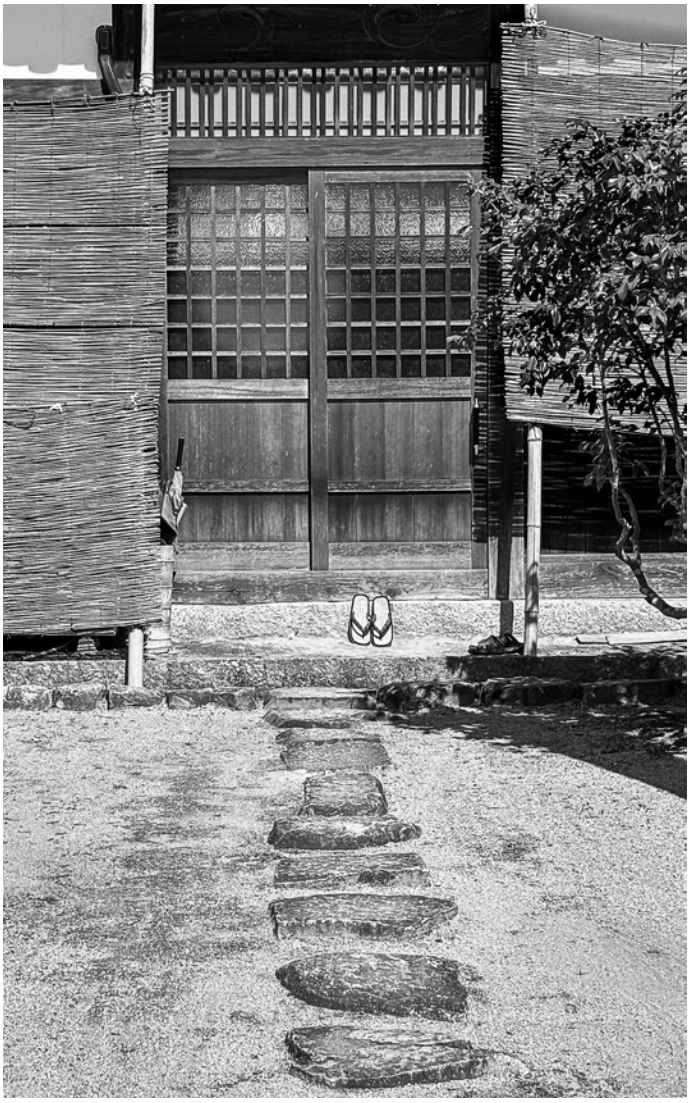
CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER

NEWSLETTER
November & December 2026



General Meeting

Sunday morning, November 15

You are invited to the General Meeting, our annual members' business meeting, which will be held Sunday morning, November 15 after Temple Cleaning. The nominees for next year's Board of Directors will be introduced and the budget for 2027 will be presented. Everyone is encouraged to attend, but only Participating Members are eligible to vote. If you have agenda items, please contact the Board President, Danielle Bouchard at Danielle.Bouchard@gmail.com.

Rohatsu Sesshin

LED BY ZENKI KATHLEEN BATSON
Friday evening, December 11 through Wednesday afternoon, December 16

For more information, see page 7.

Dharma Talks

Dharma Talks begin at 10:30 AM, following two periods of zazen at 9 and 9:50 AM. Everyone is welcome to all or any part of the Sunday morning program.

INRYŪ PONCE-BARGER
Sunday morning, November 8

Rev. Inryu Ponce-Barger leads All-Beings Sangha in Washington, DC.

ZENKI KATHLEEN BATSON

The public is welcome to all of Zenki Sensei's Dharma Talks during sesshin, **December 12–15**.

Buddha's Enlightenment

Sunday morning, December 6



We will commemorate Buddha's Enlightenment at 10:30 AM with a short talk directed to the children followed by a candle lighting and special service in the zendo. At the end of service, the children will be given a gift of incense and a candle. **The morning will end with a potluck lunch**, with beverages provided. Two periods of zazen, beginning at 9 AM will be held as usual. Everyone is welcome.

Above left, and on pages 3 and 7: *Toshoji Official Sōtōshū Training Monastery* by Zenki Kathleen Batson

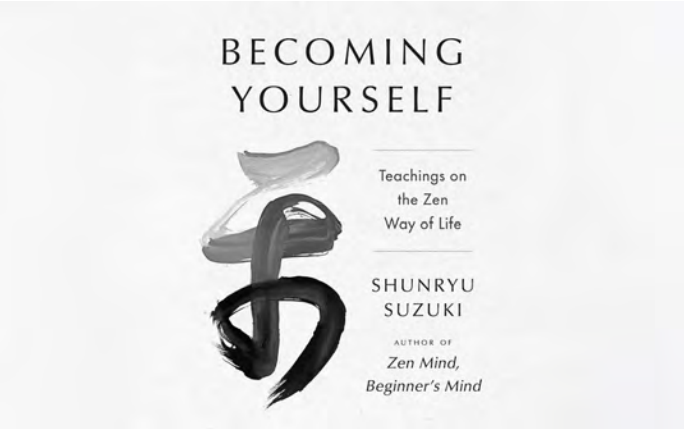
Study Group

LED BY JOSHO PAT PHELAN

Thursday Evenings from 6 to 7 PM via Zoom

Beginning January 14, 2027

We will read, study, and discuss together the book *Becoming Yourself, Teachings on the Zen Way of Life* by Shunryu Suzuki, Author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Everyone is welcome and there is no signup. Just show up.



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.

Children's Program

Sundays from 8:50 to 10:30 AM

The 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 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.

Instrucción en español

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

Silent Outdoor Half-day Sitting

Saturday, November 21, 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 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.

New Year's Eve

Thursday evening, 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 PM, and a Fire Ceremony at 9:50 PM, followed by refreshments. 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.**



Peer Group

Wednesdays, November 18 and December 16 from 6 to 7 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 now meets **on the third 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

Baikaryu Eisanka

Saturday, November 14, 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM

You are invited to join us in singing *Baikaryu Eisanka*, Japanese Soto Zen Buddhist hymns with bell accompaniment. No experience necessary! If you are interested in attending, contact Chris at ccensullo@yahoo.com. Chris has created a video with PDF download to help beginners learn a hymn **tinyurl.com/588z469u**. For more information about Baikaryu Eisanka, see **sotozen.com/eng/practice/baikaryu.**

Living with Impermanence

About Once a Month via Zoom

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!

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 jeffsherman3333@gmail.com, or Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com.

New Acquisitions for the Members' Library

No Self No Problem, Chris Niebaur, Ph.D.

My First Book of Zen, by Tracy Gallup

Welcoming the Unwelcome, by Pema Chödrön

The Buddhist Handbook, by John Snelling

Alive for It All, Wisdom for Everyday Life: The Teachings of Darlene Cohen, by Cynthia Kear

The Roots of Goodness, Eihei Dogen Zenji, Commentary by Kōshō Uchiyama Roshi, translated by Daitsū Tom Wright

Painting Peace, Art in a Time of Global Crisis, Kazuaki Tanahashi

Buddhism, The Great Courses DVD and Guidebook, Malcolm David Eckel

Holiday Closures

The Zen Center will be closed on **Thursday, November 26 and Friday, November 27** for Thanksgiving.

The Zen Center will also be closed from **Monday, December 21 through Saturday, January 2,** except for the evening New Year's Eve Program. In-person zazen will resume on **Sunday morning, January 3**.

On Renunciation

by Josho Pat Phelan Roshi

Today I would like to talk about renunciation, or how I think about renunciation in Soto Zen. I consider Zen practice, both on the cushion and off, fundamentally, to be a practice of renunciation. By renunciation, I mean renouncing the past, letting go of memories, thoughts, and regrets, about what happened last night, last week, or years ago, as well as letting go of our ideas and yearnings for tomorrow. I find the anticipation that I feel or the way I "plant" myself in fantasies and desires for the next thing — a vacation, a new movie, a special meal — replaces my present, living experience. Being able to let go of our regrets and memories, our anticipation, desires, planning, and so on, is necessary to connect with the living presence of this moment, to be able to join the fullness of being that's unfolding right now. The "*glue*" that connects our memories and regrets, our anticipation and yearning, the glue that creates and sustains the story of "me and my life," is our thinking. Thinking creates and sustains the experience of a continuous and a separate self. So, letting go of our grasp on separation is a kind of renunciation.

In the book *No Beginning, No End*, Jakusho Kwong wrote about renunciation saying,

> *At the moment of renunciation, you have to die and give up. And in a way that is ordination. There's no way around it for anyone. You have to renounce.*
>
> *Dogen…emphasizes the point by writing that when various people devoted themselves to the Dharma, they actually preserved the Dharma, which was contained in their renunciation of the world. And that then they received the precepts….renunciation does not mean turning our back on the world. It means turning our back on the conditions that cause suffering — greed, anger, and ignorance. … through renunciation, we give up the dualistic conditions and strong ideas of self that separate us from reality. This is exactly what we are surrendering.*
>
> *… renunciation is not anti-life but refers to a way of living that gives life.*

I think another way to view renunciation is the way Pema Chodron talks about denial. She said in the first years after moving to Nova Scotia to be the teacher and director of Gampo Abbey, that the other residents would point out her shortcomings, but she couldn't hear it.

She couldn't really take it in, and she said that this went on for several years, with different people trying to give her feedback. When one day she finally heard what they had been telling her about how her behavior was affecting them, and at last the message got through. She said that she realized that she was a terrible director. She said, "That's what it means to be *in denial; you can't hear anything that doesn't fit into your fixed identity*." She said, "Even something positive … is filtered through this fixed identity. [and] You can't take it in unless it's already part of your self-definition."

She talked about when your life, or inner life, is in crisis, saying, "you might feel as though your whole world is crumbling. But actually it's your fixed identity that's crumbling." She referred to this as a "fixed-identity crisis." Being still with our self, getting to know what we identify with, how we define our self is a way to begin loosening our grip on our self-identity or our fixed identity. When we see what we are doing and the difficulty it causes, we can start to loosen our clinging to it, which is the beginning of renouncing the feeling that we are fixed and unchangeable. So, our identity is just another thing to be aware of and practice with — just another thing to loosen our grip on.

Shyalpa Tenzin Rinpoche wrote a book called *Living Fully, Finding Joy in Every Breath*, and one chapter from it was published in the *Shambhala Sun* called "The Beautiful Energy of Thoughts." I think this phrase, "the beautiful energy of thoughts," — is so refreshing, especially in contrast to how we usually view thinking in the context of meditation

practice, where thinking is usually considered a detriment, an obstacle, a hindrance, or something that we are doing wrong. The article began, "Destructive habits and careless behavior are the cause of our suffering." And he talked about when we narrowly focus on ourselves, through discursive thoughts and negative emotions, that these obscure the naturally expansive, luminous nature of mind. So, how do we avoid obscuring the naturally expansive nature of mind, and experience the *beautiful energy* of thoughts?

Shyalpa Tenzin suggested letting each thought remain in its own place. I think we have a habit of letting our thoughts take over, half-consciously allowing one thought to lead to another as if they were strung together in a constant stream like a long train. He said,

> *When you experience each thought in its completeness, the energy of the thought arises and dissolves in its own place. Therefore, you do not need to tamper with your thoughts. … When the energy of each thought is complete and independent, it is liberated upon arising and leaves no trace.*

He went on to talk about having space for each thought to be complete and independent, saying that "an independent thought is natural energy that is fresh, vivid awareness. It is not dependent upon further support."

Being present with a thought as it arises, exists, and passes away — just being right here removes the connector between this thought and a long stream of associations. So, rather than thoughts being like one pearl on a long necklace, Shyalpa Tenzin brought up the idea that each thought can be an independent existence. Being with one thought at a time is being present — aware that a thought is part of the environment of zazen in this moment, while our basic activity is just being awake.

Sometimes consciousness is compared to the mirror-like quality of a still lake that reflects things just as they are, or to the clear quality of still water that allows you to see all the way down to the bottom. Whereas our usual consciousness, which is dominated by our conditioning and habit energy, tends to be constantly thinking about something, always involved with an object. This is compared to the distorted reflection or murkiness of a lake that's been stirred up.

In zazen when we are deeply settled, the mind is calm and clear so that when a thought arises, it is just a solitary thought, without the energy and momentum that connects our usual self-centric story. I think of this like a glass of carbonated water after most of the bubbles have risen to the top and burst. The clear water is like the still mind, with the occasional bubble or thought rising to the surface, now and then.

The experience of having a thought, one thought, can be distinguished from the process of thinking, in that, thinking moves along under its own steam, each thought creating another, and another, bringing us along with it.

In order to experience the fresh energy of thought, Shyalpa Tenzin said,

> *Look directly at the source of each thought rather than following its trail. …Habits are a form of energy, and energy emerges and subsides like waves on the surface of the ocean. When you recognize the source, the energy will self-liberate upon arising…. the source of your thoughts is pure energy arising from emptiness.*

Looking directly at the source of our thinking is like the teaching in the *Fukanzazengi* to learn "the backward step that turns your light inwardly to illuminate your self," or the line from the *Song of the Grass Roof Hut,* "Turn around the light to shine within, then just return." These practices are to turn awareness away from objects back to the source of awareness. When this happens, there is simply awareness, a

holistic awareness that isn't broken in two creating a subject and object.

The Sensory Awareness teacher, Charlotte Selver, spoke about thinking a little differently, she said,

> *…many people have learned to say to themselves, 'Stop thinking,' and then they control their thoughts and try to stop their thinking. Like somebody who is being choked, thoughts are being choked off. But, … we are sometimes very desirous to come to quiet….this state of quiet is something wonderful. Quiet is not dullness.*
>
> *Quiet is also not forbidding thoughts. Quiet is a different state into which we gradually … come. You cannot stop thinking from one moment to the other without violating your thinking, but you can — when you feel you would like to rest — gradually allow the giving up of thoughts… it's not a command with the expectation that right away something will happen. It may be a long way which we have to go until we can gradually allow — altogether — more quiet….*

In zazen, try not to fight or resist your thinking. Rather just let thoughts come and go on their own, without adding anything extra — without continuing a train of thought by developing it. In the small book *Soto Zen*, Shohaku Okumura wrote about Dogen's phrase, "non-thinking," which refers to a mind that is awake and conscious, not lost in thought or intentionally engaging thought. Okumura Roshi compared non-thinking to a car engine that's idling in neutral. Even though the engine is turned on and working, the gears aren't engaged so the car doesn't move. He said when we think non-thinking, "We cannot say that there is no thinking. And we cannot say that we are thinking." He said that "Thoughts are simply idling." So, in zazen, the mind is alive and able to function but it isn't actively producing and following a train of thought. When thoughts arise, if the mind is bright and alert, it is much easier to let them flow through without sticking to them or getting lost in them. Okumura Roshi said, "…by keeping an upright posture, without either rejecting or chasing after anything, we aren't controlled by delusive thoughts."

In order to be fully, wholly here, right here, engaged, open and responsive, we need to be grounded in this moment … just this moment, again and again, breath after breath.

I came across some instructions by the 11th century Indian monk Tilopa which are translated as, "Six Words of Advice" or the "Six Nails of Key Points." These Six Words of Advice or Six Nails are:

> *Let go of what has passed,* also translated as *Don't recall.*
>
> *Let go of what may come,* or, *Don't imagine.*
>
> *Let go of what is happening now,* or, *Don't think.*
>
> *Don't try to figure anything out,* or, *Don't examine.*
>
> *Don't try to make anything happen,* or, *Don't try to control.*
>
> The last is, *Relax, right now, and rest.*

"Letting go of what has passed" is a kind of renunciation of memory in that it allows our personal history, or the story we make up about who we are, to drop away, including our regrets and grudges. "Letting go of what may come" is a renunciation of our imaginary future. "Not trying to figure things out" is renouncing anticipation or expectations, including our strategies and plans. "Not trying to make things happen" means letting go of our need to control and instead trusting in the security of this moment, allowing things to unfold. And "Relax, right now, and rest" is a renunciation of goals and achievements, of ambition and trying. In practice it also means trusting that we have everything we need — that we were born complete. We might say we were born complete for practice, that we don't need to acquire anything else or to try to change ourselves in order to be able to practice.

In the Santa Cruz Zen Center newsletter, Kokyo Henkel talked about letting go. He said, "In the end, letting go comes down to being present and aware of what we're holding onto, and releasing our grip in that moment. Zazen is like an all-encompassing renunciation practice. Since we emphasize a particular upright posture, if we sit still long enough we'll find some holding on; one has to let go of the wish to move or to do something more interesting. It's renunciation to just patiently let go of those urges to move or do something else. Zazen is letting go of moving, letting go of thoughts about past and future, and ultimately letting go of all conceptual elaboration, this is an endless lifetime practice. Nobody finishes zazen practice, ever!"

As we sit, try to allow each breath to come and go on its own terms, allowing the universe to breath you…breath by breath just coming and going, always right here. Each exhalation is an opportunity to let go, to be a renunciant by trying not to hold on… to anything. By just sitting, we are making an offering, giving our body and mind completely to zazen, giving ourselves completely to the universe which may be manifesting right now as zazen.

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Donations Gratefully Accepted

If you would like to support the Chapel Hill Zen Center through a monetary donation, please mail your 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**.

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Member-at-Large · willsavery@gmail.com

Josho Pat Phelan
ex oficio · joshochzc@gmail.com

Rohatsu Sesshin

LED BY ZENKI KATHLEEN BATSON
Friday evening, December 11 through
Wednesday afternoon, December 16

Sesshin is an intimate way to practice
with ourselves and others. We begin sesshin together,
we sit together, walk together, eat together, and work together.
Our practice is supported by the entire universe
and each of us is supporting everyone else.

Sesshin will begin at **7 PM on Friday evening** with orientation and job assignments. In order to help all of us settle into the schedule and our zazen practice, **please arrive on time for orientation.** The zendo will be open by 5 PM on Friday. Following orientation, silence will be observed.

It is possible to sit part of the sesshin, but **priority will be given to those sitting the whole sesshin.** Please come to orientation on Friday night and commit to sitting for at least two days. When registering, clearly explain what part of sesshin you would like to attend. The sesshin day will begin at 6 AM and include zazen, kinhin, a Dharma talk, work period, and formal oryoki meals in the zendo. *Dokusan*, an individual meeting with Zenki Sensei, will be available. The day will end around 9:30 PM.

Fees are $50 per day for Participating Members, and $60 per day for others. However, if you are able to offer more, it would be very helpful; the additional funds can be considered a tax-exempt donation. There will also be an opportunity to offer a donation to the teacher. **It is our intention that no one be turned away for financial reasons, and scholarships are available.** Please contact Danielle Bouchard at danielle.bouchard@gmail.com if you would like to request a scholarship. In the past, contributions received for scholarships were very helpful in allowing people to attend sesshin here and at the San Francisco Zen Center.

Please return your registration form
with a $50 deposit by **Wednesday, December 2.**

The registration form is available online at
chzc.org/sesshin.pdf.

You are welcome to sleep at the Zen Center, and there may be some space available in members' homes nearby. Please bring a portable bed or pad for the floor, a sleeping bag, pillow, a towel and washcloth, slip-on shoes, work clothes, and layered clothing. Opportunities for bathing are limited. For more information, please contact us at info@chzc.org.

The Zen Center emergency phone is
(919) 933-0776.

CHAPEL HILL
ZEN CENTER

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SCHEDULE

TUESDAY EVENING	SUNDAY MORNING
7:00 PM *zazen*	9:00 AM zazen
(Zen meditation)	9:40 AM kinhin
7:40 PM *kinhin*	9:50 AM zazen
(walking meditation)	10:30 AM service
7:50 PM zazen	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

Nirvana itself is Reality. Reality itself is nirvana, is bliss, uncreated, has always been here, and is not dependent on causes. When you come to know that Reality, you realize you have always known it.

The First Noble Truth is 'unenlightened life is frustrating.' The Second is 'its cause is ignorance.' If Relative and Ultimate are separate, then Ultimate Truth wouldn't be really ultimate because there would be some place it didn't exist.

— Robert Thurman
September 29, 2014, Raleigh, NC

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.