



Water Wheel

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

— Gate of Sweet Nectar

Diligence, Enthusiasm, and Zeal Practicing in the Year of the Horse

by Katherine Senshin Griffith



As we shed the introspective Year of the Snake, renewed and ready for change, the Year of the Horse gallops in with vibrant and spirited energy, symbolizing exploration, vitality, and momentum. This aligns with Right Effort, the sixth spoke on the Eightfold Path, and the fourth Paramita (Perfection) of Diligence.

This “effort”

has a more multidimensional meaning in the original Pali *vayama*, which has been translated as diligence, enthusiasm and zeal. Diligence implies attentive, concentrated perseverance; enthusiasm has the quality of thirst, urgent desire and passionate interest; and zeal refers to unflagging energy. What if we were to truly think of our effort as expressing diligence, enthusiasm and zeal? Right Effort equates to positive thinking, followed by focused action, with an attitude of steady and cheerful determination.

Right Effort along with Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are the spokes on the Eightfold Path that deal with the functioning of the Mind. The Pali word for “right” is *samma*, and it too is more multidimensional than in English. It’s not right or wrong, good or bad -- or even one size fits all -- but what is appropriate for every moment or occasion. *Samma* means to go along with, to turn together, literally to unite with.

We unite with the eternal source of existence, aligning ourselves with the laws that govern the universe. If we are not synchronized with the Way of Life, disharmony is created.



With diligent enthusiasm, we must commit to staying in sync! But sometimes, we encounter hindrances.

Buddha taught four considerations regarding Right Effort. First, make an effort to prevent unwholesome qualities, especially the three poisons (greed, anger and ignorance), from arising. Second, be diligent in extinguishing any unwholesome qualities that already have arisen. Third, make an effort to cultivate skillful beneficial qualities, especially generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom (antidotes to the three poisons) that have not yet arisen. And fourth, exert effort to strengthen the wholesome qualities that have already arisen. When the Right Effort is exerted, it covers the four functions automatically.

Unwholesome states relate to thoughts, emotions and intentions, and include the hindrances: sensual thoughts, doubts about the Way, restlessness, drowsiness, and ill will. Sensual desire is that which is unrestrained or immoderate regarding all the senses. In our contemporary sensory overloaded culture, it’s so easy to be immoderate or unwholesome. But if we commit to working with our non-beneficial habits, we can create a transformative fire which can transform our inner world.

We must apply ourselves wholeheartedly but without falling into a hyper-vigilance that is harmful. Wholehearted

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ENTHUSIASM AND ZEAL (*Continued from page 1*)

— but not fanatic. It's not about beating ourselves up or judging shortcomings but reenergizing our practice over and over with fresh calm commitment. Right now is a new moment.

Buddha gave the example of tuning a string instrument. If we let the strings get too loose, there's no music. If we keep it too tight, the strings will break. Know what your tendencies are. What keeps you from giving your all? Which habits hinder you, which help? The shadow side of your strength can be your weakness. The shadow side of your weakness can be your strength. So, this extinguishing and nurturing involves how you channel your core energy. If you are lazy, your strength may be ease or calmness, but you might need to balance with more exertion. If you are a very energized person, you may excel at enthusiastic action but might need to balance with stillness, patience, not doing too much, or not doing it all at once. If you struggle with self-discipline, the practices and container of the Zen Center are here to support you.

To simplify, ask: Right now, what is most beneficial? Additional guiding questions can be: Are my strings breaking? Am I exhausted or overwhelmed? What is draining my energy? Am I in avoidance mode, afraid to face something or leave my comfort zone? Am I holding onto a false ideal of perfection and not seeing Life as it is? Are my strings so loose, there's no music in my life?

The entry point can be our very suffering. The Cosmic Love of our Buddha consciousness wants to express itself. And when we are out of alignment, it gives us clues. Suffering is a call for attention, showing us what we need to attend to. Don't just push away your suffering. By truly facing it, we have the opportunity to grow and widen and deepen our awareness.

Right Effort also applies to how we are with short-term and long-term commitments. What enthusiasm do you bring to doing even small tasks? Are you putting your whole self into everything you do? What effort is needed for each action? Like hitting the bell in the zendo, you discover the sweet spot and learn about yourself in the process. With true alignment, it might even feel like doing nothing, letting the Universe guide you, with no excessive exertion. No doer, just the doing.

Do you have a diligent sustained commitment to practice? Dogen Zenji reminds us the Buddha said if you make diligent effort, nothing is too difficult. He goes on to say:

It is like a thread of water piercing through a rock by constantly dripping. If your mind continues to slacken, it is like taking a

break from hitting stones before they spark: you can't get the fire that way.

A commitment to the eternal return to meditation requires sustaining effort. We could use the words in our precept ceremonies to apply to our effort: "will you maintain it, will you really maintain it, will you really maintain it well?"

Right Effort equates to positive thinking, followed by focused action, with an attitude of steady and cheerful determination.

In the *Agama Sutras*, the Buddha describes different levels of spiritual responsiveness as four kinds of horses: the first horse is swift and on seeing just the shadow of the whip, takes to the appropriate path; the second acts with the whip's light touch on its hair; the third acts when the whip hits flesh; and the fourth acts only when the whip's pain penetrates to the bone. We might have each horse in us at different times. But all of us, regardless of our initial speed, can reach awakening through diligent practice, with the "worst" often achieving the deepest realization.

Dogen Zenji in Chapter 90 of his *Shobogenzo* says:

Horses that stand eight feet high are called dragon horses... There are few humans who are prepared to train such horses. There are also horses called thousand-league horses, since they can run a thousand leagues in one day. When running five hundred leagues, these horses are said to sweat blood, but after five hundred leagues, they speedily run on, refreshed...

We may aspire to be the Bodhisattva that is a dragon horse or thousand-league horse. To do so we must diligently pay attention to the Dharma whip. When we are centered in Dharma, we can be free to fearlessly respond to what is needed in each moment. Sometimes that might mean galloping ahead, sometimes taking the backwards step, sometimes just taking one step after another.

So, as we mount the spirited Year of the Horse, let's renew our commitment to Right Effort. With Diligence, Enthusiasm and Zeal, let's work to prevent and extinguish whatever hinders the way, strengthen all beneficial aspects, and above all keep going.

Sensei Daiki (Great Energy) Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

The Tyranny of the "Shoulds"

by Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



Zen practice is about closing the gap. What gap? The gap between myself and my Self. The gap between existing and living. Between being pulled around by the nose by the "shoulds" telling me how I "should" be living, and living freely.

In 1950, psychoanalyst Karen Horney published *Nervous and Human Growth*, which included a chapter titled "The

Tyranny of the Should." This point is one that is likely familiar to every Zen student, because this "should" – the gap between our actual self and our "idealized" self – is the core reason for our suffering. Indeed, while Dr. Horney was focused on the individual, each of us holds an entire world view about how the whole world "should" be behaving differently than it is, and every "should" is nothing but fodder to feed our suffering.

These "shoulds" are gaps that we create. Gaps within ourselves, gaps within how people behave and how we believe they "should" behave, gaps between how things are going and how they "should" be going. While we can't measure our suffering in a scientific way, if you wanted to try I would tell you to measure the width of the gaps that you are each creating between how things are and how you think they should be – the wider the gap, the greater the suffering. Or something like that.

As Joko Beck so aptly explains in her marvelous book, *Everyday Zen* – which is one of the most influential things that first brought me to Zen practice here at ZCLA in 1999 – our small-self ego is constantly moving through the world trying to arrange it so that it gets exactly what it wants: it's all about "me," and arranging everything to make "me" happy.

I'm reminded of the character Veruca Salt from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, whose standout song, "I Want It Now," has her proclaiming her (very long) list of things that she wants, with the threat to her wealthy father



that she will have a tantrum if she doesn't get them – right now! It begins because she wants a goose that lays golden eggs, which she finds in Wonkaland; in the end, she steps onto a scale that measures the golden eggs, and it declares her a "Bad Egg" and sends her down the chute to the garbage bin. If you haven't seen this scene (or this movie) since you began practice, I encourage you to watch it – it might have a deeper meaning than last you saw it!

Of course, poor Veruca is an archetype, but the power of an archetype is that it makes plain something that may otherwise be hard to notice. We are all Veruca Salt, and it doesn't help to deny it. What we want, and how we think the world should be forms the core of the world in our mind's eye.

Our practice is to learn to let go of this – all of this. At the entrance to the Pine House, there is a plaque that says "Learn to let go." (This admonition applies both to visitors and to residents!) This practice is all about letting go. We come to practice thinking that it is about gaining something – it may be modest, like "peace of mind," or it may be more ambitious, like "enlightenment." But we certainly believe that through this practice (and hopefully without having to do too much of it), I will "attain" the Way. And this is what brings us to practice, so that's great. We come wanting to get something, because we have a belief that either "I" or "the world" (which includes our family, friends, bosses, co-workers, pets, fellow citizens, presidents, and on and on) "should" be different and that through this practice I can fix myself or them.

Let me emphasize: there's nothing wrong with this! After all, as my teacher observed once, people don't show up at Zen Centers and start practicing when their lives are going well – there is some dissatisfaction or unease that brings us through the door. When we begin, we believe – mistakenly – that we will get something that will solve the problem. But as Uchiyama Roshi has stated, "gaining is delusion, losing is enlightenment." The losing – that's the letting go. So while a desire to gain something brings us, it is not what will keep us.

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"SHOULD'S" (Continued from page 3)

This letting go sounds easy, but our experience in practice shows us how challenging it can be. As Sengcan says in the Verses of the Faith Mind, “The Great Way is not difficult / just avoid picking and choosing.” Another translation begins “The Great Way is not difficult / for those who have no preferences.” This is why we call it *practice*. Going back to *Everyday Zen*, one of the most important things I learned from it was that this is not an instant gratification practice. And in this culture of instant gratification, it was good to know that going in.

While the practice itself is utterly simple, it is also challenging. I say this because I think it's important to recognize this challenge, which we all experience; otherwise, we can start to make ourselves crazy – “oh, look, that person over there seems so serene, this is so easy for them, and it's so difficult for me, I should be a better Zen student, I've been sitting now for __ weeks/months/years/decades, and yet I'm still a mess!” Sound familiar? We've imported our shoulds into our spiritual practice so that we can create even more suffering for ourselves – good job! It seems to me better to acknowledge that this is a challenging practice for each one of us, and that we are all in it together. What we can give each other is not enlightenment, but we can offer support. The value of Sangha practice is that we can give each other encouragement and support, to be there when we get discouraged, and to help normalize our craziness as shared craziness, just not private craziness.

Aside from our current Sangha (what I think of as the “horizontal Sangha”), I encourage you also to begin to find your place in the stream of practitioners from Shakyamuni Buddha on, through 2500 years and many generations (the “vertical Sangha”). One of the things I have appreciated most from the completion of my training and now as I work with students on koans is how much closer I feel to this long line of students of the Way. All of them sat and applied themselves, all of them came to practice full of “shoulds” and “gaps” and all of them devoted themselves to closing the gap, letting go. Not only do we have our contemporary Sangha to support us, but we are truly standing on the shoulders of so many who have come before us and who can act as guides and cheerleaders for us today – as we will be for the generations to come.

In the recent Year End Sesshin, our reading was the “Eihei Koso Hotsuganmon,” which is considered Dogen Zenji's statement of his personal vow. One portion of it always catches me, where Dogen Zenji writes:

“Buddhas and ancestors of old were as we; we in the future shall be buddhas and ancestors. Revering buddhas and ancestors, we are one buddha and one ancestor; awakening bodhi-mind, we are one bodhi-mind. Because they extend their compassion to us freely and without limit, we



are able to attain buddhahood and let go of the attainment. Therefore, the Chan Master Lung-ya said:

Those who in past lives were not enlightened will now be enlightened. In this life, save the body which is the fruit of many lives. Before buddhas were enlightened, they were the same as we. Enlightened people of today are exactly as those of old.”

Can you believe this? Do you believe that “we in the future shall be buddhas and ancestors”? I hope so. Otherwise, why are you practicing? This very short reading activates our Great Faith, our Great Doubt, our Great Determination. This determination is easier to support when we practice together, shoulder-to-shoulder in the Zendo, and shoulder-to-shoulder with the monk in the koan who is asking his/her/their teacher in all earnestness, and with the teacher who is doing his/her/their best to help that monk wake up.

How do we close the gap? We let go. How are we liberated from the tyranny of the shoulds? We let go. Over and over. Decades of conditioning, and a culture that tells us constantly that we aren't enough does not make it easy. So we make our best effort, and when we veer off course, we just return. Just return! No beating ourselves up – because that is just giving in to the should-story, creating more gaps. And doing it together does not make it easier, but it helps keep us going.

Uchiyama Roshi quotes his teacher, Kodo Sawaki Roshi, on the importance of practicing in a community: “Sawaki Roshi often said that a monastery is like a charcoal fire in a hibachi. If you put in just one little coal, it will go out right away. But if you gather many small coals, each glowing just a little bit, then the fire will flare up. In the same way, every one of us should contribute a little bodhi-mind and thus enable our sangha to thrive.”

As we enter this New Year together, let's earnestly strive to support one another in this practice of letting go. Happy New Year!

Sensei Dharma-Joy is the Abbot and Head Priest at ZCLA.

Living with Serene Radiance

by Darla Myoho Fjeld



Are you maintaining your samadhi, your deep, open awareness? I hope so. Samadhi is what creates the portal, the opening, for realizing our own inner radiance. This is your Buddha nature.

Case 39: "Unmon and a Mistake in Speech," from the *Gateless Gate* collection of Koans, goes like this:

A monk once asked Unmon, "The radiance serenely illuminates the whole vast universe..." Before he could finish the first line, Unmon suddenly interrupted, "Aren't those the words of Chosetsu Shusai?" The monk replied, "Yes, they are." Unmon said, "You have slipped up in the words."

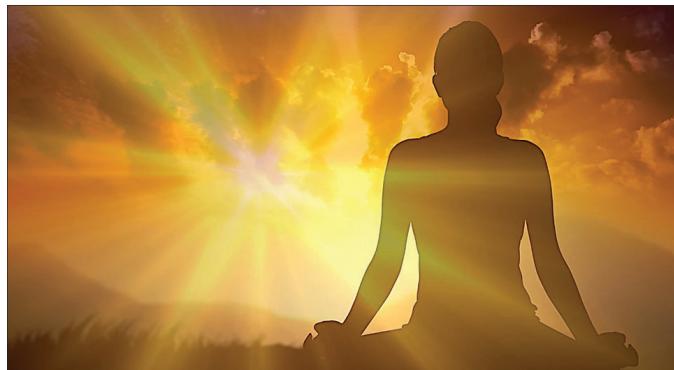
Afterwards, Zen Master Shishin brought the matter up and said, "Tell me, at what point did he slip?"

As I see it, when the monk replies, yes what I just said were the words of Chosetsu, his focus was on something outside of himself. He gets cut off before he actually asks his question, but when I read this koan, I assumed he would have said something like, "What is this radiance that Chosetsu refers to in his poem?" This would indicate to Unmon that the monk was way off course, because he didn't realize that Chosetsu only wrote his poem after realizing for himself the radiance of his true self. In the Dharma Hall at the Zen Center there is a painting of the Buddha on the back wall. It depicts the Buddha's glowing radiance. That's a painting of your own radiance – not the word "radiance," but what the word points to. The radiance is your true self.

Whatever words we use, miss the mark. We must realize that it's all about where the words emerge from. Are we in our brains when we speak or are we coming from the radiance that we have experienced? Have you ever thought about your words? Have you considered the kinds of questions you ask? Why do you say the things you say? In council, in face-to-face, to other Sangha members, to strangers, to family, to friends? Right speech is an important path. As Sensei Senshin reminded us recently: "According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha taught that Right Speech

should not be deceptive, slanderous or discordant, harsh or abusive, nor indulging in idle chatter or gossip." When we speak from a place of radiance the words are appropriate to the situation.

But Master Unmon sees an even deeper problem for the monk. Master Shishin, 200 years or so later, in a public talk with his students, brings up this matter and asks: Where did he slip up? The problem is that the monk is asking about radiance as if it is other than himself. He is filled to the brim with radiance and he doesn't see it. Radiance is before, after and during all words ever spoken. We must always take care not to indulge ourselves in fake enlightenment that we try to obtain intellectually.



Let's look into this Chosetsu who wrote the poem from which the monk recited the first line. Koun Yamada Roshi gives us a bit of background in his commentary. Cho is his family name – Setsu his first name that means "unskillful" -- but in ancient China it had a technical meaning of a person who has passed an exam for screening people for high government official positions.

Chosetsu began to study with Master Sekiso. The master asked him what his name was and Chosetsu said his name. The master hears his first name as "unskillful" and says: "Though you may try to discover the substance of unskillfulness, it can never be found. You say your name is Setsu. But where is unskillfulness?" What he is really asking is: What is your true nature? At that moment Chosetsu was deeply enlightened, realizing the empty radiance of all beings everywhere. He expresses this in a verse:

*The radiance serenely illuminates the whole vast universe,
Saints, common mortals, and other living creatures – all dwell
in one house.*

*When no thought arises, total oneness is completely manifested;
If the six organs move even a little, it is covered with clouds.
If you want to cut off delusive passions and thoughts,
the sickness increases all the more;
If you want to go towards absolute reality, this too is wrong.
In following the relations of the world there is no hindrance;
Both nirvana and life-and-death are no more than empty flowers.*

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SERENE RADIANCE (*Continued from page 5*)

In another Koan, Case 86 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, we see Master Unmon saying, “Everyone has a light. When you look, you don’t see it, so it is obscure. What is your light?” He answers himself and says, “The kitchen pantry and the main gateway.” This light that Master Unmon refers to is your true self. It is a light that cannot be objectified just as you cannot objectify your true self. Just as your eye cannot see itself directly, we cannot see the radiance within all beings directly. The only way to see it is to experience ourselves as it, and to do this without trying to achieve anything. We cannot move toward it, because we are it.

A Korean Zen Master named Chinul (1158-1210), the founder of the Korean tradition of Zen called this “taking back the radiance.” You do this by tracing the radiance back to its source. He saw that this would restore the mind to its natural enlightened state. Professor Robert E. Buswell Jr., the scholar who edited the *Buddhist Dictionary* that resides near the Sangha dining room, also wrote a book entitled *Numinous Awareness is Never Dark*. You can read this for free online. He explains the practice of tracing back the radiance, which involves turning our attention away from outward objects and bringing it back to awareness itself. Awareness is the ground of sentience. Professor Buswell explains that numinous awareness is fundamental to sentience that shines on sense-objects, lighting them up so that we can recognize them. When we turn our minds away from attachment to sense-objects and back to the fundamental source, we trace back the radiance or turn the light around. Another Korean Zen Master from the 18th century said: “It is like seeing the radiance of the sun’s rays and following it back until you see the orb of the sun itself.” Our practice of Zazen is a tracing back of the radiance to our fundamental nature of numinous awareness. This is our inherent capacity for enlightenment. It also makes Zazen possible. Buswell goes on to say that with Zazen our natural luminosity comes to shine through sense-objects, rendering them transparent and exposing their inherent voidness or *sunyata*.

Dogen Zenji has a fascicle in the *Shobogenzo* entitled “Radiant Light,” where he explains that all beings are illuminated by a radiant light that shows their oneness. He makes five points about this Radiance:

- Radiance illuminates delusion, that is, it shines a light on our delusions so that we can see clearly where we are deluded.
- Radiance is the Big Self. The entire universe is the radiant light of the Self.

- Radiance is the Buddha. Here he agrees with Master Unmon: the radiant light is everything including the Buddha Hall, the kitchen and the monastery gate.
- Radiance is the fundamental nature of the Mind. Tracing back the radiance uncovers the fundamental nature of the Mind as numinous, luminous awareness. Here we see he agrees with the Korean Master Chinul.
- Radiance is the radiance of now, of who you are in this very moment.

The radiance serenely illuminates the whole vast universe.

So how do we work with all of this? Our greatest teacher is Zazen. Our practice is to turn our attention from outward objects to awareness itself. This awareness is vast and wide and includes all beings and things. Roshi Grace Shireson in her book *Naked in the Zendo* writes about how “awareness is the self-reflective property of the mind that can grow in brightness, focus, depth, and quality.” For her radiance—awareness is when we find ourselves “in contact with a space that holds everything.” Here’s a passage from her book:

Actually, the light appears on its own when you become, rather than pursue, a unified presence; this is why Yunmen cautioned against seeking it. When you settle into your own being, and mind – you connect with your self. Naturally, your mind reflects the light of awareness. This light allows you to watch your own thoughts as they arise. Through finding the spaciousness, light, or luminosity in your mind, you can observe the subtle movements of the mind without being pulled around by them. You enjoy a sense of grounded connection while just watching what arises in your mind – no grasping and no averting. You develop an unfiltered intimacy with what is actually going through your mind and to the circumstances to which your mind is reacting.

All of these words I have shared with you are pointing to the original Truth of the Universe, the radiance that serenely illuminates the whole vast universe. This is the Aliveness that shines in all of us and this Aliveness will never die. This is not something to believe – it’s who you already are.

Sensei Myoho is a priest, on the Teachers’ Circle, and recently retired as ZCLA’s Temple Development Steward.

Serving and Shifting as Head Trainee

by Bill Tetsui Press



When I started sitting 30 years ago, I felt like a floundering fish finding water. I had a lot of energy and few commitments and I was suffering. It was a relief to dive into daily practice and into Sesshins. Everything else took a back seat. Then, over time, my depression eased and my life settled down. I found a livelihood that involved less suffering. I moved closer to my daughter, I

became closer with my parents, I met my wife, we had a son. Life seemed richer, more complex, and I felt happier. I also wasn't sitting as many Sesshins as I used to. That roiling pot of practice often quieted down to a simmer. I used to sit four to five Sesshins a year. Now, between work, time with the family, and visiting my parents, I was sitting maybe two, three at best. And when my teacher of two decades, Diane Rizzetto, retired from the Bay Zen Center, ZCLA became my primary sangha. I would come down to ZCLA from Berkeley a few times a year, and I started a small Zoom sitting group to support those with remote practices. Still, I felt a bit distant from the sangha.

Then, my teacher, Roshi Ryodo, asked if I would consider being Head Trainee. "What would that look like," I asked, "when I live so far from the Zen Center?" "Well," he said, "at the least you would have to come down and attend every Sesshin, maybe every Zazenkai, too. And it would be good to spend some time in residence at the beginning of Practice Period. And of course there's the Hossen ceremony." Beyond these commitments, I wasn't really sure I understood what it meant to be Head Trainee, but I knew I wanted to do it. I talked with my family – I have a teen at home and my adult daughter was due with her first baby in September – and in the spirit of plunging into practice, I said yes.

So, what was the year like?

When I stayed at Zen Center that first month in October, after my granddaughter was born, I tried to go to every sitting and service I could. I learned the rhythm of early morning in the Zendo, of officiating the evening and

temple guardian services. And over the course of the year, I did, indeed, come back for every Sesshin and Zazenkai. In February, I went to Yokoji for the first time for their winter Sesshin. I attended some kind of extended sitting every month. This helped keep that pot of practice hot, and reminded me how to practice in my everyday life.

Amidst all of my responsibilities as Head Trainee, a lot happened last year in my personal life: one set of parents moved from the east coast to live near the California family, which was a big transition for all of us; some strife in another part of my family; a concussion in the spring; and a health issue that came up in the late summer. How did being steeped in practice help? It reminded me that the only place I need to be is exactly where I am, in the midst of whatever's arising: taking care of my parents, feeling dread about family conflict, dizziness from the concussion, worrying about my health. I also found my awareness sharper when trying to escape discomfort with one of my preferred distractions (e.g., thinking, reading novels, browsing online).



Serving in this role didn't just benefit me; it's a service position. I knew this, and yet I came to appreciate this more deeply. Being Head Trainee required showing up – showing up for sitting in the Zendo or on Zoom, showing up in classes, showing up for Sesshins, Zazenkais, and Tangaryos – providing encouragement for others by being a steadfast presence. It also meant serving by helping wherever I could. In the July Sesshin, I was a monitor, Zoom host, meal leader, samu leader, dish cleaning coordinator, and chanter.

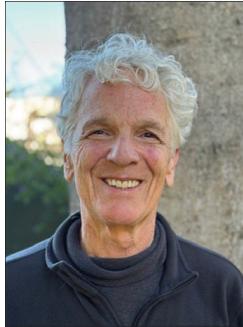
Too overloaded to get in my head and worry about what I was doing, I stopped second-guessing myself. It became effortless to help others.

Something else shifted over the course of the year, too. My time at Zen Center was filled with small, important sweetneses: being invited over for a meal, a movie night in the Dharma Hall, spontaneous dinners. When I started the year, I felt like a fellow practitioner. When I ended the year, I felt like a friend. Today, I feel deeply enmeshed with the fabric of the sangha. When I look at the fan my teacher gave me, I feel gratitude. When I come back to town and walk through the gate, I feel like I'm home.

Tetsui served as the 2024-25 ZCLA Head Trainee.

Pandemic Gifts

by Rich Taishin Schulhof



Few of us will forget the first weeks of the pandemic. I was running the Los Angeles County Arboretum, and beginning in April 2020, practically all public open spaces closed. Just when people most needed connection with the natural world, the Huntington, Descanso, and natural areas shut their gates. In a few days, the Arboretum was the go-to public natural site in the north San Gabriel Valley.

I contacted the health department to ask how we could stay open. They replied “adhere to every protocol;” little did I know that the protocols would change every few days. Our front-line staff team, the people most at risk, bravely kept us in compliance and we became one of seven major botanic gardens in the country remaining open throughout the pandemic.

People came in droves, far more than at any time in the Arboretum’s 75-year history. Masked and carefully spaced, they lined up outside our gates, seeking the peace and healing benefits of nature. But apprehension and fear were palpable. Yellow caution tape draped across benches and drinking fountains.

With so many in need, how could we best serve? The team jumped in. Taking turns, we would welcome people at the gates or take a golf cart to cover the Arboretum’s several miles of paths, engaging with visitors. Our job was to make them feel welcome and safe, and help the situation as best we could. For me, connecting with so many people in those stressful weeks brought a new focus to my practice.

Three upayas (skillful means) became my guides, beginning with my early morning sitting and helping me throughout the day. As the weeks passed, three became one.

1. Settle the mind. Every day in those early weeks, I could feel my mind racing like a trip hammer, one thought quickly begetting another. For me, the pandemic was an accelerant, propelling worries, fears, and endless to-do lists. And how did I slow the mind? Curiously, I found simply focusing awareness on the energy that was driving my thinking, rather than the thoughts themselves, could move my mind closer to stillness. Under the light of direct seeing, the fear and anxiety would begin to fall away.

Every morning before going out to greet the public, a few minutes sitting in my golf cart, calming my mind, was essential.

2. Feel the breath. I once practiced at a vipassana center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, focusing on a sutra called the *Anapanasati*. This series of 16 meditations explores the breath and its many manifestations. For years, my practice was just the breath, and when the pandemic began, it was there for me. I remembered a business article that refuted the idea of multi-tasking, saying that we can only do one thing in any single moment. And in those anxious Covid days, it was true! I found I could reach for my breath, deeply feel its movement, and there would be breath and nothing else. In those weeks the breath became my constantly present companion, anchoring me to the earth.

3. Really Listen. My most challenging practice was deep listening. There was so much emotion. To really hear people, even when they are saying hard things to you, is not easy. Not everyone liked the fact that the Arboretum was staying open. Some people yelled, “you’re a threat to public health.” Another called me a “monster.” In that situation, how could I not judge, not think about what I should say in response, but just deeply listen.

Thich Nhat Hanh knew much about listening. On a trip led by one of Hanh’s students, my wife Seiju and I visited Vietnam to trace his life and teachings. We learned that after the war, Hanh vowed to do all that he could to heal the people of his country after decades of conflict. To make his teachings accessible to as many people as possible, he created simple meditations and hymns. Beautifully calling forth the spirit of deep listening, he wrote,

We aspire to learn the buddha’s way of listening is to relieve the suffering of the world. Buddha, you know how to listen in order to understand. We evoke your name in order to listen with all our attention and open heartedness. To listen without any prejudice, without judging or reacting. We will listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what has been left unsaid.

For all of us during the pandemic, so much was unsaid but understood. For me, interactions beyond words remain present: the man furiously yelling that people were walking unmasked; countless visitors thanking us for staying open; the young masked child taking my hand to see a lizard. Also remaining are skills that helped me connect with people and saw my practice grow.

Long-time ZCLA member Taishin recently retired from his job at the Los Angeles County Arboretum.

Moving On

by Darla Myoho Fjeld



Back in 2013, I agreed to take on the job of Temple Development Steward, while I was still teaching philosophy at El Camino College. I was fortunate to have Yudo Burger as my assistant and Mary Rios as my

guide. The first thing I did was save the Zen Center money by finding a more affordable printer for the Annual Fund appeal letter, and going paperless for the Dharma Training Fund. Each year, the Board would agree what our fundraising goals would be for the year and I would do my best to reach it.

This year, I made the difficult decision to step away from development to allow younger people with more social media experience to take over. In addition, after 55 years of working one to three jobs since I was 11 years old, I'm ready to retire from paid work and will be drawing on my Social Security. Some of my jobs were mowing, babysitting, dishwashing, paper routes, fast food, waitressing, security guard, pizza delivery, director of SANE, coat check, data entry, research associate for the study of theological education, political campaigns in New York, Food and Hunger Hotline, Outweek Magazine, grassroots organizing, housecleaning, playwright and director, daycare, corn detassler, and philosophy professor. I had to put myself through school. When I was a child, I worked to pay for anything extra, such as going to the movies. I was raised primarily by my mother who worked in a factory, and I didn't think that she should be the only one working. She instilled in me my work ethic.

For me, development work at the Zen Center involved outreach to let people in Los Angeles know about the Zen Center in addition to fundraising. Our Sangha is so welcoming and friendly that I knew that anyone who walked through our gates would want to keep coming back.



My philosophy on fundraising is that the Zen Center is giving people a chance to practice the paramita of generosity and it gave me and others the chance to practice gratitude. I also see generosity through the lens of Shared Stewardship where everybody is invited to take responsibility for the fiscal health of the Zen Center. I have been blown away and even moved to tears over the years by the generosity of our Sangha that has helped us reach or surpass our financial goals for most years even during the Pandemic. I also see development as a way to fulfill my vow to keep planting Dharma seeds wherever I can. I am also grateful to the Sangha members that served on the Development Circle over the years – Patti Muso Giggans, Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert, Sensei Jeanne Dokai Dickenson, Rosa Ando Martinez, Reeb Kaizen Venners, Betsy Enduring-Vow Brown, Mike Salerno, John Kyogen Rosania, John Plum-Hermit Swanger and Geri Meiho Bryan. There were also others that served the Development Circle before my time.

I love my life as a Senior Citizen and as the lady of our Palm Springs house. I'm up every morning by 5 a.m. and at first light, sweep leaves and trim bushes and trees. I also hand water all the trees on our property and feel the gratitude emitted from all of them. I do the shopping, cooking, laundry, and clean the house. I also clean our apartment at the Zen Center. These tasks are great ways to practice samadhi and bring me joy.

I can now focus on what makes me most happy: being a priest, a preceptor and a Zen teacher. My central vows are to see reality as it is and to serve others in any way I can. I also plan to reach out to the Boys and Girls Club in Palm Springs to see if there are volunteer opportunities. For me, every day is a good day. Sending love, joy and gratitude to all of you who have supported the Zen Center over the years.

Sensei Myoho is a Zen priest and teacher. At ZCLA, she also led the Executive Circle and served on the Board of Directors for many years.

2025 Fall Practice Commitments

We acknowledge with gratitude the following 142 practitioners who made formal practice commitments for the 2025 Fall Practice Period.

ZCLA

Alan Taigen Turton
 Aaron Mason
 Ben Genkai Ehrlich
 Betty Jiei Cole
 Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran
 Bill Tetsui Press
 Bill Ware
 Brian Sotetsu Huff
 CaLisa Lee
 Carrie Helgeson
 Cathy Vartuli
 Chen Wang
 Chris Daian Fields
 Chris Genzan Hackman
 Conrad Butsugen Romo
 Corey Ryūjin McIntyre (also SLO)
 Craig Daigetsu Brandau
 Darla Myoho Fjeld
 David Shealy
 Diane Enju Katz
 Diane True-Joy Fazio
 Dylan Bantō Neal
 Dylan Lake
 Eleanor Joen Heaphy
 Ellen Jagosz
 Frank Genku Martinez
 George Mukei Horner
 Glenn Gikai Davis
 Hannah Seishin Sowd
 Jack Kuykendall
 Jane Radiant-Joy Chen
 Japhy Grant
 Jason Walton
 Jenny Jūsen Bright
 Jerry Grenard
 Jessica Oetsu Page
 Jitsujo Angyo Gauthier
 John Haukoos
 John Kyogen Rosania
 Josh Cretella
 JT Reager
 Julian Kijun Hixson
 Karina Myoki Beltran-Hernandez
 Katherine Senshin Griffith
 Kathy Myoan Solomon
 Kipp Ryodo Hawley
 Lorraine Gessho Kumpf
 Lukas Wagner
 Mak Muan King

Marinel Mukherjee
 Marley Jakuan Dowling
 Marsha Cifarelli
 Mats Borges
 Mike Radice
 Pam Myogetsu Smith
 Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher
 Rachel Torres
 Reeb Kaizen Venners
 Rey Barcelo
 Richard Taishin Schulhof
 Roberta Myodo Brehm
 Robert Harinam Jagosz
 Ryan Rockmore
 Ryan Sozan Schneider
 Sacha Joshin Greenfield
 Sandra Seiju Goodenough
 Sebastian Wadier
 Sheri Christopher
 Toby Keido Rider
 Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert
 Tom Yudo Burger
 Ty Jotai Webb
 Wendy Egyoku Nakao

Bambushain Zen-Center

Aachen, Germany
 Andreas Seijun Rampelt (also ZCLA)
 Antje Huke
 Eva Jiun Neumann (also ZCLA)
 Julia Sandlöbe

Empty Hands Circle
Campinas, SP, Brazil
 Cristiano Krepsky
 Edson Reuter
 Eduardo Pompeu
 Giovana Umbuzeiro
 Gyokuzan Geraldo Fonseca
 Hongaku Sebastião Ferreira
 Jion Carmen Ferreira
 Kakuon Camilla Abbehausen
 Kōun Bruno Fernandes
 Leonardo Picanço
 Myōkan Maria Vargas
 Seikai Jacqueline Cabrerizo
 Taidō Diego Barbosa
 Tchōren Christina Carvalho (also ZCLA)
 Tenryū Lucas Schuster

Joyful-Mind Sangha

Rolling Hills, CA
 Dai Takano
 Eiji Noguchi
 Eriko Imaizumi
 Hajime Nakamura
 Hideki Yamashita
 Ikuo Komura
 Jun Ohzuno
 Kunio Sakihara
 Naoko Yogi
 Natsuko Takamura
 Nem Etsugen Bajra (also ZCLA)
 Nobu Soi
 Ren Toshie Miura
 Shinichi Ito
 Takashi Umezawa
 Toshio Horiba
 Yae Dobashi
 Yoko Gyokuren Bajra (also ZCLA)
 Yokomizo Hajime
 Yoshiko Fukushima

San Luis Obispo Zen Circle (CA)

Amber Seishin Harmon
 Chris DeMartini
 David Zoller
 Deborah Fuku-an West (also ZCLA)
 Derek Tōshin Ó Corraín
 Eduardo Kyōzen Zambrano
 Elham Khodabandehloo
 Gary Kōshin West
 Geoff Kanjō O'Quest (also ZCLA)
 Harry Hōetsu Heck
 Joe Jikai Johnston
 Mark Shefrin
 Mark Shōgen Bloodgood (also ZCLA)
 Mary Beth Ross
 Megan Foot
 Michael Daishi Tevlin
 Nico Larson
 Peggy Johnston
 Rachael Taijun Rayburn
 Russell Rinkai Rayburn
 Salvatore Kusala Solorio
 Sara Mikkelsen
 Steve Sumi

California Men's Colony
 Gregory C. Sal C. Jovan M.
 Terry F. Joseph H.

Inside the Training Hut

by Nem Etsugen Bajra

1.

I built a small hut where nothing is mine.
Morning light enters—dust floats in silence.
I sweep the floor, boil rice, sip tea.
The hut looks rough, yet it holds the Way.

2.

The one in the hut lives quietly,
using what is at hand, grateful for each thing.
News of gain and loss drifts like clouds.
He trains himself—and whoever comes near.

3.

From a desk no wider than a tatami mat,
he reaches students across the world.
Grounded in Zazen, resting in Not-Knowing,
he listens to their work, their worry, their life.

4.

People arrive—some through the gate,
some through a screen that glows faintly.
They learn to sit upright, breathe, and vow:
“For the sake of all beings, I will do good.”

5.

Together they discover—no one sits alone.
Joy and sorrow, gain and loss,
are waves of the same ocean.
Still, they keep returning to the cushion.

6.

Their work ripens with meaning;
their days unfold in a life of vow.
They meet the ancestors in the stillness,
and glimpse the true face within.

7.

Let go of the trophies of knowledge.
Walk bare-handed, curious, alive.
Thousands of books and teachings
—Rafts merely to cross the stream.
Here, in this hut -
ah, the sweetness of persimmon.

After studying The Song of the Grass-Roof Hermitage by Shitou (700-790), Sensei Etsugen wrote this poem reflecting on his own practice.

Dharma Words Bodhi Day December 8, 2025

Sandwiched between over-stuffed holidays and worldwide divisions, we silently empty out, united with crisp air, lingering moon, alert lizard, and the caw caw caws of dawn.

Dear Shakyamuni Buddha:

2500 years ago, when you exclaimed, “Wonder of Wonder, I, the great earth, and all beings simultaneously achieve the way,” we were there! In whatever formless form, we were there.

Just as you are here. We’ve never been separate! Can never be otherwise.

Thank you for showing us that
and for all your teachings.

Boundless thanks for your Great Awakening –
simultaneously with us!

The morning star still shines.
Our fathomless awakening continues.

All Together Now.

.....

*Great enlightenment right at this moment
is not self, not other.*

[Dogen Zenji]

Katherine Daiki Senshin Griffith

Corner of Disorder



Photo by Mary Francos

A Heartfelt “Thank You!”

To our Sesshin and Zazenkai leaders: **Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley, Senseis Lorraine Gessho Kumpf, Nem Etsugen Bajra** (Autumn Wind); **Sensei Jitsujo Gauthier** (November Zazenkai); **Senseis Katherine Senshin Griffith and Darla Myoho Fjeld** (Rohatsu); **Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert** and **Roshi Mark Shogen Bloodgood** (Year End);

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To **Senseis Dharma-Joy, George Mukei Horner, Gessho, Etsugen, Jitsujo, Myoho, Senshin, Roshi Shogen, and Dharma-Holder Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran** for their Dharma talks;

To our Zazen instructors, assistants and zoom hosts: **Cliff Shishin Collins, Chris Daian Fields** (Co-Steward), **Diane Enju Katz, Diane True-Joy Fazio, Frank Genku Martinez, Ben Genkai Ehrlich, Jenny Jusen Bright** (Co-Steward), **Sacha Joshin Greenfield, Seiju, and Mentor Sensei Mukei**;

To **Sensei Jitsujo and Roshi Shogen** for stewarding the Bearing Witness to Life on the Streets Zen Pilgrimage;

To our Dharma Chat leaders: **Sensei Dharma-Joy and Roberta Myodo Brehm**: Posture Check; and **Mats Borges**: Discipline; and to **Conrad Butsugen Romo** (Steward); and to **Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror** for leading a Sunday Council;

To our Sesshin, lunch, snack and breakfast tenzos and assistants: **Butsugen, Carrie Helgeson, Dylan Lake, Hilda Bolden, Jerry Grenard, Jim De Santis, Josh Cretella, Joshin, Julian Kijun Hixson, Kyle Dion, Mats Borges, Mike Radice, Myoki, Myodo, Ryan Rockmore, Steven Skye, and Preceptor Betty Jiei Cole**;

To **Senseis Etsugen, Gessho, Myoho, Senshin; Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror and Preceptors Jiei and Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher** for leading the Exploring Your Zen Practice classes;

To **Sensei Dharma-Joy and Sensei Senshin** for offering Public Face-to-Face and continuing to lead the Hidden Lamp Study;

To the leaders of the Aspects of Zen Practice class: **Senseis Etsugen and Gessho** (Steward), **Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror, Preceptor Jiei and Brian Sotetsu Huff, Enju, and Genku**;

To our Q4 Day Managers/Head Monitors: **Reeb Kaizen Vanners and Jusen** (Zendo Co-Stewards), **Daian, Keido, John Kyogen Rosania, Sensei Mukei and Mats Borges**;

To those who clean our Altars: **Aaron Mason, Joshin, Jusen, Kaizen, Kijun, Mats Borges, Ryan Rockmore, Sotetsu, and Sensei Mukei**; and to the Jishins who care

for the Founders room: **Senseis Dharma-Joy, Gessho, Jitsujo, and Myoho; Glenn Gikai Davis, Joshin, Jusen, Keido, Kyogen, Myoki**;

To our Q4 Jikidos: **Eloise Hess, Genkai, Japhy Grant, Kijun, Mike Radice, Rey Barcelo, Ryan Rockmore**; To our Q4 Jishas: **Corey Ryujin McIntyre, DH Earth-Mirror, Genkai, Gikai, Jane Radiant-Joy Chen, Joshin, Kaizen, Keido, Kyogen, S. Mukei, Myoki**;

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To **Sensei Dharma-Joy, Kyogen, Kaizen, and Myoki** for the Service Position Training class;

To **Kyogen and Enju** for stewarding the Winter Clothing Drive;

To all those who helped with the New Year's Eve celebration. ■

Sangha Rites of Passage

Hossen

Bill Tetsui Press

Juji Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley

October 12, 2025

Head Trainee Leave Taking and Shuso Entering

Bill Tetsui Press (Head Trainee)

Glenn Gikai Davis (Shuso)

October 19, 2025

New Members

Kyle Dion

David Dennis

Bonnie Myosen Nadzam

In Memorium

Walter Genei Van Vort

June 4, 1947 - November 20, 2025

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