



# Water Wheel

*Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.*

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

## The Thus Come One's Seat

by Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith



*"When one takes the Seat of Head Teacher, one enters the Thus Come One's room, puts on the Thus Come One's robe, sits in the Thus Come One's seat, faces the assembly without fear and reveals the teachings. A heart as vast as the world is the room, gentleness and patience are the robe, the emptiness of all phenomena is the seat. From this position beyond position, one should expound the Law throughout the day and night, and care for the*

*Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."*<sup>1</sup>

When I became Head Teacher in April, I took this beautiful pledge and it has stayed deep in my heart ever since. And because my vow is to you and we are each the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, engaged in Collective Awakening as Bodhisattvas – I'd like to share it and transform it into another Bodhisattva Vow for us all.

Tathagata is the Pali word for Thus Come One and is one of the ten honorable titles of a Buddha, meaning one who has come from the realm of truth. Sometimes it is translated as "Thus Gone One," indicating one who has gone to the world of enlightenment. This title indicates that a Buddha embodies the fundamental truth of all phenomena and has grasped the law of causality spanning past, present, and future. The general meaning is connected to how the previous Buddhas came and went, but also how they understood and explained the suchness of all moments of existence.

The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is, with no ebb or flow of birth and death. It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse. And it's not what we who dwell in the threefold world perceive it to be. Sitting in this seat, we find it's so much bigger than in person, on Zoom, masked or unmasked. It is beyond our usual perception and is what we are cultivating in our Zazen.

<sup>1</sup>Roshi Egyoku adapted these lines from *The Lotus Sutra*, Chapter 10, when she Ascended the Mountain in 1999.

When we look closely, we find sprinkled throughout our practice forms, opportunities to align with the perspective of the Tathagata. In the Gatha on Opening the Sutra, we chant:

*The Dharma, incomparably profound and infinitely subtle,  
Is always encountered but rarely perceived,  
even in millions of ages.  
Now we see it, hear it, receive and maintain it.  
May we completely realize the Tathagata's true meaning.*

Before we put on our rakusu, we chant:

*Vast is the robe of liberation, A formless field of benefaction.  
I wear the Tathagata-teaching, Serving all sentient beings.*

In the Gate of Sweet Nectar dharanis, we chant:

*Being one with the Unconditioned Tathagata.  
Being one with the Boundless Tathagata.  
Being one with all Tathagatas and Avalokitesvara  
Bodhisattva, please nourish and sustain us.  
Being one with the Inconceivable Body Tathagata, let the  
nectar of Dharma spring forth.*

In our noon service, we chant "Lifespan of the Thus Come One" from the *Lotus Sutra*, which includes this passage:

*At all times I think to myself: How can I cause living  
beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly  
acquire the body of a buddha?*

It's easy to miss the power of these great invocations. I'm constantly amazed when I hear them freshly. Don't

*(Continued on page 2)*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE ... and more!

- 3-4 Still Serving in a New Role by DH Dharma-Joy
- 4 Living Together in Sangha by DH Gessho Kumpf
- 6-7 Bearing Witness to Racism by ZCLA Members
- 8-9 A Mindful Pilgrimage by ZCLA Members
- 10 Preamble to the Three Seats by Roshi Egyoku
- 11 Your Gifts are Received, "Thank You."

## THE THUS COME ONE'S SEAT *(Continued from page 1)*

glaze over these familiar texts but continually align yourself with this spacious unsurpassable perspective. Imagine sitting in the Thus Come One's room every time you sit Zazen. Can our hearts be as vast as the world? Can we wear a robe of gentleness and patience? Can we realize and sit in the emptiness of all phenomena? When asked to orient to the whole, what comes to mind? Is even your sense of expansion still stuck in too a small a view? How vast is your Robe of Liberation?

We talk a lot about the Three Tenets: Not Knowing, Bearing Witness, Appropriate Action. But I don't think we remember the Not Knowing enough. I know I don't Not Know enough. And I don't mean I don't know what to do, or don't know how to solve this problem. Not Knowing is the grounded return to the formless field of non-conceptual openness.

We drop for a second, then impatiently get whisked away and caught up in all that's going on because it's so noisy, so vivid, so endlessly covered in the news. Then we either feel fired up and wanting to do something - or hopeless because everything seems so stuck. We may loop in our minds with anger or anxiety. Before we can do anything, we need to truly root ourselves in boundless Not Knowing, the very seat of the Tathagata.

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*Imagine sitting in the Thus Come One's room everytime you sit Zazen.*

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The Head Teacher rests in the Study Sphere of our Mandala. The responsibility of the Teaching Sphere is the care and development of training paths, developing teachers, presenting the teachings, the spiritual training of students both individually and collectively, and the transmission of the lineage.

I bow with deepest gratitude to Roshi Egyoku for her years of dedication to the Zen Center and her personal guidance to me, and vow to do my best. I've often said the Sangha makes me better than I am and I will continue to rise to the challenges of this new role. With deep appreciation for our lineage, I vow to not let the Dharma Seed die.

The practice here at ZCLA is a great combination of rigor and creativity – wonderfully embodied by Roshi Egyoku. We will continue being rigorous with the forms that make our practice strong and deep while being open and creative to new forms that might need to arise. This Three Seat model is one of our creative experiments. I already enjoy working with Abbot Sensei Faith-Mind and Rev. Dharma-Joy. It really is wonderful to see new angles and blind spots pointed out and this grows out of our having spent decades practicing together.



*Head Teacher Installation.*

This transition is coming at a very interesting time. We are slowly emerging from over two years of a global pandemic. We all feel the reverberations from the world threatening war, exacerbated divisions of hatred, increased mass shootings, harmful court rulings and dire effects of climate change. The Three Poisons of Greed, Anger and Ignorance are institutionalized in our culture. Our Bodhi-sattva Practice is needed more than ever to help change the paradigm.

When Buddhism moves to a new country, it often takes on elements of that culture. Since I first started my Zen Practice over 35 years ago, I've felt part of this newly rooted potential. The United States is itself a young experiment, currently in peril, with its conflicting aspirations for equal justice and power hungry greed. This Mother Temple is just a little over 50 years old. How can our practice deepen for the benefit of ourselves, the world, and planet? Shall we find that together, using our collective wisdom and awakening, grounding ourselves deeply in the Three Tenets, especially in the Not Knowing perspective of the Tathagata.

Let's sit together in Thus Come One's room, with hearts as vast as the world, gentleness and patience, realizing the emptiness of all phenomena. I deeply wish us all to awaken to our true nature and freely access each of our unique gifts to serve what is needed.

Bowing forwards and back, I share this poem I offered quietly on the day of the installation:

*Myriad Manifestations  
Profound and Subtle  
Unsurpassable Teachings  
Eternally Revealed  
Eluding even the name  
Dharma  
Laughter echoes in the Empty Sky.*

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*Sensei Daiki Senshin is the new ZCLA Head Teacher.*

# Still Serving in a New Role

by Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



In the April 2022 Installation Ceremony, Sensei Senshin was installed as Head Teacher and I was installed as Head Priest & Preceptor; this completed the actualization of the Three Seats model that Roshi Egyoku had originally envisioned in 1918 and that began when Sensei Faith-Mind was installed as Abbot in May 1919. It has now been a few months since the ceremony—as

with so many things these days, it seems both yesterday and a few years ago, at the same time—and I appreciate this opportunity to offer some reflections.

The most important thing always to remember is that this is a role of service—service to Zen Center, service to the Sangha, service to all beings everywhere. Of course, the Bodhisattva path is one of service for all of us: the first line of the Four Bodhisattva Vows sets this out clearly: “Numberless beings/I vow to serve them.” Similarly, when we chant the Verse of the Kesa, it declares: “Vast is the robe of liberation/A formless field of benefaction/I wear the Tathagata-teaching/Serving all sentient beings.” The heart of the Mahayana is the ideal of the Bodhisattva—someone who forgoes entering Nirvana until all other beings have awakened. Thus, from the very beginning to the very end, this is a path of service. But as we take on different positions, the path and means of service is always changing. So as a new practitioner, what does service to numberless beings look like? As a novice priest, what does it look like? As a transmitted priest? A transmitted teacher? The call to service remains the same, but how the response manifests will change.

From my experience, not only has the means of serving changed as I have taken on various positions, but the fact that these positions are nothing but positions of service has become much more evident. Now, in taking Seat of Head Priest and Preceptor, that the role is one of service is exceedingly clear—and, frankly, quite intimidating. For each of the Three Seats, these are roles of service. And I hope all of you will help to keep me clear about this! While I am certainly not an expert on these things (and I hope never to be!), my impression is that most of

the problems that have arisen in practice communities stem from moments when the people “in power” forget that they are in those positions to serve others, and not to benefit themselves.

This is not a position intended to reinforce the small-self ego. Not at all! In a recent talk, Roshi Egyoku spoke of her experience at a Zen Peacemaker Bearing Witness Retreat among the Lakota Indigenous people, and how, after someone was explaining the Three Tenets, one of the Lakota elders said that, to him, he would translate our practice of Not-Knowing as being humble. Being humble—practicing Not-Knowing—is an important ingredient in holding this seat. In his *Tenzo Kyokun*, Dogen Zenji talks about how the Tenzo, or head cook, should conduct himself/herself/themselves in preparing the meal for the Sangha. Quoting a prior teacher, he says: “Use the property and possessions of the community as carefully as if they were your own eyes.” This type of care applies not only to the property and possessions of the community, but also to how I, as Head Priest (and all the Seats) should conduct ourselves with the Sangha. The Sangha Treasure is, indeed, a treasure. I hope I always remember this, and I hope that, if I do not, you will help to remind me! (For a funny koan along these lines, see *The Hidden Lamp*, “The Old Woman Recognizes Mazu.”)



Head Priest Installation.

As part of the Installation Ceremony, there were two pledges, one public and the second private. In the public pledge, in a call and response with Roshi Egyoku, I declared the following:

I, Dharma-Joy, take the Seat of Head Priest and Preceptor. I pledge to serve the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha with a heart as vast as the world, with gentleness and patience, and with the clear insight of prajna paramita. I take full responsibility for my action and reaction, for my motives and their effects. I pledge not to make excuses for my own unskillful behavior; I pledge not to be self-serving or to seek gain or reputation. I ask for the support of each of you, and of the Sangha, in helping me to fulfill this pledge to you.”

There are many parts to this pledge, and every time I come back to it, various elements resonate differently—just as, when we recite the precepts in a Ceremony of

(Continued on page 4)



## STILL SERVING (Continued from page 3)

Atonement or a Day of Reflection, different ones stand out for me each time, depending on what is going on in my life. Fundamentally, however, being humble is at the core of this pledge, and it is important for me to be reminded of it regularly.

While the First Tenet is Not-Knowing—being humble—the Second Tenet is Bearing Witness. The Lakota elder translated this as “we are all related.” This is equally important to my functioning as Head Priest: recognizing that we are all related, and that I am not separate from all that is. The minute I act from a place that is not humble, the action is coming from a place of “I”—and the minute there is an “I” that I am working on behalf of, there is a “you” that I am not working on behalf of. The I/you gap yawns open, and separation arises. To quote an old robot: “Danger, Will Robinson, danger!”

Of course, this gap is constantly opening, and our practice is to keep closing the gap, over and over and over. In *Appreciate Your Life*, Maezumi Roshi talks at length about Dogen Zenji’s statement in the *Genjokoan*, “to study the Buddha Way is to study the self.” He emphasizes that this word “study” has a different connotation in the original Japanese than the intellectual inquiry that we associate with the word in English. In Japanese, the word that is translated as “study” is *narao*, and it means to do something over and over and over and over and over—you get the idea. It is not pointing to an intellectual mastery, but rather an experiential mastery. (The British writer Malcolm Gladwell, in his 2008 book *Outliers*, stated that it requires 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert in anything; while subsequent research has disputed the exact figure, the point remains valid and aligns with the point being made by Dogen Zenji and Maezumi Roshi.) Our practice of closing this gap—that’s *narao*. We close the gap, and we close the gap again, and we close the gap again. That’s why we call it “practice.”

As we know, Zen is an experiential practice, not an intellectual one. We—and I include myself—often come here with an intellectual curiosity, often having read one or more books that aroused what we thought of as an intellectual interest—often because we are so disconnected from our wisdom-hearts and connected only to our thought-minds that we cannot recognize a deep yearning that has been awakened within us. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter. It gets us in the door, and then we begin to find out that this intellectual mind is, really, no good at all for what this practice involves. Instead, we begin to watch others, to learn from them, and to watch ourselves. This practice experiential—and experimental. And we are the test subjects! It invites us to be curious, and to observe rather than to judge. And, it then invites us to close the gap, over and over and over. Narao!

One part of serving in these positions is to be willing to sit down in the midst of a furnace. Both I and others hold so many ideas and expectations, internal and external, about what it “means” to be Head Priest, how I “should” behave, how I’m doing it “wrong,” and on and on. As I’ve already experienced, transference and counter-transference are very real! And in inhabiting this seat—this seat of service to the Sangha—my function is to roll all of it into my practice, to help others roll it into their practice, and to do my best to serve others. In doing this, it hopefully helps everyone—me and others both—to surface the assumptions and ideas we may each have about what a “Head Priest” is, and to see where these ideas are creating stuck-ness.

The Bodhisattva’s function is to affirm life. Sometimes we don’t see that the ideas we have are dead, that we are not affirming life but rather impeding life. The process of recognizing this can be painful. We like our ideas; I like my ideas. Giving them up as “dead words” leaves me vulnerable—there’s “no place on earth where I can hide,” as the Shuso says in the Hosson ceremony. I expect it is the same for you. So, we come back to the same place: practice practice practice! One of the true benefits of long practice is the realization that we can let go of our ideas, our cherished sacred stories—and we will be fine! We are not going to simply pop! out of existence if we loosen our grip on our fixed ideas of who we are and how the world works or should work.

The Third Tenet involves action. We have articulated this a variety of ways over time, and each one has seemed to not quite capture it: we have called it loving action, appropriate action, healing action. Right now we say we take action that arises from Not-Knowing and Bearing Witness. For me, this captures the direction, but maybe not the heart. But taking the Lakota understanding changes it profoundly: I will take action that comes from a place of being humble, and realizing that we are all related. Action that arises from this place—that my wisdom-heart can connect with.

As part of the Installation, as the Head Priest and Preceptor, I offered a silent pledge of my own before the Buddha Hall altar. Hopefully it reflects this Third Tenet of Action:

*Putting down my bowing mat, I offer it as a  
refuge to the whole universe;  
Bowing down, I raise all beings above my head.  
May this Buddha Hall, and may I, always be a  
refuge and a support.*

*Dharma Holder Dharma-Joy is the new Head Priest and Preceptor.*

# Living Together in Sangha

by Lorraine Gessho Kumpf



Recently I took on the position of Senior Resident at ZCLA. In this role I aim to nurture a sense of practice community and to help develop a collective residential practice. The role is concerned with how we connect, how we support each other, and how we are supported in practice. A key function is training on the *Sangha Sutra*, our guiding ethics document, which aims to

ensure a safe and supportive practice environment. The Senior Resident position requires a wide view of the whole community. This role is new to ZCLA as well as to me: its function and relation to the ZCLA organization will be clarified through our shared experience.

I see the Senior Resident position as one that looks deeply into how we treat one another in the community. As practitioners we follow the core practice of the Sixteen Precepts and use the Three Tenets in application. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to apply Precept language and scope to situations that arise in our personal and communal life. The *Sangha Sutra* has been developed as guidelines to address questions of both personal and organizational ethics.

By “personal ethics” I mean how one approaches the questions: Who am I? What are my values? What action should I take? What is it to be in alignment with my Zen practice? “Organizational ethics” poses similar questions from the viewpoint of the organization: How do we want to be as an organization? What is our vision of right living? What are we asking of our residents and members, and how can we codify that in a functional way?

When the community needs to say NO! to harmful behaviors, how is that done? In its early years, ZCLA had no structural way to address harmful conduct. Traditional Buddhist ethics did not provide a way. The *Sangha Sutra* came out of ZCLA’s history of ethics struggles. The Sutra lays the groundwork to approach problems in the Sangha by educating us on aspects of human behavior that are particularly relevant to the practice community, by presenting a code of ethics for the community, including its leaders, and by laying out procedures for dealing with conflict, harmful conduct, and formal grievance.

Here’s why I see the *Sutra* as foundational: I think that we Sangha members tend to see ethics as an aspect of our personal development, influenced as it is by our Zen practice. But given this, can we separate our personal life from

the organizations in our lives? We belong to the Sangha, and to all manner of other organizations: particular to our time and place, we each have complex social affinities, hold different identities, and connect to many different institutions.

As much as they affect our lives, I think we tend to ignore the structural side of organizations, including that of ZCLA. Why is it important to see that side? Sociologists tell us that wherever there is an organizational structure, there is an inherent dynamic of power and vulnerability. This may be particularly true for a practice community, which relies on trusting spiritual leaders. Accepting that these dynamics exist, and can cause tension, is important. The tension is an invitation to widen the view, to orient to the whole. The grounded quality that we gain through practice is essential in seeing ways forward when problems arise.

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## *What is our vision of right living?*

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At ZCLA, we have come a long way to care for the ethical concerns of the community: we have tools such as the Many Hands and Eyes process for airing concerns, and practices such as the Atonement Ceremony for personal engagement with the Precepts. The organization provides and maintains such practices. Further, for the organization to function and be maintained, there must be a structure of responsibility, some guiding rules and accountability. These are areas under continuing development.

Bearing witness to situations, I can see that ZCLA’s functioning can improve, as can the *Sangha Sutra* documents. It is only through the working of the *Sutra* that flaws and gaps can be seen and addressed. I have seen and heard about poor communication, lack of clarity, inability to approach basic problems such as racism, and more. It takes the engagement of the Sangha to make improvements. To familiarize ourselves with the *Sangha Sutra*, and use it, is also to be engaged.

Harmful conduct usually occurs in the personal sphere, and the organization is called upon to deal with the effects. How is wisdom accessed in the organization? Can the Zen Center reflect our practice ethics: to pay attention, to take care, to be compassionate, to atone, and so on? It demands committed effort. Our positive steps in that direction make me hopeful.

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*Dharma-Holder Gessho is a long-time resident, Preceptor, and the Senior Resident.*

# Reflections: May 2022 Bearing Witness to Racism in America Retreat

*Four Sangha members reflect on their experience at the Zen Peacemakers International retreat.*



## Valerie Richards

Do you remember when you first learned about slavery in the United States? Do you remember how you felt? I do. My family had recently moved to Miami, FL. I was in fourth grade. I attended a Catholic School where I was one of three black kids in my class. I felt embarrassed and confused. In eighth grade, I was the only black student in my class.

My teacher wanted to have a debate on the pros and cons of slavery. My mom was livid. She knew that my knowledge of slavery was extremely limited. Both of my parents grew up in the segregated South. My mom recognized for many reasons that my teacher was a racist. What a dilemma. Perhaps your experience of learning about slavery was different but what is your understanding of how and why it occurred? What are the present-day ramifications?

Attending the Bearing Witness Retreat on Race allowed me to experience the places that I had only seen on television or read about. I thought that the retreat would be the culmination of years of study both in and out of the classroom. I was wrong! I must return to Alabama for an extended period of time. The history there is important because it sheds light on why issues like voting rights, gerrymandering and women's reproductive rights were and still are rights that we should not let slip through our fingers.

As I walked through the Legacy Museum and the Lynching Memorial, I realized that what I read in the history books was only one side of a very complicated history. I learned that while black people were lynched it was because they had engaged in some "inappropriate action," i.e., being accused of rape, theft or some other crime. While at the Lynching Memorial, I realized the arbitrariness of the decision to lynch. Much like the Coliseum in Rome, lynching was a "spectator sport" for white men, women, children and communities who participated in crowds as small as two and as large as 10,000 in the taking of a life without a trial or concern for the pain inflicted upon black families and communities.

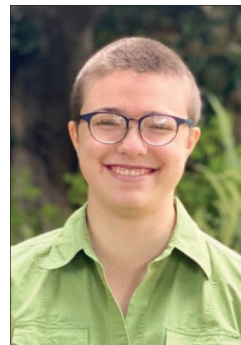
I would encourage those who are truly committed to social justice to attend this retreat in the future. I realize



*Black voters were expected to know how many jelly beans were in the jar and how many bubbles the bar of soap would make in order to vote. (Photo by Valerie Richards)*

that it is easier to keep the blinders on—but at what cost? As I stood before the imaginary waves of the Atlantic ocean in the Equal Justice Initiative Museum, I thought about my ancestors who toiled and labored to help to make this country prosperous. This retreat highlighted why the generations before me fought so hard to obtain our right to vote. It can connect the dots for those who are ready to see.

## Sacha Joshin Greenfield



I initially hesitated to go on the retreat because I thought, "There's so much racism to bear witness to right here in Koreatown, yet I avoid looking at or addressing that racism. Why am I flying to Alabama to bear witness to the racial history of the US, when I'm not addressing the racism in how I relate to my neighbors?" In spite of this, I had a very strong feeling: "I must go." I later realized that this is an opportunity for me to take action and face my discomfort in addressing racism in my daily life. But the question continued to be present for me—why am I going to this "other place?"

During the retreat, I often felt, "There's something wrong with me, because a lot of this isn't affecting me."

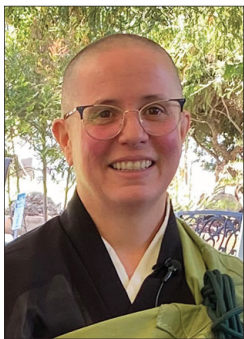
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**RACISM IN AMERICA RETREAT** *(Continued from page 6)*

This is how I experience “white numbness”—the part of my conditioning as a white person where I dissociate from uncomfortable situations involving race. Since returning, however, vivid images and feelings from the retreat have stayed with me, like the lynching memorial in Alabama. One morning, sitting at ZCLA after returning, I suddenly felt the whole memorial: the place, the sculptures, and the over 4000 lynched human beings — and their deep suffering and Trauma — as one Whole. The meaning finally penetrated, as though whatever the memorial was trying to teach me found a way in at last after three weeks.

Since returning, the place of the retreat has not left me, and I have realized those places in Alabama where we bore witness are not somewhere else. The trauma of racism they hold are actually here in my body, and I must continue to open myself to that and bear witness.

**Jitsujo Gauthier**

Of course, there will be resistance. Whenever I step out of my comfort zone, a committee of hungry ghosts, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas gather in my mind to offer various concerns. During the retreat, I practiced staying in my body, being completely present, and trusting just this. I contemplated: where is the edge between bearing witness

and being a tourist? Am I seeing this experience as transactional? Do my expectations and disappointments relate to my privilege, desire to fix, or difficulty feeling pain? What are my internal responses and assumptions of Black folks, Asian folks, Middle Eastern folks, Mexican folks, Latinos, white folks, etc.?

Upon returning, the shooting happened in Buffalo. I thought about the young white perpetrator, and the spectacle of this shooting as another hate crime. I recalled the photos of public lynchings and newspaper articles that advertised lynchings as barbecues in the Legacy Museum. I remembered the montage of countless Black boys and men shot for running, standing, eating, driving, walking. Granted, the Buffalo shooting was not reported as a fun spectator sport, but there was a knowing that if that perpetrator was a young Black man, the police would have shot him. I wondered, what caused the police to not shoot this young white man? Was it a stereotype of him as a “good ‘ol boy” who strayed from the path and just needs to be set straight? If so, how do we undo such stereotypes? Even “good stereotypes” seem to be causing harm here. There is mental illness that is neither being identified nor addressed—in the case of this young white perpetrator, and

in the many European-Americans who have dehumanized, stolen, enslaved, and killed countless people over time.

Another side is the stereotype of Black men as inherently violent and dangerous. The retreat demonstrated how this story was created and retold over time, conditioning all of us to believe it. For example, when I see the news, the thought arises: “well that young black man must’ve done something to be shot, he must’ve, right?” Bearing witness to racism in America is painful, but it is allowing me to see these ideas become hollow, unfounded. I see how both conditioned stereotypes perpetuate the justification of slavery, violence, incarceration, and domination, as well as our collective ability to ignore injustices. It feels important to continue bearing witness to both suffering and joy.

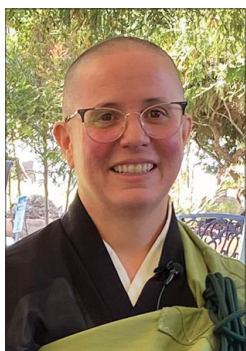
**Geri Meiho Bryan**

I went on this retreat to Alabama to look under the rocks of America's racism and sit with all the exposed wormy bits underneath. I felt a calling that it was the work that I needed to do. I had no idea what I was walking into. I did not have any ideas of how things were going to go down. In Hunter S. Thompson's words “I bought the ticket and

took the ride.” I was not prepared for the actual experience of people of color as they went through the Legacy Museum. I overheard a woman of color crying and exclaim, “We were kidnapped and then enslaved!” The sobbing was inconsolable. Realizing America has been built on the commoditization of enslaved human beings is an enormity of injustice that is hard to fathom. This retreat was the starting point for me to step into witnessing my country's racist past and current injustices. I have been complicit in the injustice by not asking enough questions and drilling down deeper into an uncomfortable truth. Reflecting back, my voice has changed. My heart has opened, and I vow to no longer look away. I don't have the answers, but I am willing to ask more questions.

In Selma, I crossed paths with a mural artist, Tres, who sold his house in Birmingham and moved to Selma and vowed to cover the black belt (the southern part of Alabama that is currently economically depressed) in art. He had a few murals in Selma that were just purely whimsical. A conversation with the owner of the Airbnb we stayed at in Montgomery expressed that Montgomery is not what it once was; it has evolved and it's looking at its past with a clear eye and informs what the city is today. She would encourage you to visit and see for yourself. It is grace that brought me to this retreat. I hope that grace brings me back next year.

# A Mindful Pilgrimage: Opening Up to the World on a City Walk



## Introduction by Jitsujo Gauthier

Gaps appear as Buddhism takes root in U.S. soil. There are gaps in culture, language, class, ethnicity, race, and worldview to name a few. There is also this looming idea of “Two Buddhisms,” i.e., convert temples and heritage temples. Being a professor of Buddhist chaplaincy at Taiwanese-founded University of the West and living at Zen Center

of Los Angeles, sometimes I think I live and work in dual worlds. Other times I see myriads of worlds in boundless complexity all around one another.

In this pilgrimage to Dharma Vijaya, a Sri Lankan Buddhist vihara (temple), we walked through various worlds and gaps together—bearing witness to suffering and joy. I was grateful to have Nem Etsugen Bajra as my co-leader to hold the complexities of these spaces. Those who engage in the Shikoku pilgrimage in Japan wear traditional pilgrim attire. We provided a pilgrimage hat so the group might feel unified. The hat was optional. While most participants wore it, some did not feel comfortable wearing a traditional Asian style hat for various reasons, e.g., cultural appropriation.

A view I did not consider was the public view, what those on the streets or passing cars by might think, the spectacle of it all, or “public statement.” Some participants experienced our group unity as Buddhist pride, powerful, emotional, some as unusual, a target for Asian hate, dangerous, uncomfortable, while others found a sense of belonging, inspiration, interconnection, a walk in peace. The following three reflections provide insight into some of the learnings and gaps that we pilgrimage through together.



## Lane Kyojin Igoudin

We started with a circle, hands in gassho, chanting “mu.” The sound first vibrated throughout my skull, like an inner bell inviting me to turn inwards, and then, when shared by a group of 30, it turned into a spontaneous vibration rising up to the morning sky.

Pilgrimage is a purposeful walk. Reasons for it, the ZCLA invitation explained, could be “as diverse as the people who make them. Some may want to embark on a spiritual journey, accumulate blessings, offer merit, or show homage to those that came before us, others may want to process grief, memorialize the dead, or mend a broken heart.” I set my intention on staying focused on the walk itself, and not letting myself be distracted by the sites of the city. The week had been hectic, frantic even. This pilgrimage would be a way to simply get out of my head, stop doing things, just walk. The plan was simple: walk 2.5 miles from the Zen Center of Los Angeles to Dharma Vijaya, make offerings, chant, learn about the temple lineage, traditions, and caretakers, enjoy the snacks, and head back.

We headed out of the gates of the center in a straight line. It was an early Sunday morning when most of the city was still asleep, and you could smell the ocean breeze and hear the birds, not just the traffic. The monks in orange robes rang the bells every 20 paces or so – a ding in the front, echoed by another in the back of the group – a helpful reminder to return to meditation. Our *nón lá* hats provided enough shade, which came in especially handy on our walk back from Dharma Vijaya, at noon, when the sun reached 90F in the shade.

*(Continued on page 9)*



## A MINDFUL PILGRIMAGE (Continued from page 8)



I chose to observe the sensation of walking, rather than breath, in part to make sure not to trip on broken-up pavement. Should my thoughts overtake me, I'd count the steps. After all, every step counts.

In a single file, we walked through the areas of some of the highest population density in the US — fortress-like 1930s brickstones rising next to brand new condos, crammed into former single house lots. We bowed silently to the people opening up the shops, rolling out recycle bins, hanging outside a corner store. A young Hispanic guy on a bike blocked the traffic as we were crossing Western Avenue to make sure we all crossed safely.

We walked past the stately mansions, the homeless tent camps, the boarded-up 'For Lease' signs; past the trendy, hashtagged coffeehouses, decaying couches and other urban refuse thrown up on the sidewalks; past botanica shops and strip-mall Pentecostal churches, panaderias, travel agencies advertising flights to Central America, and tearooms with signs solely in Korean. It was all so fascinating, I forgot about watching my steps. It's fine to be distracted, I realized. A pilgrim doesn't journey in some sensory-deprived bubble. Just note these new impressions, receive them, and move on.

I was walking through the heart of urban LA as if for the first time, seeing it without agenda, interacting with all that was around me. I became part of the landscape, not an erasure from it. I found peace not in withdrawing, but in opening up.



## Quynh (Thích Tâm Nguyên)

Being a first-generation immigrant, Bhante Dhammajothi's childhood stories transported me back to my childhood in Vietnam. Sitting by the wooden doors waiting for my father to come home from work, the smell of the wet earth after the

summer rain embraced me as I listened to the sound of the great bell from the temple across our house. Some-

times I could hear the sangha chanting during their evening service.

As a young girl, I used to walk barefoot across the half-paved street to the temple. Through the temple's gate, the sight of the dignified assembly in the Buddhist service intertwined with the burning incense, the gentle aroma awakened the curiosity about the monastic life in me. As an adult, wearing the monastic robes, adorned by the traditional Vietnamese *nón lá*, I pilgrimed through the streets of Los Angeles under the April sun.

Seeing those wearing *nón lá* and walking with others has made me feel connected to the community and being a part of the sangha. The connection was not merely formed by what we wear or where we are from, but through our collective intention and purpose, as diverse as they could be. For me, to cultivate a sense of community is being a part of a spiritual practice. One of my spiritual practices is dana. Dana is an offering from within, or from what I could offer. When I offered the Vietnamese vegetarian bánh bao (buns) at the beginning of the pilgrimage, a sense of openness blossomed in me. The vastness within helped me be more aware and attune to my surroundings. My heart opened as my mind held an image of the Buddha. I greeted those who greeted me along the path. I silently offered prayers in forms of mantras with every step I took.

The pilgrimage was a beautiful experience. One thing that this pilgrimage has affirmed in me was that as long as I have an image of the Buddha on my mind, a practice of dana in every step, and an openness in my heart, there would be a sense of belonging wherever I am.



## Jane Radiant-Joy Chen

The pilgrimage was for me a deep learning in Dana Paramita, and at the same time, a painful reminder of a lifetime of racism.

*Nón lá* hats, which were offered on the pilgrimage, have a history in the U.S. of being used to ridicule, blanketly label, or commodify Asian cultures. They

are found in party stores around Halloween, thrown on characters in movies to signify "Asian person," and capitalized on by companies like American Apparel who sold them as "Ching Chong Hats." Recently a Korean-American friend while wearing a generic straw hat was asked by a white colleague, "What are you, going out to the rice paddy?"

(Continued on page 10)

## A MINDFUL PILGRIMAGE (Continued from page 9)



Abercrombie and Fitch t-shirt.

Although I did not wear the hat myself, I was, by default, part of that symbol of American objectification. During the walk, I felt fear, bracing myself for a passerby to shout, “Go back to China!”

When we crossed the street and cars waited 30+ seconds for us to pass, I imagined their stares while looking away. When I saw a white person photographing us, I hid my face from view. Seeing photos of us afterward was more jarring, reminding me of the fetishization of Asian people and spiritual traditions, and the privilege white people are afforded, wearing other cultures’ traditions without suffering the dehumanizing consequences.

Context matters.

I have spent my whole life trying to convince people that their caricature of me is not me. Still, to this day, I meet people who don’t think I’m “from” here, who are surprised that I speak English well, who compare me to ... I don’t even want to say. That’s why I feel that the perpetuation of these images *in the United States*, is not helping our cause of ending suffering for all, *even when the intent is positive*. Many more, vastly different portrayals of Asian-Americans, are desperately needed: This is my contribution.

How do I treat everything that happens in life as a gift? Truly accept what is offered in each moment, and respond without judgment? Dana Paramita continues, in the writing of these reflections, and in your reading them.

*Jitsujo, Kyojin and Radiant-Joy are ZCLA members. Quynh completed the precept class with Sensei Myobo and is a graduate at the University of the West.*

## Preamble to the Three Seats

by Wendy Egyoku Nakao

The Three Seats are the Abbot, Head Teacher, and Head Priest (Seat Holders).

The Seats are Seats of Service to The Three Treasures. While the Abbot Seat is the leader of the Three Seats, together the Three Seats hold the vision of the Circle of Life (Mandala) and history of the Zen Center of Los Angeles. This new organizational arrangement is an experiment in Shared Stewardship and in Collective Wisdom and Awakening.

The Seat Holders must situate themselves in the organizational and practice Circle of Life (Mandala) of the Zen Center. The Seat Holders function from the view of the Oneness of life, situating themselves in the Big View while taking care of their respective spheres. Seat Holders have a finely honed understanding of the Zen Center as a Zen Practice Center of the White Plum lineage, as a Zen Buddhist Temple, including as the Mother Temple of the White Plum lineage; and as an Organization of living Dharma. ZCLA is also a seminal Zen Center in the founding of Zen in the West.

The Seat Holders also situate themselves within the Zen Buddhist culture of today and have a good grasp of the evolution of Buddhism and Zen, the contemporary cultural issues of Buddhism in the West, and of the complex evolution of ZCLA. They should affiliate with peer groups both in the White Plum Asanga and the wider

Buddhist Sangha as appropriate. The Seat Holders should also cultivate relationships with Zen teachers/Buddhist teachers outside of the WPA lineage.

The Seat Holders are knowledgeable of the streams of practice that run through ZCLA, including the living Dharma planted here by its Founding Family and Founding Abbots and Teachers, Ven. Maezumi Roshi and Roshi Bernie Glassman. The Seat Holders maintain a respectful working relationship with Roshi Egyoku, the remaining “founding teacher” of ZCLA.

The Seat Holders will learn how to “read the field” of ZCLA to discern what is arising and what needs to be brought forth. They will cultivate the heart-mind of generosity, gratitude, and generativity. They will strive to be models of right relationship among themselves and with the Teachers and with the Sangha. They will always work to strengthen relationships and weave a resilient Sangha web with spaciousness and grace. They will regard the Seat Holder positions as a training vehicle for themselves and retain the spirit of a practitioner of Buddha Dharma.

*Roshi Egyoku held all three seats for decades and was instrumental in helping to form this new model of leadership. As Abbot Emeritus, she recently stepped down as Head Teacher, Head Priest and Resident Teacher and continues to serve as Senior Dharma Teacher.*

## Your Gifts are Received with a Heartfelt "Thank You!"

*The Zen Center is maintained by the hands and eyes of each one of you.*

To **Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen**, **Sensei Katharine Senshin Griffith** and **Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert** for leading Buddha's Birthday Sesshin and the Sangha Forum;

To **Sensei Faith-Mind** for officiating the 49th Day Memorial service for Jim Dojun Hanson and **Roshi Egyoku Nakao** for officiating the 49th Day Memorial service for Roshi Merle Kodo Plum-Dragon Boyd;

To **DH Dharma-Joy** for leading the chant circle for peace in Ukraine and officiating the Maezumi Roshi Memorial;

To **Sensei Senshin** for facilitating the Council on Change and Impermanence, leading the May Peace Prevail Sesshin, and leading the Hidden Lamp study with **DH Dharma-Joy**;

To **Preceptor Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran** for his class on Never Turning Away: The Precepts and the Climate Crisis;

To **Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld** for her class series on Examining Our Worldview from a Zen Perspective;

To **DH Jitsujo Gauthier** for leading the Three Tenet Mala Workshop, being Preceptor for the Jukai Ceremony and for co-facilitating the Pilgrimage to Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara with **DH Nem Etsugen Bajra**;

To **DH Jonathan Kaigen Levy** for leading the June Zazenka;

To **Karina Myoki Beltran** and **Tom Yudo Burger** for organizing the Saturday Fushinzamu with **Conrad Butsugen Romo**, **Reeb Kaizen Venners**, **DH Lorraine Gessho Kumpf**, **Sensei Myoho**, **DH Mukei**, **Jacque Rabie**, **Ty Jotai Webb**, and **Ben Ehrlich**;

To **DH Dharma-Joy**, **DH Etsugen**, **Sensei Senshin**, **Sensei Myoho**, **DH Jitsujo**, **DH Gessho**, and **DH Kaigen** for leading the Wednesday night Exploring Your Zen Practice;

To **Preceptor Earth-Mirror**, **Sensei Faith-Mind**, **DH Jitsujo**, **DH George Mukei Horner**, **Sensei Myoho**, and **Sensei Senshin** for their Dharma talks;

To our Day of Reflection leaders: **Glenn Gikai Davis**, **Julie Getsuan Suhr**, and **Jack Kuykendall**;

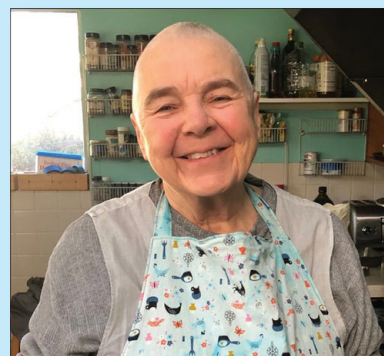
To our Ceremony of Atonement officiants **Sensei Myoho** and **DH Mukei**.

### *A Special Thank You*

To those who helped make possible Roshi Kodo's memorial: Roshi Egyoku, Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen, Peter Nyodo Ott, DH Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Reeb Kaizen Venners, Mujin Sunim, Diane Enju Katz, Penelope Luminous-Heart Thompson, Dylan Banto Neal, Chris Genzan Hackman, Jacque Rabie, Ty Jotai Webb, Diane True-Joy Fazio, Sacha Joshin Greenfield, Valerie Richards, Dwana Ekan Willis, and Tom Yudo Burger.

To those who helped make possible the Installation Ceremony for the Three Seats and Senior Resident: Roshi Egyoku, Sensei Faith-Mind, Sensei Darla Myoho Fjeld, DH Gessho, Brian Sotetsu Huff, Karina Myoki Beltran, Yudo, Jotai, Ben Seiko Allanoff, Craig Daigetsu Brandau, Nyodo, Banto, Kaizen, Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran, Mujin Sunim, Mike Radice, Hilda Bolden, Ian Dallas, Enju, Luminous-Heart, Nan Reishin Merritt, Frank Genku Martinez, and Jenny Jusen Bright.

### *A Special Thank You*



*Mujin Sunim  
Gives without giving  
Like a breath of fresh air.  
Has she asked You what your dream is?  
Every journey across the ocean  
Brings a teaching  
On how to cook our lives.  
Thank you!*

-Karina Myoki Beltran



**Corner of Disorder**

*Don't you  
think you're  
taking that  
"don't elevate  
yourself" a  
bit too far?*

by Sunshine



## ZCLA Affiliated Groups

**The Monday Night Meditation Group (Pasadena, CA)**  
*coordinated by Betty Jiei Cole*

**The San Luis Obispo Zen Circle (CA)**  
*led by Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood*

**Empty Hands Circle (Campinas, SP, Brazil)**  
*coordinated by Christina Tchoren Carvalho*

**Wild River Zen Circle (Nevada City, CA)**  
*led by Sensei Jeanne Dokai Dickenson*

**The Valley Sangha (Woodland Hills, CA)**  
*coordinated by Marc Dogen Fontaine and  
 Michael Jishin Fritzen*

**The Westchester Zen Circle (CA)**  
*led by Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley*

## Outreach Groups

**CMC Buddhist Fellowship Group  
 California Men's Colony (CMC)  
 (San Luis Obispo, CA)**  
*led by Sensei Mark Shogen Bloodgood*

*Contact [info@zcla.org](mailto:info@zcla.org) for information.*

*The Water Wheel is published quarterly by the Zen Center of Los Angeles, which was founded by the late Taizan Maezumi Roshi in 1967.*

**Our mission** is to provide training and resources for realizing the oneness of life, to maintain the precepts, and to embody the Three Tenets of Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action. **Our vision** is an enlightened world free of suffering, in which all beings live in harmony with each other and the earth, everyone has enough, deep wisdom is realized and compassion flows unbindered.

*Founding Abbot: Taizan Maezumi Roshi*

*Abbot 1995-1999: Roshi Bernard Glassman*

*Abbot Emeritus 1999-2019: Roshi Egyoku Nakao*

*The Three Seats: Abbot Sensei Deb Faith-Mind Thoresen,  
 Head Teacher Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith, and Head Priest  
 Rev. Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert*

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## Sangha Rites of Passage

**New Member**  
*Caitlin Brady*

**New Resident**  
*Corey Ryujin McIntyre*

**Dharma Holder**  
*Nem Etsugen Bajra  
 May 15, 2022*



*A close-up view of folded cranes.*

## An Invitation from the ZCLA Board of Directors

The Zen Center Los Angeles (ZCLA) is looking to grow its Board of Directors. ZCLA has been transmitting the teachings and training of Zen Buddhism for over 50 years. The buildings and grounds maintain the commitment of the many Zen teachers and students who have practiced here. ZCLA's Board of Directors oversees the taking care of all governance, legal, fiduciary matters, and operating expenses, as well as upholds the Zen Center's Mandala, Mission/Vision, Core Values/Practices, and Sangha Sutra. In order to extend the Mission/Vision, core values and practices to future generations we need diverse voices, new perspectives, and fresh ideas. Our world may benefit from the shared stewardship model that ZCLA has been developing so that we may face unrest, crisis, and transitions that lie ahead together. Those who sit on the Board have the opportunity to maintain a place for practice rooted in our Bodhisattva Lineage, and nurture the widest possible view. If you are a committed Zen practitioner, ZCLA member, or Zen Peacemaker interested in applying to join the efforts of ZCLA Board of Directors, Email: Muso, Board President at: [patti@peaceoverviolence.org](mailto:patti@peaceoverviolence.org) and Earth Mirror, Board Vice-President at: [billcorcoranem@gmail.com](mailto:billcorcoranem@gmail.com)