at Hoen-ji in preparation for ordination. At first, I thought of being on parallel trainings. Then I thought of being on entwined trainings. By the middle of my second 400-hour CPE unit, I realized there was no division between the trainings. Each was a daily working on my becoming aware of who I am and a heightened awareness of the "who" as the instrument to actualize Kanzeon in my life and the lives of those I touch. Through both trainings (One Training!), I examine who this self is that I have constructed and all too often defend. Are my actions guided by habit, reaction or belief and Vow?

To share how this questioning words and to answer the question asked of me – "What is it like?" – I'll share what I wrote at the end of one CPE Unit.

Gyoshin Virginia Lawson photo by Myorin Catherina Landis

"I dealt with death this unit, more so even than when on oncology rotation. Actually, I dealt with it more intimately, with more knowledge of what was happening physically and more sensitively or with more awareness of the spiritual-mental activity of goodbyes, of endings. I struggle to understand the stark Buddhist statement in The Heart Sutra (i.e., the heart of the matter): 'No birth, no death… no old age and death and no end to old age and death.' Given that Buddhist 'knowing' is defined by experiencing, at best my struggles took the form of meditating and observing what was happening before my eyes. I did come to the realization of no objective, reified Death. Can't explain, but the way it affected my pastoral work was to allow me to experience grief without pulling back, without shielding myself. Very tiring, and I tear up a lot. I think that's my release, health-giving balance that keeps me from becoming depressed or focused on my feelings when I am in a room with uncertain, or frightened, grieving people. And even dying isn't always sad.

"There are moments to be cherished and celebrated with patients, staff and families. 'I am ready,' 'She got what she wanted,' and statements like those when speaking of a death have become extremely meaningful to me. Being there to listen has become part of my pastoral care. But I still feel the need to learn to listen more to the feeling behind the words, especially behind the questions. I have this automatic politeness need to answer the question asked me. And given that I quite often don't know the answer or know that the literal answer will take us off somewhere away from the patient and into a realm of intellectual speculation, I have come to say 'I don't know,' and lead the attention to sharing their knowledge of the patient and to include the patient through direct address by name in the conversations, by encouraging touching and holding of the patients hands. [Most people at the point of death are not speaking or interacting overtly. Touch and direct address become very important.] This listening to people has helped them as they may have needed to deal with whatever they felt was unfinished business, in addition to the current grief at parting and loss."

I am infinitely grateful for the Dharma that brought me to this place at this time. To have two inspired and inspiring teachers and two supportive Sanghas is beyond planning! □

STORM

The sky was fractious,
wanting hard to rain,
but couldn't.
Syllables of leaves
taunted from tree to tree
frantically.
I hurried, grass to gravel,
gravel to stone,
afraid to be alone
under that sky,
those leaves.

– Amy Doherty

Droplet in Time: Onondaga Lake

By Myorin Catherine Landis

Anyone who has puzzled long and hard over the challenges associated with Onondaga Lake knows that it is like running into, not a wall, but layers of interconnected walls: political agendas, legal strictures, contaminated landscapes, sunken poisons, social will, public shame and history, not to mention reams and reams of reports and documents detailing the lake's woes, usually written in obfuscatory remediation-ese prose, another wall. Here I offer a Zen perspective on the Lake, in the hopes of penetrating the complexity – or perhaps just adding another layer of wall.

From this view, Onondaga Lake is constantly changing. What we call "Onondaga Lake" is not static. When you look closely, there is no one thing you can call "Onondaga Lake" that is not intimately connected with everything else in the community and everywhere.

Crane on Onondaga Lake
photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Let's look at the name – Onondaga Lake – words in a language imported from across the ocean. The French called it Lac Gannentaa. Even this script is just scratches on a page made in an alphabet that is merely a convention, developed in a faraway land in ages past. Over time the lake has had other names in other tongues: Oh-nen-ta-ha, Ganentaa, Kaneenda, Kot-cha-katoo.

None of these is "Onondaga Lake." In the past – say, 300 years ago – it was larger, before adjacent wetlands were drained and then filled in with Solvay Process sludge, municipal trash, and other discarded materials. In the far distant past, it was even vaster, one with Lake Ontario's progenitor, Lake Iroquois, near the end of the most recent ice age, 10,000 years ago. Even farther back, it was no lake at all, maybe a tropical lagoon on the supercontinent Pangaea. Way way back, stardust – astral memory in every drop.

According to the more recent glacial story, the current lake was born of ice. 20,000 years ago, no liquid lake at all, only ice, part of the vast ice sheet that covered much of North America.

So what we call Onondaga Lake is merely a puddle in a system that's fluid and constantly changing – expanding, contracting, flowing, upwelling, vanishing into the sky. Everything we know about Onondaga Lake is just a story. Today it is one story, tomorrow it will be another story.

The past 200 years of history, when the Lake was treated as a dump for some of the deadliest chemicals known, is therefore merely a blink in time. Does that mean it can be ignored, dismissed as negligible? That dumping caused enormous suffering, as fish, plants, birds, frogs, snakes, turtles, invertebrates were poisoned in the very medium that once gave them life.

As it says in the *Diamond Sutra*, an understanding of interdependence, of the fallacy of separation, does not mean we drop all manifest standards, become passive and inert. Our oneness implies moral dimension that extends to our relationship with all beings, including lakes. Including the water that comes from our taps. Including the rain that falls from the sky, now tainted by pollutants released from coal-burning power plants in Ohio and other midwestern states. Including the water we flush down the toilet – all of these places are where Onondaga Lake begins. Water forms one giant cycle, shape-shifting, intimate part of every cell, flowing out, finally all draining out after we die, to disappear into clouds, crayfish, dewdrops.

We have responsibilities to water, to fish, to ourselves. What comes around, goes around. Usually when people talk about Onondaga Lake, they talk about the science – how can we ever clean it up? The moral perspective is just as important. We damage a lake, we lose a lake. By the same token, if we do all we can to clean up the lake today, or create conditions by which the lake can clean itself, the lake will respond. Since the closure of Allied Chemical, and the upgrades at the Metropolitan Sewage Treatment Plant, the lake has responded already in terms of clarity and oxygen levels and return of littoral zone plants.

Will we ever be able to eat the fish from Onondaga Lake? Maybe. The important thing is to conduct ourselves in a way that would make such a goal possible in the long term – 100, 200, 500 years in the future. As the Onondagas say, think of the seventh generation in all you do today.

Many contaminants have been dumped heedlessly into Onondaga Lake over the years. But as Shinge Roshi has pointed out, the underlying poisons that damaged the lake are greed, anger and ignorance – pollutants in our minds. In Zen, these are recognized as the three poisons. Without them, none of the mercury, PCBs, btex, dioxins, cadmium and heaps of white Solvay waste would have been so carelessly dumped into the lake.

What happened to Onondaga Lake represents a temporary condition within a system of constant change. Our responsibility, as I see it, is to work with change to do our very best as a community to clean it up. In the case of Onondaga Lake, however, the "right thing," the best course of action, is not so simple. The problems are multidimensional, multichemical, multidisciplinary. As such, they seem intractable, discouraging – the wall I referred to earlier.

Take the lake bottom, for example. The sediments of the lake are

Waste bed at Onondaga Lake
photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

contaminated with a long list of chemicals, most notably mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), chlorinated benzenes and polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These compounds are toxic to organisms living on the bottom of the lake that are eaten by fish that live in the lake. Certain chemicals, including mercury, PCBs, dioxin and hexachlorobenzene, also pose a threat to human health and wildlife because they bioaccumulate in fish, leading to levels that are unsafe to eat.

If you remove this mud, you run the risk of stirring up the bottom and releasing toxins into the water column, where they can enter food chains and perpetuate more harm to biota. Taking precautions with protective silk curtains is no guarantee that nothing will leak. If you leave the stuff in place, you have poison sediments – granted, at some depth, as they become buried by incoming solids over time. But there is always the chance that a storm or some other disturbance could return them to the surface. It might seem best, then, to remove as much as we can – but even this choice comes with a cost. What do you do?

I don't know the best answer to that question. Rather than hauling clean fill (truckloads of sand, for example) in, it might make most sense to remove the contaminated sediments and dispose of the problem properly as much as possible. Other innovative solutions might be possible for this seemingly insoluble issue.

In any case, the ideal approach would resemble a conversation with the lake, trial and error, call and response. We come up with the best plan we think will work, the lake responds. Based on the response, we try something else. This method feels more like a dialogue with the lake than any single one-shot imposed remedy. In scientific language, this method is called adaptive management. This process could take decades, in the case of Onondaga Lake, or centuries.

Such "walls," or insoluble problems, are koans. For the lake-bottom predicament, what do you do? Engineers currently plan to dredge (remove) sediments in part of the lake, and add a four-foot-thick "isolation cap" in others. The rest of the lake bottom would be left for deposition of clean sediments to happen naturally over time ("monitored natural recovery").

To me, a koan – that intractable complexity for which there is no good solution – provides an opening, an opportunity for change. As a society, we generally think we are separate from nature. Society sanctioned Allied Chemical's dumping. No one was put in jail; in fact the company leaders (such as Frederick Hazard and others) were well rewarded. We certainly can't blame industry for treating the lake as a sewer; that responsibility belonged to the civic leaders and public health advocates who made Onondaga Creek a sewer. But at the time, this alternative was seen as better than outbreaks of typhoid or cholera, water-borne public health menaces.

Whatever decisions were made in the past, we can make other choices today. We can aim to steer both lake and incoming streams to full cleanliness and health. We can work through engineering, physics, chemistry, biology, but also arts, body, spirit, clearing the pollutants in our minds. Let's start today – every drop counts! □

SATURDAY

Climbing up a sleeve of fog,
seeing only coyote bushes left and right,
coming and going from cloud rooms.
Twice they were stopped –
by a poof of lichen, which surprised them
with its waters, cool and a little soapy.
And again by a pile – intestines, some fur.
Transfixed by a glimpse of their inner workings.

Later a friend, after a lapse of seven years, came for lunch.
His joking voice now pricked by waning sunlight.
He spoke legalese, of courts, good judges, motions,
torts, filled her in on the success of their classmates.
His own life wilting under the flinching bulb of comparison.
At the ocean, he wished to be reincarnated as a dog.
She walked beside him, listening, while eyeing
the dam of her own lost plans, knowing how the wastewaters
spill over, and the feeling that precedes it.

In the evening, three friends,
no anchor of a past swinging amongst them,
did as sandpipers do, and crept around the waves,
chasing air pockets and the crabs exhaling beneath them.
She thanked the ocean for its reliable effacement.
They lay against the dunes, half-buried, dozing.

In their separate dreams, light and wind
played the strings of their minds
in a bottomless, forgotten, concert. *– Kaity Cheng*

The Perfect Way: An Interview with Shugetsu Sandra Kistler-Connolly

By Myorin Catherine Landis

The teaching of the Buddha is that if one truly and courageously faces reality and sees the truth about his or her life, indeed about life itself, with time and guidance, one can find the cause of the discontent, heal it, and realize a new and truly satisfactory life.

– Donald Mitchell, from one of the readings for Basic Buddhism class

I remember Shinge Roshi (then Roko Osho) once announcing after a sitting, the beginning of the Basic Buddhism class. She adjured us, "You'd be insane to not take this course!" Impressed by her conviction, I signed up. I found that the class provided invaluable context for our practice on the cushion. Buddhism is about freedom from suffering. Studying the teachings of "The Way" – the four noble truths, eightfold path, and other fundamentals – from a variety of perspectives, voices, and cultures, helps to enrich our practice many-fold. Besides, we eat cheddar goldfish and chocolate truffles, drink wild berry zinger tea, and discuss ancestor worship in China.

Shugetsu Sandra Kistler-Connolly photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

We focused on Taoism today, among other things, and read from the *Tao Te Ching. The Tao that cannot be told / is not the eternal Tao.* So why teach? Why say anything at all, or offer a class like Basic Buddhism? "There's no way you can't speak about it, especially if you want to teach others," Shugetsu points out. My conversation with Shugetsu continues below, in the interview that followed the class.

Why do you teach this class?

Roshi and I talked about this a long time ago – people who are here need to know more about the richness of Buddhist tradition and development. You don't "need" that, but it helps to deepen one's understanding of Buddhist practice and Buddha-dharma. There is also this amazing connection between what were doing right here, right now in the 21st century and what Buddha did and taught in sixth century BCE India.

Further, I've discovered since I've been teaching the class here, that it clarifies things for me. The insights that people bring to the discussions that we have really help me in my own practice.

What is the value of learning about the teachings? Why not just sit, and eschew readings and study?

This could be just the scholar in me talking, but I do feel that learning about the context of these teachings and ideas in the culture at the time really helps to understand references in other works – for example, those that we examine in Dharma Study (Rinzai, Huang Po). When statements that are made in these works are put in the context of what was going on at the time, it seems to clarify so much.

The dharma wasn't esoteric, but lived in one's day-to-day life. Take the Rinzai Roku, for example. It came in response to what people in China at that time saw as the age of the degenerate Dharma, when the teachings of the Dharma had been weakened and true teachers were increasingly rare. (This was an idea that had developed in India centuries earlier and was now embraced by the Chinese during a time of chaos and upheaval.)

Just a few centuries earlier, people in both rural and urban China had embraced Buddhist teachings and believed that they were creating a "Buddha-kingdom" on earth, working together as brothers and sisters in the Dharma, supporting each other in compassion. But during the sixth century, civil war broke out and Buddhists took both sides, with the priests associated with the courts on the side of the nobility and those associated with the common folks on the side of the peasants. This caused great disillusionment with Buddhism generally, giving rise to the embracing of the view that this was the age of the degenerate Dharma. The Chinese response was very pragmatic: stronger forms of practice were needed to help people to attain True Awakening. To this end, various schools of Buddhist practice were developed over the next several centuries. Rinzai's teachings and practices arose out of the context of this continuing effort to preserve the true Dharma teachings.

We see how the true teaching of the Dharma has persisted, even through such violent and chaotic unrest. People of insight, age after age, have been here and continued to show this path to others – incredible compassion for the sake of all beings.

Three centuries after the passing of the Buddha, Ashoka (in India) was the first Buddhist king. He had been a ruthless conqueror, although he had two wives who were Buddhist, so he was exposed to Buddhist teachings. During the aftermath of a particularly bloody and violent battle, Ashoka walked through the battlefield littered with the broken and bloody bodies of warriors on both sides. That experience was his turning word. He vowed to rule to the best of his ability according to the teachings of the Buddha. He established what he called "Dharma-rule," establishing hospitals for people and animals, services for the poor and needy, and providing Dharma teachings throughout the kingdom. Just as the Buddha himself taught acceptance of all religions, so, too, Ashoka respected all of the religious traditions in his kingdom.

These historical events of the development of Buddhism show how much

Buddhism is a lived religion. People sometimes think it's an esoteric practice. Social concern did not start when Buddhism reached America! The Buddha himself was involved in social activism, counseling kings about social concerns and how to rule justly and compassionately.

Again, it's a lived practice, and not metaphysical speculations.

As I said earlier, I learn so much from the people who attend the class; I'm really grateful to everyone who comes. □

THE GIFT

In a large room with many sofas
was the small room of contemplation
where thoughts ratcheted
against the walls

I hummed through the difficulty –
rifled through a stack of wise words
paced wider circles around
an impenetrable center.

Slowly my friend walked towards me
a purple leaf twirled in his outstretched hands.

On the steady wooden chair arm
I rested the leaf on its furled back
saw no laziness in its design

the deep middle vein
broke off into smaller veins
a lattice where sugar and sun
flowed through each other.

Its finely toothed margin
the wind's clean bite marks
a thin inch of carbon
once joined leaf to branch,

long enough to grow green from the feast
long enough for chlorophyll to stop coursing.
Now greenless, now flightless
purple danced through each little room.

– Kaity Cheng

President's Report

By Meigetsu Rebecca Beers

Newly repainted Zen Center of Syracuse
photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

I am very pleased to announce that Togan Tim Kohlbrenner will become president of the Zen Center of Syracuse Board of Trustees in January 2012.

Togan is a long-term student at Hoen-ji with a strong practice. Professionally, he taught technology in the Oneida Central School District for 16 years, before becoming an administrator, overseeing the district's technological and computer needs and its English as a second language program. He joined the board of trustees in January 2009 and chairs the Technology Committee, whose members have in recent years created a new Website, revamped our computers, and helped to put Shinge Roshi's teishos on the Internet, among other things. He also has been active on the Membership Committee.

His technology and administrative background seem a particularly good fit, as the Zen Center becomes more technologically savvy. As you may already have read (Page 27), Togan is a mountain climber, so the challenges here at Hoen-ji are likely to seem less daunting than some he's faced. We look forward to working with him.

I have held the job for three successive three-year terms, and will continue as vice president. I thank you all for allowing me to serve.

Tisarana Council

With her new role as abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo requiring her to be away from Hoen-ji for a week or two at a time, Shinge Roshi has created a council of long-term members to encourage and support the practice here. The council consists of Nikyu Robert Strickland, Doshin David Schubert, Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz, Gyoshin Virginia Lawson, Jisho Judith Fancher, and Daigan David Arnold.

The group has been meeting at least once a month, both with Shinge Roshi and in her absence, and their discussions have reflected their warm concern and creative ideas for ways to help Roshi and the Hoen-ji Sangha.

Facilities work in 2011

With the 2010 Capital Campaign behind us, the continuing effort to update and renovate the facility was more modest in 2011. Painting was completed on the main house, at 266 W. Seneca Turnpike, and on the east side of the zendo. Also, the washboard-like section of the driveway at the residence is scheduled to be repaired and repaved at this writing.

Legal concerns

For the last several years, the Zen Center and the City of Syracuse have been sharing a koan of sorts. We applied for tax-exempt status for the residence, 276 W. Seneca Turnpike, since it both houses our resident students and is the site of many practice-related activities, such as serving as the kitchen and dining hall during sesshin, and a meeting place for residents and guests.

Our lawyer, Cliff Forstadt, has graciously represented us pro bono at many hearings and with many affidavits during the five years of this endeavor. After several site visits, finally the court ruled we should be exempt. But, like any good koan, it's never quite that simple. Now, Cliff is headed to Rochester to represent us in the city's appeal of the ruling.

Teishos and podcasts

Teishos by Shinge Roshi are now available online through the Zen Center of Syracuse website, www.zencentrofsyracuse.org. Just click on Publications, and you can listen to them. You also can subscribe to iTunes through the website, and download podcasts of Roshi's teishos.

These recordings are free, but we hope grateful users will donate to the center. We plan to add one teisho every two weeks to the site, and have a bevy of talks already edited and ready to be uploaded. Adding them any faster could swamp our bandwidth, I'm told.

Zion I & the Grouch

Speaking of new ventures, the Zen Center signed on as a sponsor for Zion I & the Grouch, a hip-hop band from the West Coast that came to Syracuse while on tour last April. The band draws inspiration from meditation and was eager to have a connection with a meditation center here in town.

Their intent is to use music to send positive, uplifting messages for youth and promote social activism. Many of us listened to their lyrics, and they are indeed upbeat. So the Zen Center and Imagine Syracuse partnered with them in hosting a concert at the Westcott Theater. In return, the musicians promised us a small percentage of their ticket sales.

Two grants

The Zen Center received a grant from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation for a plaque celebrating the significant history of the Joshua Forman House. The plaque arrived recently and will be mounted at the front steps of the building. The grant, written by Shinge Roshi, Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz and Joe O'Brien, was for $1,800.

Another Zen Center resident, Kaity Cheng, spent several weeks this summer writing a wonderful Open Spaces Sacred Places grant to study the feasibility of using the center's grounds as a much-needed green space in our neighborhood. "We envision an ecologically informed transformation of the center's grounds," she wrote in the narrative, "including a precious forest patch that has been called 'the country in the city.' We are looking for ways to share this space that has been blessed with years of meditation. Our preliminary ideas include forest restoration, a Zen garden, artwork, seating, native plantings, and interpretive signs." The grant was submitted in September; we should hear back by mid-December.

Should the Zen Center be awarded the $50,000 grant, we would apply for subsequent grants to complete the work.

Board membership

Longtime Hoen-ji member GetsuAn Ann Marshall, who is an administrator in the library system at the University of Rochester, joined the board of trustees this year; a few meetings later she became its secretary by a consensus vote of the board. The addition of GetsuAn brings our current board membership to 10, including Shinge Roshi; Togan; Toku Ellen Grapensteter, our treasurer; Nikyu Robert Strickland, past president; Jika Lauren Melnikow; Chris Lord; Fugan Sam Gordon; Gyoshin Virginia Lawson, and myself. □

Treasurer's Report

By Toku Ellen Grapensteter

A deep bow of gratitude to all who have given so much. Hoen-ji has reduced its mortgage to only $52,000, thanks to the Capital Campaign, in addition to carrying out many much-needed improvements and repairs on the buildings and grounds.

Shinge Roshi and the Zen Center of Syracuse Board of Trustees have been and continue to be thoughtful and dedicated caretakers of our Sangha home. In a few years the board hopes to be debt- free. Vintage buildings, however, require ongoing TLC. The support of the membership is critical for this.

Despite change within and beyond our doors – high unemployment, melting savings, rising costs – Hoen-ji needs our support to continue the work. Please encourage your friends to visit the website and sign up for programs and sesshin. May true Dharma continue. □

WALKING WITH NIKITA

already thinning
canopy of red and gold
fragrance under foot

– Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat

Meet the New President

By Togan Tim Kohlbrenner

Starting in January, I will take over as president of the board of trustees. Whether serving as assistant jisha, tenzo or as a board member, I cherish the opportunity to serve the Sangha in whatever capacity I am able.

In all of the jobs I've done at Hoen-ji, there always seem to be big shoes to fill. It is easier knowing that Meigetsu will be continuing to serve on the board and will be there as a mentor. Thank you, Meigetsu, for the many years you have served on the BoT and all the time and energy that you have given. Shinge Roshi told me that when she and Nikyu were having one of their monthly meetings to discuss Hoen-ji matters, they both agreed that Meigetsu has been an incredible president – attending so well to policy, facilities, community and all aspects of sound governance.

And, as always, I am especially fortunate to work with Shinge Roshi and everyone at Hoen-ji. □

Shinge Roshi, president-elect Togan Tim Kohlbrenner (right) and Kimpu Jonathan Swan. Kimpu (left), a longtime resident at Hoen-ji and inji (Roshi's attendant) for several years, recently left to spend the second half of the fall training period at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. Fellow Hoen-ji resident Matt Russell also has been training at DBZ since the beginning of August.
photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Our Many Bodhi-sattvas

By Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz

Many, many people have acted as quiet bodhisattvas over the past year, ensuring that the Zen Center is beautifully maintained and taking our practice into the community. Some of those are listed below.

Around the grounds:

Joe O'Brien and Daigan David Arnold regularly mow the grass and have done so since spring; Daigan is the Knotweed Samurai, having almost completely eliminated this invasive plant from our grounds.

Matt Russell filled many bags with invasive weeds, dug out unwanted bushes, and planted flowers and vegetables.

Jushin Barb Rauscher, Diane Grimes, and Jenn Reid have put in many hours weeding along our buildings and pathways.

Kaity Cheng and Caroline Savage planted a garden in front of the residence; they also weed and harvest it.

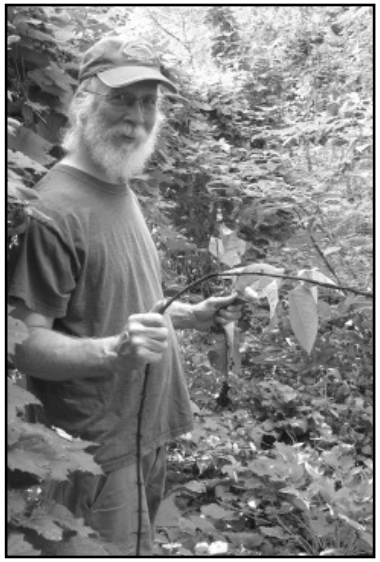
We've planted tomatoes, flowers, and bushes.

In the woods:

Myorin Catherine Landis weeds and protects our plantings and coordinates the purchase, placement, maintenance (and removal) of vegetation in the woods.

The family and friends of longtime Sangha member Eishun Phyllis Berman, who died on May 11, 2011, donated bushes for a blueberry grove near the Tom Huff sculpture.

Myorin, Caroline, Kaity, Joe, and Matt tended to and planted the blueberry bushes.



Daigan David Arnold, the Knotweed Samurai, who almost completely eliminated the invasive weed from the grounds
photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Many Sangha members adopted trees or bushes that were planted last fall, and have tended them regularly during the summer and into fall; Mokuon Karen Nezelek has cared meticulously for "her" spicebush, and Joraku JoAnn Cooke for "her" elderberry.

Matt and others pulled weeds throughout the woods, especially garlic mustard and American knotweed, which are prolific and invasive; as a result, the path and the woods are welcoming and look cared-for as we walk there.

On Acts of Kindness weekend (September 10), our

Sangha members were joined by community members Terra Harmatuk, the Rev. Beth Dubois and the youth group from Onondaga Valley Presbyterian Church, and a few SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry students as we beautified the area around the sculpture and along the creek.

On the buildings:

Togan Tim Kohlbrenner and Daishin Paul Cook replaced rotting boards on the deck and stairs of the zendo and the back stairway to the Forman House.

Spring and Summer Sesshin participants cleaned the porch and de-winterized the ramp.

Meigetsu Rebecca Beers made arrangements with various workmen to submit bids for repairs, met them and explained our needs, hired people, and oversaw the work (e.g., repairing the residence driveway, painting two sides of the Forman House and zendo, and doing electrical upgrades.

We called and met repairmen for a variety of routine problems, such as the Forman House furnace, the sewage reservoir outside the zendo, electrical adjustments, etc.).

Inside the buildings:

So many people cleaned, fixed, winterized, de-winterized, watered plants, brought in mail, answered phones, etc. that it's not possible to name them.

Kaity Cheng worked with many others to submit a complex grant proposal, Sacred Places, Sacred Spaces.

Daigan and several others removed and/or put in air conditioners, according to the seasons.

Gyoshin Virginia Lawson maintains the database and takes care of the Zen Center office, information flow, registrations for programs, and many other tasks.

Myotan Pat Hoffmann prepares deposits of donations made to the Zen Center and takes the checks to the bank; Meigetsu enters financial information into the database.

Jikishin James Douglass, before and since his move to California, has spent months on the website he created last fall, and taught many others to update and make improvements to the site, http://www.zencenterofsyracuse.org/ .

Senju Dave Fisher has given countless hours to the technological side of our operations, tending to the computers and printers, moving the list-serves from one server to another, and helping out whenever a need is identified, including the website.

Kimpu Jonathan Swan has managed the teisho project all year (and before), recording, editing, creating CDs, switching over to the online system now in progress, and taking great and sensitive care with each recorded teisho so that each can be preserved for present and future Sangha members.

Senju, Meigetsu, Kaity, Caroline, Jishin, Jikyo, and others have updated the website regularly so that it is almost always current.

Kaity initiated and maintains the Facebook page for the Zen Center of Syracuse, http://www.facebook.com/zencenterofsyracuse.

Jisho Judy Fancher, as chair of the Ritual Committee, helps officers and is in charge of Hoen-ji's ceremonies and altar preparations.

In the community:

MyoEn Deborah Bateman and Jikyo volunteer with the Buddhist men at Auburn Correctional Facility, and bring meditation to women in the Justice Center.

Jisho works with youth at Faith Hope Community Center.

Jishin has led meditation with young women at Elmcrest Children's Center

Caroline, Joraku, Kyung-Ha Lee, and Jikyo organized a seminar series at Syracuse University called The Ethics of Eating (see photo and go to Caroline's blog, http://ethicsofeatingconference.wordpress.com/).

Joe O'Brien leads meditation twice a week with men and women with disabilities who come to the zendo from HOME, Inc., an area agency.

Mokuon organizes volunteers for community events and, along with many others, has staffed informational tables about the Zen Center at Syracuse University, the Westcott Street Cultural Fair, and Onondaga Community College.

This list is hardly complete. It doesn't mention the overarching work of Shinge Roshi, the board of trustees, and the Tisarana Council, nor does it discuss the inconspicuous work done by so many of our members. If I have forgotten anyone, please accept my apologies. Regardless, your efforts and care are deeply appreciated. □

LIVE RELEASE

Raccoon,
caught in the trap
meant to capture
a marauding
woodchuck
(to be released miles away
down some untraveled, unhoused
road)
glares.
Wrapped in grass,
subdued by days
before we found him,
turns and growls
before he runs away.

-- Amy Doherty

Sangha Passages

New Members

The following people joined the Sangha in new-member ceremonies during sesshins this year:

Eric Bauer, Anne Beffel, Jim Bellini, Robin Gross, Fumiyo Hirano, Kyung-Ha Lee, Jennifer Reid, Clay Strange, Yao Xu

Deaths

Eishun Phyllis Berman, longtime member and dear friend to the Sangha. Eishun died May 11, after a months-long battle with brain cancer. Her funeral and 49-day service were held at Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji. A group of lushly producing blueberry bushes were donated in her honor and planted in a grove near our Tom Huff sculpture. She is greatly missed.

Betty S. Beers, mother of Sangha member Meigetsu Rebecca Beers, died Jan. 12.

Marvin Weinstein, father of Sangha member Ryobo Gary Weinstein, died Aug. 19.

Doriva I. Lord, mother of Tibetan Sangha member Chris Lord, died Feb. 23.

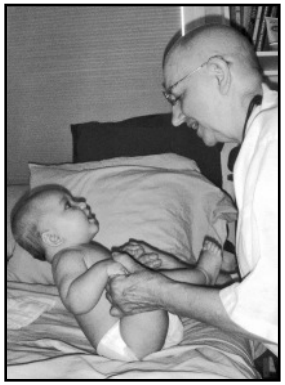
Sybil Elizabeth McFall, daughter of Tibetan Sangha friend Madalyn Smith, died March 22.

The Ven. Keido Fukushima Roshi died March 1.

Ton-Shun Chang, father of Kim Chang, died March 3.

Births

Eleanor Hansel-Leader, granddaughter of Sangha member Gyoshin Virginia Lawson, was born May 16 to Gyoshin's daughter, Adrien-Alice Lawson Hansel and her wife, Jess Leader. Eleanor is Gyoshin's first grandchild.



Baby Eleanor and Grandma Gyoshin

Weddings

Amanda Caroline Pustilnik and Alexander Benjamin Howard, son of Sangha member Shiju Ben Howard, were married June 5 at the Woodend Nature Sanctuary, a property of the Audubon Naturalist Society, in Chevy Chase.

Trauma Resiliency Training

There is an increasing need for people to address traumatic issues that have hindered their ability to move on. A skill-based process using time-tested techniques has been developed and used in many countries with trauma survivors, including older children and adults. Ishin Bill Cross, PhD, will offer an eight-week course from 6 to 8 p.m. on Wednesdays beginning early next year. Look for specific dates on the Zen Center's website, www.zencenterorsyracuse.org.

Thank You to Our Donors

The following people generously gave year-end and memorial contributions to the Zen Center of Syracuse. We are grateful for your gifts.

Year End 2010

Judy Antoine
Louise Bayer
Meigetsu Rebecca Beers
Richard Bell
Carol Biesemeyer
Ken and Cathy Bobis
Peter Brouwer
Robert Brown
Nick Cavanaugh
Pei-Sze Cheng
Sanghyeon Cheon
Rudolph Colao
Daishin Paul Cook
John Paul Crangle
John Dare
Adrienne Eddy
Richard Ellison
Jisho Judith Fancher
Senju Dave Fisher
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