



CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER

NEWSLETTER

July & August 2026



Zenki's Practice Period in Japan

In preparing for Josho Roshi's well-earned retirement, we learned in April that when Zenki Kathleen Batson is Abbess, it is necessary for her to attend two 85-day practice periods at a credentialed training monastery in Japan in order to maintain the Chapel Hill Zen Center's ability to continue training Soto Zen priests according to the regulations of the Japanese Soto School, and host Practice Periods that are registered in Japan. Josho Roshi's long history of monastic practice at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center and residency at the San Francisco Zen Center's City Center was grandfathered in as a recognized equivalent of this requirement by Soto-shu. Training such as this is comparable to attending a credentialed university. While there are thousands of Soto Zen temples in Japan, there are fewer than twenty that are authorized to provide this training. At this time no current

monasteries in the U.S. have this qualification, though we hope to see this change in the future.

Zenki will leave for the Soto Zen Temple, Toshoji, on June 28 and return to the U.S. on September 26. Because she is only staying for three months, Zenki will not be allowed to receive or send mail, texts, emails, or phone calls except in the case of an emergency.

Danielle Bouchard
President

Image above: *Tosho-ji Soto Zen training center, Okayama Prefecture* by Rev. Hokyū JL Aronson



All-Day Sittings

Sundays, July 12, August 16, and September 20

All-day Sittings begin on **Saturday night at 7:30 PM**, and 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*, a private meeting with the teacher, 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 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 bowl sets are available for use by those who do not have their own, and a \$5 donation is appreciated. **Please sign up by the Wednesday before** the sitting at info@chzc.org. For more information on the oryoki meal form, see kannondo.org/getting-started/oryoki.



Silent Outdoor Half-day Sitting

Saturday, July 25 from 6 AM to 12:15 PM

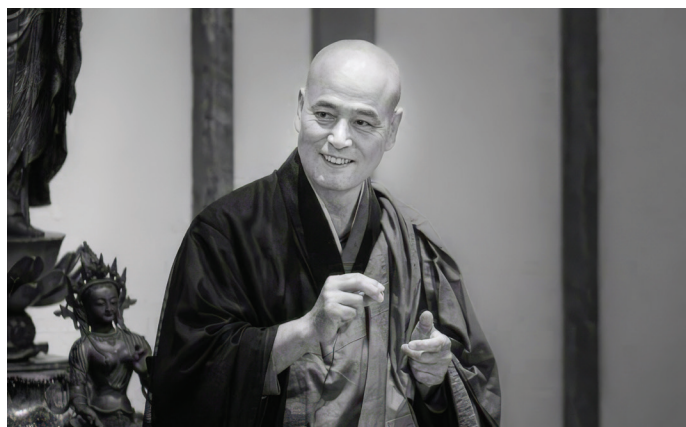
Please bring a bag breakfast which you can keep at your place or store in the annex fridge. Coffee and tea will be available on the back deck. For more information or to sign up, please email Steve at steve.magers@gmail.com. If you would like to join us for only a portion of the morning, please let us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

Dharma Talks

Talks follow 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, July 12, August 16, and September 20 at 10:30 AM.



Zoom Study Group

LED BY JOSHO PAT PHELAN ROSHI

Begins on Thursday, August 20

Thursday Evenings from 6 to 7 PM via Zoom

We will read, study, and discuss together *The Structure of the Self in Mahayana Buddhism: Self, No-self, Universal Self* by Shohaku Okumura. This book is available as an ebook only, with a request for a donation of \$7.50 to \$15. It can be found at dogeninstitute.podia.com/the-structure-of-the-self.

JOINING THE ZOOM STUDY GROUP

Via computer: zoom.us/j/821378615

Via phone: (646) 558-8656

Meeting ID: 821378615

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.

Pictured above: Shohaku Okumura Roshi

Looking Ahead

ROHATSU SESSHIN

We are planning a *sesshin*, a silent meditation intensive, for Friday evening, December 11 through Wednesday afternoon, December 16, to be led by Zenki Kathleen Batson.

Instrucción en español

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

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.

The Children's Program now meets weekly on Sunday mornings from 8:50 until 10:30 AM 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 coordinators, at chzckidsprogram@gmail.com.

Peer Group

Wednesday, July 8 and August 12 from 7 to 8 PM

*Ananda knew that having good and encouraging
friends was very important for the path.*

He even wondered whether having good friends is half the path.

*"No, Ananda," the Buddha told him,
"having good friends isn't half of the Holy Life.
Having good friends is the whole of the Holy Life."*

Meghiya Sutta

These online meetings give sangha members an opportunity to share their 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 help one another deepen our practice in daily life.

The Peer Group meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month. For more information, please contact Al-Nisa Berry at alnisa.berry@gmail.com or Maura High at maurahigh@gmail.com.

JOINING THE VIRTUAL PEER GROUP

Via computer: zoom.us/j/85185384652

Meeting ID: 85185384652

Holiday Closures

The Zen Center will be closed on **Friday, July 3** and on Labor Day, **Monday, September 7**.



Baikaryu Eisanka

Saturday, August 15 from 10 AM to noon

You are invited to join us in singing *Baikaryu Eisanka*, 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 sotozen.com/eng/practice/baikaryu.

Sangha Net

This 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 would like to join our network of volunteers or if you are in need of assistance, please contact Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com, Senmyo Jeff Sherman at jeffsherman3333@gmail.com, or Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com.

Living with Impermanence

By Zoom About Once a Month

This is an informal discussion group in which we share 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 from raised concerns. Silence is frequently a response after someone shares and we trust in that silence. On occasion we've set an agenda in advance to study a topic of interest.

Please contact Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com, or Neil Bolick at nebolick@gmail.com if you would like more information. Everyone is welcome, regardless of age.

State of Mind

by Zenki Kathleen Batson

Many years ago, Josho Roshi said to me something to the effect of, "There is nothing more important than tending to your state of mind." The longer I practice, the more I find this to be true. Everything we know about and experience in the world is filtered through our state of mind. Our mind is both the canvas and the palette with which we paint the reality we experience. Our mind is the place from which the separate objects we are perceiving emerge out of an otherwise single reality.

Does this mean we can create whatever reality we want? No, of course not, not without consequences. What we perceive in our minds co-arises with what is actually occurring "out in the world," but we can only experience it through our limited perspective. Our state of mind plays a monumental and imposing role in how we perceive this complex, ultimately indescribable reality and how we respond to it as it unfolds.

In the very first stanzas of the *Dhammapada*, a collection of sayings attributed to the Buddha, it states:

*All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind,
Made by mind.
Speak or act with a corrupted mind,
And suffering follows
As the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox.*
*All experience is preceded by mind,
Led by mind,
Made by mind.
Speak or act with a peaceful mind,
And happiness follows,
Like a never-departing shadow.*

So it is beneficial to get to know our own minds and our biases to the best of our ability. This is our practice. It isn't possible to be aware of all our biases. When engulfed in an environment of bias, we may not recognize that we hold

it, like a fish may not be aware that any environment other than water exists.

It is also beneficial to know our moods and emotions, the ways they ebb and flow, and how they affect our behavior. When we are angry, it is helpful to know we are angry, and when we are sad, anxious, at peace, or elated, it is beneficial to know we are feeling these things. I don't mean predicting how we *will* feel or *should* feel in response to something. I mean knowing through somatic experience what we are *actually experiencing*, even if we don't have words to describe it accurately. This sounds simplistic, but I know I have been caught off guard at times when my words or actions expressed emotions I didn't even realize I was experiencing until I expressed them with my behavior. According to Thich Nhat Hanh,

We have to look deeply into our perceptions in order to be free of them. Then, what has been a perception becomes an insight, a realization of the path. This is neither perception nor non-perception. It is a clear vision, seeing things as they are....Touching reality deeply, knowing what is going on inside and outside of ourselves, is the way to liberate ourselves from the suffering that is caused by wrong perceptions. This isn't about a specific ideology; it is insight into the reality of this life.

When confronted with the realities and issues of this life, I can find myself developing strong opinions about what I perceive, and I can forget how much my view of the world is colored by the palette I have both inherited and developed over time through various causes and conditions. All our life experiences color how we see the world. Our genetic, hormonal, and chemical makeup, and our cultural, religious, and socioeconomic background, all color how we see the world. The perspectives of our parents, our family dynamics, our emotions, and our own choices up until this point in time, all of it, color how we see this world. I forget this sometimes as I dig down deeper into a specific view about something, and I begin to angrily think that surely

my way of seeing things is the only right way to see things. When I discover that I have become fixed in this way, I recognize that I have not been caring for my state of mind. Formulating a fixed view is easy to do because a fixed view is simple and feels stable. It is somewhere to rest in a constantly changing reality. It can also help define our identity, which can feel reassuring, thereby reinforcing our sense of self.

My sense of the ideal state of mind from a Buddhist perspective, however, is to be comfortable with impermanence and complex co-arising, and it is settled by resting in the spaciousness of these things. It also recognizes that our perspective is very limited. The ideal state of mind stays soft, open, and malleable, humble about what we may not know. This state of mind has room for creative responsiveness. It is joyful, equanimous, and has a quality of care towards all beings. In this ideal state of mind, there is no clinging to a small *I* or *mine*. It stays in touch with the one seamless fabric of reality from which nothing is excluded, while having awareness of its unique position in this fabric. Sometimes, to help me tend to a stuck state of mind and return to spaciousness, I can simply return to being fully present with my physical being and sensory experience in the present moment. Doing this always helps still my mind. As we say in the ordination ceremony,

*Good Disciple of Buddha
the source of mind is still
the ocean of Dharma is profound
Those who realize this
are liberated immediately*

When moving through the day, I find my way back to being fully present through my breathing or by bringing my attention to my feet. There is something about the sensitivity of my feet, how they are touching the entirety of this whole earth, and the fact that they are the farthest point from my brain that often makes them the most effective entry point into non-discursive awareness of the present moment for me. Finding my breath or feet in this way is how I get in touch with the experience we practice in zazen. Our work as bodhisattvas is to bring the practice of zazen into all of our activities. Suzuki Roshi once used the phrase, “just receive the letter from the world of emptiness.” Sometimes it can be more like a quick text. We can receive these letters and texts all throughout the day, in and among all the decision-making and discriminating that allows us to function in the world. I see the letters from emptiness, and this returning to wordless awareness as touching *prajna*—the wisdom beyond wisdom. The wisdom that knows suchness or emptiness. It is a way to “keep one foot on the ocean floor

always,” as Katagiri Roshi said somewhere. The ocean floor is the place of stillness below all the waves.

In the introduction to his book, *Zen Chants*, Kaz Tanahashi writes,

Our life may be seen as a dance in which one foot represents pluralism and the other singularism....Can we see our dance in life and meditation as something other than switching between these seeming opposites? When the dancing flows naturally, singularism and pluralism are no longer in opposition. The opposites merge, allowing us to dance freely and gracefully. This is the manifestation of wisdom beyond wisdom, which is a wholesome experience of freedom from, and integrity in, pluralistic and singularistic understanding and action.

I think this is the essence of what Zen practice is asking of us. It is the *Merging of Difference and Unity*. It is the *Genjokoan*. The koan of how to live our life. According to Okumura Roshi in his book *Realizing Genjokoan*, *Genjō* means “reality actually and presently taking place,” and *kōan* means “absolute truth that embraces relative truth,” or “a question that true reality asks of us.” So we can say that *genjōkōan* means “to answer the question from true reality through the practice of our everyday activity.”

What is true reality asking of me? This feels like an important question to carry. It is easy to get stuck in a specific perspective or opinion and forget that this view is experienced from a limited perspective. To want others to see things from the same perspective as us is a denial of the reality of how they are experiencing the world. To function according to the teachings in the one reality we all share, it doesn't really work to pretend that the parts we disagree with aren't real. No matter how deluded I may believe a person's perspective is, it doesn't change the fact that they hold this perspective. Their perspective evolved through complex causes and conditions just like mine did. So, whether I like it or not, there are people who see the world very differently from me. They do not follow the Buddha's teachings and don't care about the same things I care about. I think it was Sojun Roshi who once said, “Don't expect others to be you.” Since this is the reality of our existence, we have to decide how to proceed within this reality. How do I live according to my deepest intentions within this landscape? If a bodhisattva vows to live for the benefit of all beings, that means ALL beings—how do I do that? I don't think it is something I can know as a concept; I believe we have to figure out how to *live* it moment by moment. Suzuki Roshi said,

Because we have some particular view of life, without knowing what it means in its true sense, we are caught by those views of life, or a teaching or a philosophy, whatever

religion, whatever it is. We have to pay attention to not being swept up into particular views, especially ones based on theoretical information.

Genro-an Tetsugen Inoue in the introduction to his father's book, *The Formless Record of the Transmission of Illumination*, wrote, "If you ask about the reality of the world under your feet and the nature of the mind of the Way, the answer can only be found in what you are touching now. There is no other way to ask or do anything about it." If the answer can only be found in what we are touching now, this for me means returning to my physical experience. Finding my breath and my feet touching the earth. Returning to the awareness we practice in zazen. To do this over and over is to practice the dance that Kaz Tanahashi speaks of between singularism and pluralism. It is how to live the *Genjokoan*. In his fascicle *San Sui Kyo*, Dogen writes: "...the views of all beings are not the same. You should question this matter now. Are there many ways to see one thing, or is it a mistake to see many forms as one thing? You should pursue this beyond the limit of pursuit." Dogen doesn't tell us what view to have. He asks us to question this matter *now*. He admonishes us to pursue it *beyond the limit of pursuit*. I can't help but think that to question it "beyond the limit of pursuit" is to experience the wisdom beyond wisdom—the wisdom that moves beyond discursive thinking, experiences expansiveness, and lets go of the tight grasp of a limited perspective. What I perceive Dogen to be saying in the passage above is that to follow Buddha's Way, we not only recognize that there are many ways that people view the world, and those views are all limited and the results of causes and conditions, but also that all views cause various levels of suffering. And they are all part of this one life we are living out together. I find it helpful to remember that the views of those I disagree with, as well as my own views, are all tainted with the ignorances and poisons the Buddha taught about. This is why sitting in zazen is such a very important activity for me. Zazen is like going home. It is the vibrant concerted effort of *being* stillness and simply experiencing the seamless fabric of reality, moment after moment, without separating the fabric out into various objects. We sit in zazen and relax the discriminating mind. It is the moment-by-moment practice of watching what the mind is reaching for and pushing away. When I get up from zazen, I feel such a deep gratitude that I have this practice and the Bodhisattva Vows to guide me.

Throughout the day, we can practice returning to our experience of body and mind the same way we do in zazen. We can breathe deeply and contribute calm and steadiness in chaotic moments. We can work to make decisions from our deepest intentions instead of reactions. To live according to

our deepest intentions requires Right effort. Right effort of the Buddha's Eight-fold Noble Path is often articulated as Four-fold Right Effort. The four practices are:

1. *Preventing the arising of unwholesome mental states that have not yet arisen.*
2. *Continuing to abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen.*
3. *Generating wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen.*
4. *Continuing to cultivate wholesome mental states that have already arisen.*

In other words, right effort means to take care of our state of mind. In Buddhist thought, wholesome mental states are characterized by mindful awareness, energy, joy, concentration, and equanimity. If you think about it, when confronted with anger, greed, hatred, and division, just to manifest these qualities has a subversive and rebellious quality. The question I carry is how to have these wholesome states of mind no matter what conditions test me. That's the practice, isn't it? If it were easy, we would live in a peaceful world. In all schools of Buddhism, wisdom and compassion function together like two wings of a bird. When I consider the teachings about Four-fold Right Effort above, I find that it supports my hunch that I will create the most benefit in the world if I first care for my state of mind, which encourages spaciousness and flexible creative ways of responding. It also inspires me to focus my energies on what I care for, and not on hating and being reactionary to what incites anger and fear within me.

The more we practice returning to our breath and our physical being, the more we develop the habit of returning. The more often we return in this way, the closer we come to the dancing that Kaz Tanahashi spoke of. In returning to our physical presence and finding this ok-ness in various moments throughout the day, it gives us a sense of spaciousness and groundedness that help us respond when things are difficult. We have practice with this. We have practice noticing our state of mind and recognizing some of our many delusions. We have practice sitting with an upright, aware, and open body, which encourages an upright, aware, and open mind. Sojun Roshi said, "To sit upright in the center of the empty circle as a vehicle for light is the Zen student's life. The cycle of continuous practice, of sitting zazen and allowing that selfless freedom to be expressed in daily life, is the turning of the wheel and the basis for harmony." To engage in this effort is to care for our state of mind. Let's continue this practice and allow it to guide us.

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New Acquisitions for the Members' Library

Nothing to Attain: Zen Stories of Faith and Understanding,
Reb Anderson

Love and Fear, Stories from a Hospice Chaplain,
Renshin Bunce

Transmission of Light: Zen in the Art of Enlightenment by Zen
Master Keizan, Thomas Cleary, translator

*The Formless Record of the Transmission of Illumination: A
Contemporary Commentary on Keizan Zenji's Denkoroku*,
Vol. 1 and 2, by Gian Inoue, Daigaku Rumme and Keiko
Ohmae, translators

*Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Intern-
ment Experience*, Patricia Wakida

*Spiritual Bypassing: When Spirituality Disconnects Us from
What Really Matters*, Robert Augustus Masters

The Snow Leopard, Peter Matthiessen

Mental Health First Aid, National Council for Mental
Well Being

Tale of a Zendo Teapot, P. J. Mooney

*The Other Shore: A New Translation of the Heart Sutra with
Commentaries*, Thich Nhat Hanh

Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet, Thich Nhat Hanh

Introduction to Buddhist Studies, Miao Quin

Paths to Perfection: Buddhist Art at the Freer|Sackler,
Debra Diamond

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Donations Gratefully Accepted

If you would like to support the 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 CHZC.org/donate.htm.

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



Pond Cleaning

On April 24, two skilled workers from American Aquascapes gave the pond a very thorough cleaning as pond residents, Hoover and Eureka, spent time in a temporary holding pool that the workers brought. Hoover and Eureka seem very much at ease in their newly cleaned environment which also brings joy to many who pass by it on their way to and from the zendo. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this well-needed pond cleaning.



Images above by Zenki Kathleen Batson

CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER



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SCHEDULE

TUESDAY EVENING

7:00 PM *zazen*
(Zen meditation)
7:40 PM *kinhin*
(walking meditation)
7:50 PM *zazen*

SUNDAY MORNING

9:00 AM *zazen*
9:40 AM *kinhin*
9:50 AM *zazen*
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 • CHZC.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

In reference to ancient Chinese poetry, Red Pine said,

*“Words from the Heart.
They didn’t think about their poetry,
they felt it.”*



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.