



CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER

NEWSLETTER

January & February 2026



2026 Zen Center Board Members

We are happy to announce that the Board Members for 2026 are:

Danielle Bouchard, President • danielle.bouchard@gmail.com
Daniel Rhodes, Vice President • rhodesdt@gmail.com
Mike McKillip, Treasurer • mmckillip61@gmail.com
Jill Kuhlberg, Secretary • jkuhlberg@gmail.com
Michael Soter, Member-at-Large • msotre@gmail.com
Will Savery, Member-at-Large • willsavery@gmail.com
Josho Pat Phelan, ex oficio • joshochzc@gmail.com

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Chris Censullo and Lance Ashdown for their years of service as Vice President and Member-at Large, respectively.

New Year's Eve

Wednesday night, December 31

We will welcome the New Year with two periods of zazen at 8 and 8:50 PM followed by the Bodhisattva Ceremony at 9:20, and a Fire Ceremony at 9:50 PM. For the Fire Ceremony, we write down the habits and tendencies, difficult states of mind, tangled aspects of relationships, and so on, that we would like to release. We will have an outdoor fire to burn our papers along with the name cards from Memorial Services held during the past year and incense stubs that have accumulated throughout year.

Everyone is welcome for the whole program or to any part of it. **The program will end with potluck refreshments.**

Study Group

LED BY ZENKI KATHLEEN BATSON
Thursday evenings from 6 to 7 PM
Beginning January 15 via Zoom

There is no separation between you and the environment.

You and the environment are perfectly continuous.

It isn't possible for you to be separate from it.

*From the beginning, you have always been able to move
while being one with it. We are all made this way.*

—Gien Inoue Roshi

We will read together *The Formless Record of the Transmission of Illumination: A Contemporary Commentary on Keizan Zenji's Denkoroku* by Gien Inoue, translated by Daigaku Rummé and Keiko Ohmae.

This is the first of a four-volume commentary by Gien Inoue Roshi, Harada Sekkei's teacher, on Keizan Zenji's Transmission of the Light, a primary Soto Zen text. In this work, Keizan Zenji (1264–1325 CE) expounds on the Buddha's enlightenment and its transmission through the fifty-two generations of ancestors that we chant in *The Names of Buddhas and Ancestors* for service.

Inoue Roshi explores how each of their stories is intimately connected to the practice of Zen.

Please log on 5-10 minutes before the study group begins so we can start on time. Everyone is welcome and there is no charge.

TO JOIN ZOOM STUDY GROUPS

Via computer: www.zoom.us/j/821378615
Via phone: (646) 558-8656
Meeting ID: 821378615

Looking Ahead

Sunday, March 29 at 11:15 AM, Professor Richard Jaffe will give a talk about D.T. Suzuki's lectures given at Columbia University. Everyone is welcome.

Sunday, April 19 through Sunday, May 31, a Six-week Practice Intensive will be held.

Formless Record of the Transmission of Illumination or the Denkoroku

WORKSHOP LED BY DAIGAKU RUMMÉ
Saturday, February 21, 8:30 AM- 5:30 PM

This weekend will include zazen and talks by Daigaku Rummé on Keizan Zenji's *Denkoroku* through the lens of a commentary by Inoue Gien Roshi (1894-1981), Daigaku's grandfather in the Dharma, and a Soto Zen master.

Long overshadowed by Master Dogen and his works, the *Denkoroku* was scarcely known to the Japanese public until the mid-20th century. It consists of Master Keizan Zenji's fifty-three talks on the transmission of awakening in the Soto lineage beginning with Shakyamuni Buddha and concluding with Master Koun Ejo.

Many questions remain regarding the relationship between the *Denkoroku* and Dogen's *Shobogenzo*. There are obvious differences, but can they be seen as complementary expressions of the same truth, or are they different visions of the truth?

Inoue Roshi's commentary of the *Denkoroku* brings light to the illumination that Master Keizan describes in the direct transmission through the generations of the Dharma. How does this teaching of illumination relate to those of us in the 21st century? Rev. Daigaku will touch on

these and other questions relating to our Zen practice.

Rev. Daigaku Rummé was ordained a Soto priest by Sekkei Harada Roshi in 1978. For more than 27 years, he practiced under Harada Roshi at Hoss-hin-ji Monastery in Japan. In March 2003, he moved to San Francisco to work at the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center. After seven years, Rev. Rummé moved to Los Angeles where he worked as the Director of the Soto Zen Buddhism North America Office. He is now the founding priest and teacher at Confluence Zen Center in St. Louis.

To register, contact info@chzc.org by Friday, February 13. Cost is \$60 and includes lunch.



108 Bows of Great Repentance

Tuesday evening, January 6

On Tuesday evening, January 6 we will perform 108 bows of repentance together instead of having a second period of zazen. Everyone is welcome to join. People are welcome to do floor bows or standing bows or any combination of both. Contact Zenki at chzc.zenki@gmail.com with questions.



Dharma Talks

Following two periods of zazen at 9 and 9:50 AM. Everyone is warmly invited to join us for all or any part of the morning program.

JOSHO PAT PHELAN ROSHI

Sunday mornings, January 18 and February 8 at 10:30 AM

DAIGAKU RUMMÉ

Sunday morning, February 22 at 10:30 AM



All-Day Sittings

Sundays, January 18 and March 15

All-day Sittings begin **Saturday night at 7:30 PM**, continuing on Sunday, 6 AM until 5 PM. Orientation on Saturday includes instruction in the oryoki meal form and assignments. The day will include zazen, a Dharma Talk, *Dokusan* and a work period, as well as breakfast and lunch.

It is alright to sit half of the day, but please sign up in advance, and please speak to Josho or Zenki if this is your first All-day Sitting. The suggested donation is \$15 for members, and \$25 for others; however, if you are inclined to offer more, that would be very helpful in maintaining the Zen Center. Oryoki sets are available for use by those who do not have their own, and a \$5 donation is appreciated. **Please sign up at info@chzc.org by the Wednesday before.** For more information on the oryoki meal form see www.kannondo.org/i-am-new/oryoki.



Silent Outdoor Half-day Sitting

Saturday, January 31, 6 AM to 12:15 PM

Please bring a bag breakfast which you can either keep at your place or store in the Annex fridge. Coffee and tea will be available on the back deck. For more information or to sign up, please email info@chzc.org. If you would like to join us for only a portion of the morning, please let us know when signing up. There is no charge, but donations are appreciated.

Baikaryu Eisanka

Saturday, January 17, 10:30 AM to noon

You are invited to join us for *Baikaryu Eisanka*, the practice of singing Japanese Soto Zen Buddhist hymns with bell accompaniment. No experience necessary! Please contact Chris at ccensullo@yahoo.com if you are interested in attending. For more information about Baikaryu Eisanka, see www.sotozen.com/eng/practice/baikaryu.

Peer Group

Wednesday, January 14 and February 11 from 7 to 8 PM

via Zoom

This is a monthly online meeting that gives members an opportunity to share individual experiences, receive encouragement, and offer compassion in a safe, supportive environment. Our goal is to build a thriving virtual community based on Soto Zen principles and to help one another deepen practice in daily life. The Peer Group meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month. Please contact Al-Nisa Berry at alnisa.berry@gmail.com or Maura High at maurahigh@gmail.com for more information.

Children's Program

Sundays from 8:50 to 10:30 AM

The Zen Center's Children's Program offers children three years and older a place in the Zen Center sangha through a variety of activities, including meditation, story, craft, song, and movement, as well as participation in Zen Center events and celebrations throughout the year. In each meeting, the children have the space and time to practice living mindfully and learn about Buddhist teachings and contexts while giving their guardians an opportunity to meditate in the concurrent adult program.

Beginning January 4th, the Children's Program will meet weekly on Sunday mornings from 8:50 until 10:30 except when there is an All-Day Sitting, Sesshin, or other large gathering at the Center. For more information, please contact Will Savery or Edward Markus, the program co-coordinators, at chzckidsprogram@gmail.com.

Sangha Net

The Sangha Net is a network of volunteers who offer short-term assistance to those in the sangha in need of help due to transitions in life such as illness, disability, or death of a loved one. Examples of tasks include shopping, arranging for meals, or transportation. If you need assistance, please contact Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com, Senmyo Jeff Sherman at jeffsherman333@gmail.com, or Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com.

Living with Impermanence

via Zoom Once a Month

Living with Impermanence is an informal discussion group that shares how we experience impermanence in our lives including life changes, illness, aging and death. We usually begin with participants sharing what they are currently thinking of or dealing with. Discussions then usually emerge spontaneously to raised concerns. Silence is frequently a response after someone shares and we trust in that silence. Please contact Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com or Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com, if you would like more information. Everyone is welcome.

CROP Walk Fundraiser to End Hunger

Sunday afternoon, March 22

Keep a thought for those less fortunate...

*Walk for all of them and walk for all of us
across the world. We walk together.*

— Bonita, CROP Walk volunteer, NC

Please join fellow sangha members for the 2026 Chapel Hill/Carrboro CROP Hunger Walk. This is an opportunity to walk with other congregations in our area to help hungry and impoverished people locally and around the world.

You can make a donation, walk with us, or both! You can also request donations from friends and family. And your offering can be handled easily online via the Chapel Hill Zen Center team's CROP Walk page: www.chzc.org/cropwalk.htm.

The 2026 CROP Hunger Walk is scheduled for Sunday, March 22 at 2:30 PM, beginning and ending at the Carrboro Town Commons, 301 W. Main Street in Carrboro.

Instrucción en español

Instrucción y orientación sobre Zazen ahora disponibles en español. Envíenos un correo electrónico a info@chzc.org para programar.

Donations Gratefully Accepted

If you would like to support the Chapel Hill Zen Center through a monetary donation, please mail checks to P.O. Box 16302, Chapel Hill, NC 27516, or make a donation online via MoonClerk at www.CHZC.org/donate.htm.

Teaching donations can be made online via MoonClerk at www.CHZC.org/dana.htm.

Making a Vow

by Josho Pat Phelan Roshi

I would like to begin by quoting three passages related to or by Master Dogen. The first is from *Moon in a Dewdrop*, where the Dogen translator, Kaz Tanahashi wrote, “Although one person’s practice is part of the practice of all awakened beings, each individual practice is indispensable, as it actualizes and completes everyone’s activity as a buddha.” This reminds me of a passage in Master Dogen’s text, *Bendowa* or the *Wholehearted Practice of the Way*, where he wrote, “Although this inconceivable dharma is abundant in each person, it is not actualized without practice, and it is not experienced without realization.” In *Living by Vow*, Shohaku Okumura wrote, “According to Dogen Zenji, the meaning of our practice is practice at this moment, right now, right here, actualizing the Buddha’s teaching. Without our practice there is no Buddha’s teaching.” For me, these passages resonate with each other and express the need for and importance of our individual practice. Buddhist practice and teaching exist today, and are available to us because innumerable people in the past kept it alive, through their personal practice and vows.

I would like to talk about vow and the importance of having a vow in Zen practice. I began sitting zazen when I was in college and my practice consisted of trying really hard to sit, and to sit without moving for 40 minutes. And the only way I could do that was to sit with other people, whose presence helped anchor me on the cushion. But after a couple of months, I was finally able to sit zazen by myself, and I slowly began adding more periods until I was doing zazen four times a day. For the people I was sitting with in Oregon and at the San Francisco Zen Center, the periods of zazen were always 40 minutes, so it didn’t occur to me that when I sat alone it could be for less time. Being macrobiotic at that

time and still confused about exactly what Zen practice was, I even wondered if the periods of zazen were 40 minutes because that is how long it took to cook brown rice. Later, after I had been sitting daily for almost three years, I went to Tassajara, the San Francisco Zen Center’s monastery. But even then I didn’t have a sense of how to extend practice from zazen into my daily activity. I knew we were supposed to, and I wanted to, but I just didn’t have a good sense of how to do it.

One summer in particular, during the Tassajara Guest Season when we worked long hours and sat less zazen than we did during the practice periods, every once in awhile, while I was working it would occur to me, “Right now I could be practicing, ...but I’m not;” and I felt like a failure. But over the years, I’ve found that returning to my vow throughout the day has provided a continuity of practice outside zazen. And, I have come to find that thoughts like, “Right now I could be practicing,” or “Right now I could be mindful,” are themselves returning to practice – you know, momentarily waking up. But the feeling of being a failure is extra and counterproductive. So, just wake up and remember practice!

Jakusho Kwong was a disciple of Suzuki Roshi. In his book *No Beginning, No End*, he wrote, “Suzuki Roshi liked to say that we should know everything, including our lives, *through and through*.” And Kwong Roshi said, that this is the Bodhisattva vow. “When we live ... with a commitment to living life... *through and through*, we are actually making the vow to include all parts of life – all parts of our lives, *as it is....*” He said, “Then whatever you fear is not so great, the pain is not so great, these are just the conditions of our life, and our practice works to undermine the grip of these conditions.” He said, “Actually when you give yourself to

practice through and through, which means through and beyond feelings and thoughts, little by little, you begin to allow something great to surface, something without beginning or end...And if you stick to your vow and stay with it, to your surprise something in you will naturally open."

Our deep intention – the intention to practice, the intention to be open-hearted, the intention to awaken, to be free, to relieve suffering, or whatever form your fundamental intention takes, when it is nurtured, becomes a vow. Suzuki Roshi referred to this as our inmost request. Reconnecting with our vow, keeping our vow alive and fresh is a powerful tool for practice. In practice we try to change the direction of our lives from actions that are more or less unconsciously based on or driven by karma to more conscious actions based on vow, and our intention or vow is one way to bring practice into our everyday lives.

Katagiri Roshi spoke of the difference between living unconsciously, out of habit unquestioning, just going with the flow of our karma versus living by vow. He said, "Ordinary life is to live in past karma [or past actions] as a cause and live in delusions as a conditioned element." "But," he said, "this is a very ordinary type of life." ... "...for bodhisattvas, there is another type of living.... The bodhisatta life is the person who is living a vow, who aspires to help others. This is the cause of a bodhisattva life."

I encourage you to try to clarify your vow. Being aware of our deep intention or vow, helps us become authentic. It's part of getting down to the foundation of who we really are. Your intention or vow might be something like the Three Refuges or the Four Bodhisattva Vows, or simply the vow to practice for the benefit of all beings, or it might be something more visceral like returning to your bodily presence by joining your exhalation whenever you think of it, or simply returning to your *hara*, or lower abdomen, where you may feel calm and grounded.

Whatever form your vow takes, look for ways to return to or reconnect with it throughout the day. I've found that offering incense and doing three or nine floor bows, and saying my vow is very helpful for interrupting the momentum of my mental world and for reconnecting with a quiet, open mind, and I suggest trying something like this at intervals throughout the day. For example, when you wake up in the morning, say your vow, and let that guide your intention as you begin your day. When you get to work, pause and center yourself on your breath or reconnect with your intention as you face your work. You might do this again before or after lunch, when you get home, and before going to sleep, setting your intention as you let go and enter the less conscious realm of sleep.

The Zen meal chant, for the formal meals we eat here in the zendo, includes the line, "Thus we eat this food and awaken with everyone." I chanted this for years before it finally struck me that this could be a vow, "As we eat this food, may we awaken with everyone." or "As I eat this food, I vow to awaken with everyone." This aspiration is a way of dedicating our activity to the awakening or liberation of all beings, and it can bring the mind of practice to whatever we are doing. So, as I eat this food, as I drive this car, as I brush my teeth, as I take this breath, and, maybe for some of us, as I light this cigarette, may I awaken with everyone.

In one of Ed Brown's cookbooks, he tells a story about two monks in a Christian monastery. One day one of the monks noticed the other monk smoking during evening vespers and asked, "How come you are smoking? When I asked for permission to smoke while I was praying, I was told, 'No. When you pray, you should only pray.'" The other monk responded, "Well, I asked if it was alright to pray while I was smoking." From the outside, these activities probably look the same, but there is a difference in intention. Sometimes there is a shift from doing whatever we need to do to take care of our lives, so we can then practice for an hour a week or an hour a day, to a constancy of practice that continues throughout the day using whatever we need to do as a vehicle for practice. So, the focus is on practice, and we work or cook dinner, shop for groceries or car pool, as the activity we have at hand to practice with.

Renewing our intention to wake up as we go about our activity brings practice into our daily life. We can begin with whatever we're doing by fostering our intention to wake up, or by trying to loosen the tangle of our conditioned, habitual reactions, for the benefit of all beings, including ourselves. This is a form of the Bodhisattva Vow. The Bodhisattva's Vow is the wish to end suffering, all suffering, our own as well as everyone else's. Kwong Roshi said that "in practice we make an unconditional vow not to give up on ourselves... the physical practice is the means by which we manifest this vow."

We chant the Four Bodhisattva Vows at the end of Dharma talks and the first vow is, "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them or I vow to free them." The Chinese character that is often translated as "free" or "save," literally means "to ferry across." The Bodhisattva is sometimes depicted as a boatman on a raft who ferries beings from the shore of delusion to the shore of realization or "the other shore." The Bodhisattva vows to remain in this world until all beings have awakened or crossed over. But, actually, there aren't two shores, there is only right here; and this place, this experience, can be felt as tight and oppressive, as distracted,

foggy and confusing, irritating, or as spacious and clear – it is our own mind that determines how we experience our world, it is our own mind that determines whether we experience nirvana or samsara.

Here, we say this vow as “Beings are numberless, I vow to awaken with them.” At the San Francisco Zen Center, we used to chant this as, “Beings are without end, I vow to be one of them.” And Shohaku Okumura uses, “Beings are without end, I vow to be one with them.” Translating the vow this way implies that we don’t try to remove ourselves from the difficulties of the world, which isn’t so different from the difficult parts of ourselves, rather we try to open to them and accept them for what they are. In *Living by Vow* Shohaku Okumura wrote, “To save all beings means to be one with all beings. We cannot become one with others by means of our individual efforts. But we can wake up to the reality that from the beginning we are one with all beings.” He said something I find interesting, “When we sit, we face the absolute, the infinite, and we let go of thought.... we are measured against the absolute. That is our practice of vow and repentance. No matter how great or how small our accomplishments, they are all the same compared to the infinite.”

In the Chinese text, the *Platform Sutra*, the Sixth Ancestor Hui Neng or Daikan Eno talked about the Four Vows, and he described the beings we are to save, and they aren’t just people or animals, they also include the “beings” within our own mind, such as deluded mind, grasping mind, angry mind, jealous mind, judgmental mind, and so on. These are also the beings we practice and awaken with.

As each of us wakes up to our delusions and increases our own clarity of mind, the total clarity in the world increases; so, as we become clearer, it supports clear-mindedness in everyone. In practice, there isn’t so much distinction between my clarity, my open-heartedness, my joy and everyone else’s – the boundaries aren’t so fixed.

In Buddhism the meaning of compassion is the wish to relieve the suffering of others. I think the basic cause of suffering... is duality, the wrong view that we are separate from others. I think one way to develop compassion is not to turn away from suffering – to be willing to open our hearts to suffering. Jakusho Kwong said that if you feel afraid to let suffering come in, “you can practice imagining yourself doing it.” I think this is important – awareness and compassion grow and strengthen over time, but we have to begin. And one way to begin is by imagining ourselves meeting suffering, imagining ourselves opening to our own fear and pain, as well as opening to our own clear, spacious mind. Because when we try to protect ourselves from pain, whether it’s our

own or someone else’s, we build barriers which further reinforce our feelings of separation, thereby reinforcing duality. Being open to the difficulties of others can also help us open up to the difficult or disregarded parts of ourselves – it goes in both directions. So, “Beings are without end, I vow to be one of them,” or “I vow to be one with them.” I think that ending suffering means ending duality and, therefore, ending suffering is liberation.

Our actions of body, speech and mind, create momentum, like a ripple in the water with far reaching effects, affecting people we don’t even know. Sometimes we can see the effects of an action or decision made years earlier. When we take vows, an intention is created, the seed of an effort to follow through. The nature of a vow is vast, beyond description. We continually define and redefine our vow as we renew our intention to fulfill it. If you have a well defined task with a beginning, middle, and end, like mowing the lawn, you can estimate or measure the time and effort needed. But a vow like the Bodhisattva Vow is immeasurable. The intention we arouse, the effort we cultivate when we call forth this vow, extends us beyond the limitations of this life.

Jakusho Kwong said “... make a vow to try not to uphold the karmic life. Everyone longs to get off the wheel of samsara.” And when you can assert, “I can let go of this burden in my mind...the power of vow is activated.”

Two ways to work with vow are to investigate and to dedicate. To investigate, ask yourself a question such as, “How do I engage my vow, right now, while driving my car, while taking a shower, while cooking dinner?” Or, “how can I awaken with all beings while taking this coffee break?” “How can I see through delusion right now, while shopping for groceries?” We investigate the vow by keeping it present, by learning how to be aligned with our vow in the midst of our activity. When asked, “How do you save all sentient beings?” Katagiri Roshi answered, “By chewing your pickle quietly during the [zendo] meal so you don’t disturb the person next to you.”

Another way to practice with a vow is to dedicate a particular activity to the liberation of all beings. Again, as I drink this coffee, as I smoke this cigarette, as I wash my face, may I awaken, may I have clarity of mind, with everyone; or may I have clarity of mind for the benefit of all beings. Whether you investigate “saving all beings” or dedicate your activity to waking up, both bring attention to your intention.

If you don’t know your personal vow or inmost request, both in zazen and in your daily activity, you can simply ask, “What?” “What is most important?”

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SCHEDULE

TUESDAY EVENING	SUNDAY MORNING
7:00 PM <i>zazen</i> (Zen meditation)	9:00 AM <i>zazen</i>
7:40 PM <i>kinhin</i> (walking meditation)	9:40 AM <i>kinhin</i>
7:50 PM <i>zazen</i>	9:50 AM <i>zazen</i>
	10:30 AM service or Dharma Talk

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY MORNING

6:00 AM and 6:50 AM *zazen*, 7:30 AM service

Meetings at 5322 NC Hwy 86, Chapel Hill, NC
2.5 miles North of I-40 exit 266



Josho Pat Phelan, Abbess
Zenki Kathleen Batson, Vice Abbess

(919) 967-0861 · www.CHZC.org



WELCOME TO THE CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER

Embracing diversity, the Chapel Hill Zen Center honors the fundamental connection of all beings by welcoming everyone to join us for silent meditation.

Our aim is to provide an environment where we may all meet ourselves at our most fundamental level, and one that supports trust, safety, and harmony in our community and beyond.

May all beings realize their true nature.

In Shobogenzo "Hokke-ten-hokke" ("Dharma Flower Turns Dharma Flower"), Dogen quotes the saying of the Sixth Ancestor Huineng: "When the mind is in delusion, the mind is turned by the Dharma Flower. When the mind is in realization, the mind turns the Dharma Flower."....Dogen Zenji says at the end of the fascicle, "When the mind is in delusion, the Dharma Flower turns [the self]. When the mind is in realization, the Dharma Flower is turned [by the self]. When we penetrate thus, The Dharma Flower turns the Dharma Flower."

It is not that the wind-bell rings or that the wind rings; actually, the entire universe, including both of these and the person who is hearing, is ringing. Only the dharma flower is turning the dharma flower. This is how the self and all myriad dharmas are working together to make the sound of prajna. We are turned by the myriad dharmas and we turn the myriad dharmas. This is possible precisely because we have no-self.

— Shohaku Okumura
The Structure of the Self in Mahayana Buddhism