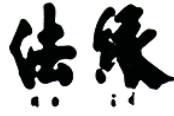




**d**harma  
CONNECTION

The Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji

2010



### Daily Schedule

*Joza (unstructured sittings): Wednesdays, 5-5:45 a.m.; Thursdays through Tuesdays, 6-6:45 a.m.*  
 Sundays, 9 a.m.-12: chanting service, zazen, teisho or dokusan  
 Mondays, 7-7:45 a.m.: short service, zazen  
 Tuesdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m. and 6-7:30 p.m.: zazen  
 Wednesdays, 6-7:45 a.m.: chanting service, zazen  
 Thursdays, 7-7:45 a.m. and 6-8 p.m.: short service, zazen  
 Fridays, 7-7:45 a.m.: short service, zazen  
 First Thursday of the month: tea and discussion following zazen  
 Second Sunday of the month: Dharma Study, 7-9 p.m.  
 Tibetan practice: Saturdays, 12-1:30 p.m.; Mondays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.  
 First Saturday of the month: Tibetan Dharma Study, 1:30 p.m.

*Newcomers welcome; please arrive at least 20 minutes early for instruction in sitting posture and zendo procedures*

### Sesshin Schedule

*Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi will be installed as abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo at 1 p.m. on 1/1/11, at a ceremony in the Catskills monastery. As abbot of a combined Sangha, she will lead sesshins, the traditional intensive meditation retreats, in both locations: four times a year at the Zen Center of Syracuse and nine times at DBZ. Each sesshin begins at 7 p.m. on the first day, and concludes at 5 p.m. on the last day at Hoen-ji (ending times differ at DBZ). For details, fees or to purchase Jihatsu (bowl sets), e-mail admin@hoenji.org. More information also is available on the website, [www.zencenterofsyracuse.org](http://www.zencenterofsyracuse.org).*

#### 2010 sesshins

Rohatsu Sesshin: Nov. 30-Dec. 8, DBZ; additional daily sitting at ZCS

#### 2011 sesshins

Martin Luther King Jr. Sesshin: Jan. 12-17, DBZ  
 Winter Sesshin: Jan. 27-30, ZCS  
 March On Sesshin: March 10-13, DBZ  
 Holy Days Sesshin: April 1-9, DBZ  
 Spring Sesshin: April 21-24, ZCS  
 Nyogen Senzaki Memorial Sesshin: May 7-15, DBZ  
 Anniversary Sesshin: July 2-10, DBZ  
 Summer Sesshin: July 22-29, ZCS  
 Summer Samu Sesshin: Aug. 5-10, DBZ  
 Golden Wind Sesshin: Sept. 24-Oct. 2, DBZ  
 Fall Sesshin: Oct. 20-23, ZCS  
 Harvest Sesshin: Oct. 29-Nov. 6, DBZ  
 Rohatsu Sesshin: Nov. 30-Dec. 8, DBZ.

### Dharma Connection

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## Letters

Greetings to all Dharma sisters and brothers,

Although I am far from Syracuse and Hoen-ji, my practice is still close at hand, and I try to incorporate it into my daily life.

I am working at an animal sanctuary – Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center in Long Island – as a naturalist educator. I work mostly with injured birds of prey, such as hawks, owls and falcons. My practice helps me to work on a different level with these stunning birds.

It is so important to be present to understand how the birds are feeling, and what I should do to make them feel more calm and secure. There have been times when I was not fully present, and I have minor scars to prove it.

No words can describe the feeling I get when I am holding our red-tailed hawk, Ishka, and really connecting with her and bringing that energy to a classroom of squirmy third-graders. It is amazing how the whole room goes silent when I have her in my hands!

I consider myself to be extremely fortunate to work with these beings, and to offer them my nen, as best I can. I would like to just thank everyone at Hoen-ji for having an impact on my life in an immeasurable way. I miss everyone dearly, but I feel the Sangha's love in my heart every day.

Kofu Carol-Anne Pugliese



---

Dear Sangha,

This came to me on the drive back from First Thursday sitting tonight.

*Roshi is the artist.  
Syracuse is the canvas.  
The Sangha members are the colors on her palette.  
With love, compassion and wisdom, she brushes, strokes, paints  
and sculpts.  
Hoen-ji – The Dharma*

Daiku Linda Piddock

When Shinge-shitsu Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi delivers her first teisho as newly installed abbot at Dai Bosatsu Zendo on New Year's Day, it will mark the first time a woman has assumed that role in an American Rinzai Zen monastery.

Her installation also will open a new chapter for the Zen Studies Society following the retirement of its founder, Eido Tai Shimano Roshi.

And for Shinge Roshi personally, adding the Dai Bosatsu abbotship to her existing duties at the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji represents both a major new challenge and the coming-to-fruit of a lifetime of dedicated Zen practice.

"I'll be commuting between DBZ and Hoen-ji, doing about 13 sesshins a year," she says. "It's a demanding schedule to say the least, but an exciting time for renewal in both personal and organizational realms."

To deal with her absences from Hoen-ji, Shinge Roshi has appointed a Tisarana Council, comprised of four ordained people, two senior Sangha members and two dedicated practitioners, to help oversee the daily practice schedule.

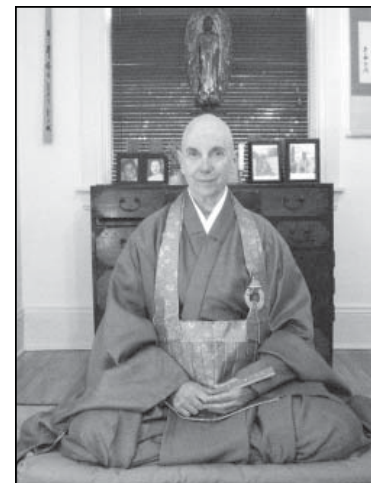
"They will help nurture, support and maintain the warm, rigorous spirit we have created at Hoen-ji," she says. "Everyone's being asked to step up to the plate, and it's making their own practice stronger. We have a very committed Sangha, a very dedicated group of people, and this is going to allow everyone to grow." She also will look to the Zen Center's board of directors for continuing administrative support.

At this autumn's Golden Wind sesshin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, she made a strong connection with Sogen Yamakawa Roshi, abbot of Shogen-ji in Gifu, Japan. He has been a guest teacher at DBZ over the years through his Dharma friendship with Eido Roshi, and he indicated he would continue his periodic visits.

Shinge Roshi, who was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., set forth on the Dharma path at an early age. With the loss of her father in World War II, as well as the deaths of both grandfathers and news of family members who

## A New Abbot for DBZ

By Zenshin  
Michael  
Haederle



*Shinge-shitsu Roko  
Sherry Chayat Roshi in  
the kaisando*  
Photo by Jishin Betsy  
Robson

had perished in the Holocaust, she was confronted at an early age by life's impermanence.

"I wanted to know about the changeless, the ultimate realm," she remembers. After her mother remarried she lived briefly in New Mexico, but mainly grew up in New Jersey. She began sitting on her own, not knowing what it was; in eighth grade she learned that there was an actual practice called Zen Buddhism. Over the next half-dozen years she devoured the handful of books about Zen that were then available in English.

She majored in creative writing at Vassar College. After graduating in 1965, she moved to New York. She met a young monk named Eido Tai Shimano at the Zen Studies Society, embarking in 1967 on a teacher-student relationship that has evolved over four decades. She also studied with Soen Nakagawa Roshi and Hakuun Yasutani Roshi on their visits to the United States.

An integral part of what is often referred to as the Dai Bosatsu Mandala, she was present at New York Zendo when the decision was made to purchase the property in the Catskills, and was co-director of the first residential community there while the monastery building was under construction, from 1974 to 1976. She and her first husband, Lou Nordstrom, then moved to Syracuse, where they led a sitting group that had started in 1972 on the Syracuse University campus. After their marriage ended in 1979, she married Andy Hassinger, and in 1981 their son, Jesse, was born. She began sitting with MyoOn Maurine Stuart at the Cambridge Buddhist Association, and was given lay ordination by her in 1985.

She received full ordination from Eido Roshi at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in 1991. He installed her as abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse after it moved from her attic to its new home on West Seneca Turnpike in 1996, and gave her spiritual transmission as an osho in 1998. In 2008, he performed the shitsugo ceremony, recognizing her as a roshi.

In addition to fostering a community-oriented practice at Hoen-ji, Shinge Roshi also found time to publish widely as an arts writer and serve as editor for a number of major books on Zen in the West. She compiled, edited and wrote the introduction for *Eloquent Silence: Nyogen Senzaki's Gateless Gate and Other Previously Unpublished Teachings and Letters*. With Eido Roshi and Kazuaki Tanahashi she compiled, translated and edited *Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Soen Nakagawa*. She also wrote the introduction to, compiled and edited *Subtle Sound: The Zen Teachings of Maurine Stuart*. She serves on the Zen Studies Society board, belongs to the Round Table of Faith Leaders of InterFaith Works, and is a member of the American Zen Teachers Association.

Of the circumstances that led to Eido Roshi's decision to retire following Rohatsu sesshin this December, she says, "One of the good things that's happened as a result of these stormy times is that there's a new openness, a new willingness to look with clear eyes at the fact that people who are deeply wise and deeply compassionate also have their own human karma. After all,

disillusionment is a necessary part of our practice – to cut through all our illusions is essential."

Shinge Roshi sees an evolving relationship between Hoen-ji and Dai Bosatsu – between lay and monastic practice. "We will be one Sangha," she says. "People at both places will inspire each other."

In her role as abbot, she says, "I want to honor our rich Dharma lineage, from Hakuin Zenji to Gempo Roshi, Soen Roshi, and Eido Roshi; from Soyen Shaku Roshi to D.T. Suzuki and Nyogen Senzaki. At the same time, I am committed to strongly upholding and adhering to the ethical principles so well articulated by our Buddhist precepts."

In maintaining the rigor of Rinzai Zen practice, she is dedicated to doing so with "an understanding of the compassionate nature of formal practice; to see it as holding, rather than repressing. True freedom is found through gladly embracing discipline. At the same time, it's important not to get caught up in a superficial regard for form that then becomes rigid and cold. We are here to grow into our bodhisattva nature. What I want to emphasize, whether at Hoen-ji or Dai Bosatsu, is that we are making a commitment to wake up to our true nature. That is the essence of our practice. It cannot be forced or rushed; we have to allow it to unfold."

Looking ahead five or 10 years, she says, "I would like to see a few more of the very serious students I have now at Hoen-ji training and/or being ordained at Dai Bosatsu and then returning to Hoen-ji and helping to guide the practice here. I envision the development of a Dharma heir or two as a result of this kind of working together."

Shinge Roshi acknowledges having some misgivings about the added responsibilities she is shouldering, given that she already has what amounts to a full-time job.

"There are many ways in which this will be tremendously difficult for me," she says. "One is even to imagine filling Eido Roshi's shoes – his Dharma eye is quite brilliant, and I feel mine is perhaps only a little glimmer, so people will have to grow with me and be patient with me. Then, of course, there's teaching and administering in two places; and most importantly, building and deepening relationships of mutual trust and understanding."

As the transfer of the abbacy approaches, Shinge Roshi reflects on how the new challenges embody the realization of her decades of Zen practice.

"I just feel so grateful for my training at DBZ with Eido Roshi and for my ability to work with this remarkable Sangha in Syracuse," she says. "My reason for being is to be a vessel of the Dharma, so if I now feel I'm being asked to do more than I can – which is probably true – I know the only way is to trust in the Dharma."

"When we stretch ourselves, we find out that what we thought were our limits were just self-imposed limitations. What is required is to be open, clear, and ready to respond." □



## The Taproot of Our Practice

By Shinge-shitsu  
Roko Sherry  
Chayat

At Dai Bosatsu Zendo's Golden Wind sesshin, we received the remarkable teachings of both Eido Roshi and Yamakawa Sogen Roshi, the abbot of Shogen-ji in Japan, one of the main training monasteries of the Inzan lineage of Rinzaï Zen. He is also abbot of Kokoku-ji, the historic temple through which the *Gateless Gate* entered Japan more than 750 years ago. Yamakawa Roshi is young, in his early 60s and a brilliant teacher. He has a beautiful face – very compassionate – but you really feel an inner core of steel at the same time. His book of teishos on the *Gateless Gate*, given at DBZ over the years and published in 2005, is well worth reading.

The two roshis alternated giving dokusan and teisho. Not only were we inspired by their talks; we could also

*How deep is our vow? How do we cultivate the taproot of our practice so that no matter what happens in our lives – and we've certainly seen how a great storm can roar through and disturb us in all kinds of ways ... – no matter what happens, the tree of our practice remains steadfast, upright and deeply rooted.*

experience how two different Zen masters might work with a student in very different ways using the same koan. I really enjoyed every teisho. Yamakawa Roshi would speak a few phrases in Japanese, and a delightful Japanese woman who seemed to have appeared at just the right time for this sesshin translated. She

was very dramatic, conveying his quiet theatricality so well. Then Eido Roshi would speak in English, and she would translate into Japanese – Yamakawa Roshi had come with five monks from Shogen-ji, and there were several other Japanese practitioners there.

Yamakawa Roshi tells great stories, and in a way, he is like a kindergarten teacher of Zen – he presents these stories in ways that are directly accessible, yet resonantly profound. They come from ordinary experiences: somebody he happened to meet, or something he noticed. And before you know it, they plunge you right into the core of the koan for that particular teisho.

Among the stories, three in particular really stand out for me. One was told to him by a teacher who overheard a conversation between two girls. They were very excited

about a plan to spend the weekend together at one of their homes, and each wanted the other to promise to do that. But they couldn't remember the word for promise. Yamakawa Roshi told us that there's another very similar word in Japanese that means desperation, or "hurling yourself away." The teacher overheard them using that word instead of the word for promise: "In desperation and throwing ourselves away, we'll spend the weekend together!" That's our Zen practice, isn't it: our promise is our vow – and it requires us to throw ourselves away. With a feeling of utter desperation, we hurl ourselves away in this practice.

Another story could be titled "Zen Training for an Angry Swan." Yamakawa Roshi was taken to a resort after a sesshin in Zurich, where he encountered a swan that kept biting him whenever he tried to feed it. This very angry Swiss swan, the leader of a group of swans, had become so accustomed to being fed by tourists that he was like a spoiled child. The swan just assumed that everything was coming to him. Over the ensuing day Yamakawa Roshi trained the swan to take food from his hand without biting. The story was an admonition to us all not to be like spoiled children – or swans – feeling entitlement instead of gratitude.

A third story came up in two different teishos, and had to do with how pines are grown on a tree farm. A pine tree doesn't need its main root, or taproot; it can get its nourishment and water from its side roots. So on a tree farm, they cut off the taproot. The side roots expand, growing close to the surface. Of course it's easier to take a tree out and sell it when it doesn't have a taproot growing way, way down. So people buy these farmed trees and plant them, and then what happens? Remember our Labor Day storm? These trees have no depth; they look beautiful until some traumatic event comes along. This is a really clear metaphor for our practice. How do we train? How deep is our vow? How do we cultivate the taproot of our practice so that no matter what happens in our lives – and we've certainly seen how a great storm can roar through and disturb us in all kinds of ways, shaking our faith, right? – no matter what happens, the tree of our practice remains steadfast, upright and deeply rooted.

Golden Wind Sesshin was really a restorative time. We had all been shaken in many, many ways, and it was as though that autumn week's climate mirrored those upheavals. When we arrived, the weather was beautiful and clear and quite warm, with trees in all their glory; Beecher Lake glittered in moonlight that first night. Then everything changed. What seemed like several storms came through; it turned out to be the same storm circling back. After sesshin we learned that it was called Tropical Storm Nicole. The winds were so powerful, blowing gusts of perhaps 70 miles an hour; the rain was shooting sideways into the zendo. The windows and doors were open – we were at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, after all; why would we keep the elements out? My glasses, when I put them on after sitting, were so completely coated I couldn't see

through them. The torrential downpour continued for a second day, a third day, and then we had a gorgeous day, and then: the storm came back! The last night was raining, raining, raining, and by the morning of the last day of sesshin we had waterfalls coming down off the mountain. The courtyard was a pond. The trees were stripped of nearly all their gold, orange and red, and were almost bare. The road was washed out in several places. People were working on that, and we were able to get out, but it was a very dramatic drive down the mountain.

We felt so grateful for the opportunity to really get that taproot deep in the ground; to “get down,” and realize that we could be okay; that whatever shakes us is just a storm passing – maybe cycling back, but a storm that helps us grow. It gets rid of unnecessary branches, shakes us to the core, leaves us stripped bare – to the bare bones of This Matter. A monk asked Ummon, “How will it be when leaves fall and the trees are bare?” Ummon replied, “Golden wind revealed.” So it was really a profound sesshin. And it was an opportunity for me to engage in a good, long-term “promise” – a hurling-myself-away promise – with Yamakawa Roshi.

Bodhidharma is considered the first ancestor of Zen, having come from India to China in the sixth century. Most of you are familiar with the story of his encounter with Emperor Wu of China, after which he went and sat in a cave, facing the wall, for nine years. You may remember Andy Ferguson talking about Bodhidharma last spring. His book, *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, tells the story of how Bodhidharma, who had at least four disciples gathered around him (despite the fact that he was hiding away in a cave), gave transmission to one of them, Huike, or Eka, as we say in Japanese pronunciation. After nine years, Bodhidharma told his disciples, “The time for me to return to India is at hand. Can each of you say something to demonstrate your understanding?” Imagine how loaded that moment was. To hear that from your teacher, “Okay, I’m going back to India now. Can you tell me your understanding?” It’s not that different from when one’s teacher says, “I’ve decided to retire. Now it’s up to you!”

Bodhidharma’s disciple named Dao Fu said, “As I see it, it is not bound by words and phrases, nor is it separate from words and phrases. This is the function of Tao.” Most of you know the Zen maxim attributed to Bodhidharma: a transmission outside the scriptures – outside words and phrases – not relying on letters, pointing directly to one’s mind; the attainment of buddhahood by seeing into one’s nature. So Dao Fu said, “It is not bound by words and phrases, nor is it separate from words and phrases.” Bodhidharma told him, “You have attained my skin.” In other words, I see your understanding; it is skin-deep. Then another disciple spoke, a nun named Zong Chi. She said, “According to my understanding, it is like a glorious glimpse of the realm of Akshobhya Buddha. Seen once, it need not be seen again.” She had had a glorious glimpse into this vast realm. Once

you see it, that’s it! Bodhidharma told her, “You have attained my flesh.” Her understanding went down a little deeper. The third disciple, Dao Yu, gave this answer: “The four elements are all empty and the five skandhas are without actual existence. As I see it, there is not a single Dharma to be grasped.” Bodhidharma said, “You’ve attained my bones.” Pretty good, huh? Getting right to the bone? Thereupon, Huike – Eka – bowed, and stood up straight. He just bowed, and stood there, a firmly rooted tree. Bodhidharma said, “You have attained my marrow.” Can you feel the taproot? The very marrow revealed.

This was how Bodhidharma taught his disciples, and this was how they expressed their understanding. The following is from “The Bloodstream Sermon,” from *The Zen Teachings of Bodhidharma*, translated by Red Pine (a close friend of Andy Ferguson – they often organize trips to China together with American Zen groups).

“Everything that appears in the three realms comes from the mind.” Everything that appears – whatever we are looking at, thinking about, feeling ... everything to which we attribute some unchanging reality is actually just coming from the mind. “Hence buddhas of the past and future teach from mind to mind without bothering about definitions.” It’s mind to mind, pointing directly to one’s mind. No need for definitions, for classifications. Just mind to mind. Then a questioner asks Bodhidharma, “But if they don’t define it, what do they mean by mind?” Bodhidharma replies, “You ask. That’s your mind. I answer. That’s my mind. If I had no mind, how could I answer? If you had no mind, how could you ask? That which asks is your mind.” When you think about this, “That which asks is your mind,” perhaps you sense that there’s something in you that asks that has nothing to do with any knowledge that you’ve been told to acquire. There’s a question that wells up. It’s not about making sense of someone else’s definition or category. It’s a question that comes up independently of everything that you have been taught. It’s coming from this mind. That which asks is your mind. That which brings you to practice is your mind.

“Through endless kalpas without beginning, whatever you do, wherever you are, that’s your real mind, that’s your real buddha. *This mind is the buddha*”

(as Baso Zenji put it in Case 30 of the *Gateless Gate*) “says the same

*With a feeling of utter desperation, we hurl ourselves away in this practice.*

thing. Beyond this mind you’ll never find another buddha. To search for enlightenment or nirvana beyond this mind is impossible.” And yet we often think that there must be something more, something better, something we need to find out there, right? Let’s go look for it. Who, or what, is going to look for it? What gave us the idea that there was something to seek? As Hakuin Zenji puts it in “The Song of Zazen,” “At this moment, what more

need we seek?" There is an original question that wells up, that is asked by none other than your own mind. But because you've been trained to think it must be somewhere else, you feel you had better go look for it. Bodhidharma continues, "The reality of your own self-nature, the absence of cause and effect, is what's meant by mind." The absence of cause and effect – in other words, pointing directly to this mind. The reality is not your emotional reaction to what is going on around you, but the original source, before cause and effect. Or we might say, the still center of the turning wheel, to use a Western metaphor. The turning wheel in this metaphor is not turning the wheel of Dharma, but the endless round of cause and effect. All those spokes come out from the center, but when you return to One, when you plunge down to the taproot of your practice, no wind can knock you over. There's no reactivity; no movement. It's absolute stillness. This is the reality of your own self-nature.

"Your mind is nirvana. You might think you can find a buddha or enlightenment somewhere beyond the mind, but such a place doesn't exist," Bodhidharma tells us. "Trying to find a buddha or enlightenment is like trying to grasp space. Space has a name but no form."

Just as Buddha has a name but no form, right? Mind – like space – has a name, but what's its form? Scientists try to study it, but they can't grasp it. Then Bodhidharma says, "It's not something you can pick up or put down." Or put in a petri dish to study with a microscope. "And you certainly can't grab it. Beyond this mind you'll never see a buddha. The buddha is a product of your mind." It's that something extra that you've projected. Therefore, you think you have to go out there and get it. "Why look for a buddha beyond this mind?"

What's wrong with looking for a buddha beyond this mind, you might ask? Isn't that what aspiration is all about? You may think, "If I create some ideal called buddhahood, then I'll be a better person as I aspire to become a buddha." But what happens when you do think that way? When you get some glimmer of the mind that is nirvana, you try to capture it; you try to grab it, and then what? You push it outside; it becomes a product. Bodhidharma says, "If you think there's a buddha beyond the mind, where is he?" Is he on the altar? Up in the heavens? "There's no buddha beyond the mind, so why envision one?" Don't waste your time making something up, as if what you already are – your fundamental buddha-nature – isn't good enough.

Then he says, "You can't know your real mind as long as you deceive

yourself." So here you are, your real mind is nothing but buddha – but you're deceiving yourself, thinking that this real mind must be something different from buddha; that buddha must be something separate from you. It's a terrible deception, and you don't need to engage in it at all. Because, he says, "As long as you're enthralled by a lifeless form, you're not free." There's a koan about this in *Entangling Vines*: One cold day, Zen master Tanka visited a temple, took the wooden buddha down from the altar and set it afire, warming himself by the blaze. As you might imagine, the priest of that temple was horrified. He said, "How can you burn our wooden buddha!" Tanka replied, stirring the coals, "I'm burning it to retrieve the holy relics." The priest asked, "How could there be relics in a wooden buddha?" Tanka said, "If there are no relics, please give me the two attendant images to burn!" The koan ends with the sentence, "The priest's eyebrows fell out." In other words, his preaching of the Dharma was false – thinking the buddha was an image on an altar. Enthralled by a lifeless form, he was not free.

It's a cold day; let's get warm. "If you don't believe me," Bodhidharma says, "deceiving yourself won't help. It's not the buddha's fault. People, though, are deluded. They're unaware that their own mind is the buddha. Otherwise they wouldn't look for a buddha outside the mind. Buddhas don't save buddhas. If you use your mind to look for a buddha, you won't see the buddha." You may know the saying, "The eye cannot see itself." E-y-e, and I. Capital I cannot see itself; when it tries, it deceives itself. "As long as you look for a buddha somewhere else, you'll never see that your own mind is the buddha. Don't use a buddha to worship a buddha." So you might say, "Well, why do we bow, then? Why do we have all this ritual around an image of the buddha?" After all, it's just to remind us that *it's in here*; this very mind.

Sometimes an artist's spiritual representation can remind us that it is truly our own mind. When we stop deceiving ourselves; when we let go of all our projections, then we can feel that what we are seeing is in actuality a reflection of our own mind. And indeed, when someone carves a buddha, he or she is, ideally, in a state of buddha-mind. You can feel that in really good images. When an artist is not in that state, what comes out does not inspire; it is merely a work of art. So you become more discerning the more you practice. When you see an image, and you feel immediately, "Oh, yes! Yes, this is my mind," you know that the artist was one with buddha, and then, with great skill, created something that could remind people "that their own mind is buddha." It is not some object. It mirrors your own mind. Whether it's a tangka or a statue, it speaks to you. Many museums have wonderful Asian collections. You can stand in front of a buddha image, and it's kind of okay, but then you move on to another image, and you're just blown over. There's nothing left except buddha-mind. Mind to mind. This happened to me in Nara. We visited Chugu-ji, a small sub-temple of Horyu-ji built by Prince Shotoku for his mother and used ever since as an imperial convent. It wasn't on the tourist path, but

*...when you return to One, when you plunge down to the taproot of your practice, no wind can knock you over. There's no reactivity; no movement. It's absolute stillness. This is the reality of your own self-nature.*

there were a few people who knew about it. The main image was an amazing carved wooden figure, considered a Kannon, but also thought to represent Maitreya. Her graceful figure and enigmatic smile radiated compassion, and I was just mesmerized.

“Don’t use the mind to invoke a buddha,” Bodhidharma continues. “Buddhas don’t recite sutras. Buddhas don’t keep precepts. And buddhas don’t break precepts. Buddhas don’t keep or break anything. Buddhas don’t do good or evil.” Maybe this is hard to understand, but it’s when you separate from your buddha-mind, when you think it must be out there, in some more evolved manifestation that you must seek to become, that you find yourself breaking precepts. “To find a buddha you have to see your nature.” In other words, you have to awaken to your own buddha-nature. Then, of course, it’s no longer a matter of finding a buddha; it’s a matter of just being the buddha you are. “Whoever sees his [or her] nature is a buddha.” Having been gripped by the delusion of seeking it out there, you suddenly come to the realization that there is no “out there.” *There is no delusion!* It just falls away! From the beginning, the delusion was a projection; something that you added to your own true nature. But, as Bodhidharma warns, “If you don’t see your nature, invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, and keeping precepts are all useless.” So when we commemorate Bodhidharma, when we chant and make offerings, we are doing so mind to mind, true nature to true nature. Therefore, it is not at all mere ritual. Not mere tradition. Yes, we honor certain forms, but it’s not about the forms. If it is about the forms, then Bodhidharma will turn away in disgust, as he did from Emperor Wu, who wanted to know how much merit he had attained by “invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings, and keeping precepts.”

Don’t we receive any merit at all through doing such things? you might ask, feeling like Emperor Wu. Bodhidharma tells us, “Invoking buddhas results in good karma, reciting sutras results in a good memory, keeping precepts results in a good rebirth, and making offerings results in future blessings – but no buddha.” So yes, honoring the forms does keep you out of trouble. While you’re bowing to the Buddha, you’re not shooting someone! But no buddha, because you’re bowing to “a buddha” – something outside. Therefore, no buddha. Still, it’s a good thing to have these expedient means. They help, perhaps; they help you get to the point of waking up to the fact that there is no gap. Mind is buddha. Just is. “To find a buddha, all you have to do is see your nature. Your nature is the buddha, and the buddha is the person who is free: free of plans, free of cares. If you don’t see your nature and run around all day looking somewhere else, you’ll never find a buddha. The truth is, there’s nothing to find. But” – you knew there was a “but” here, right? – “But,” he says, “to reach such an understanding you need a teacher and you need to struggle to make yourself understand.” These are key points.

In one of his teishos, Yamakawa Roshi used Case 33 of the *Gateless Gate*,

Baso’s “It is not mind. It is not buddha,” because he said it is too easy for people to just grab onto the idea that “this mind is buddha” and complacently go along their deluded ways. Or they might hear Hakuin Zenji’s “Sentient being are primarily buddhas” and think, “Okay, I don’t need to practice.” So, this BUT! is very important. But! Work with a teacher, someone who can point this out to you. And struggle. You might say, “Well, why struggle? My mind is already buddha, there’s no need to struggle, nothing to search for, nothing to seek, so I might as well go watch TV.” We have this laziness in us. We have this entropy, right? “OK, I’ll take it on good faith that I’m already a buddha. So why bother with practice? What’s to practice, what’s to seek, since I’m already a buddha.”

It’s so easy to miss the point, out of this karmic laziness. You must struggle. “You need to struggle to make yourself understand. Life and death are important. Don’t suffer them in vain.” Life and death. Life and death. You have this life, this temporary, short opportunity to awaken, to know for yourself this mind, sometimes called buddha, sometimes called true nature, sometimes called liberation. “The mind’s capacity is limitless and its manifestations are inexhaustible.” “Limitless” means no form whatsoever. “Manifestations” means all forms, simultaneously! Limitless, boundless, and manifesting everywhere. Today’s beautiful breeze in the clear sunlight, rustling the leaves. “Seeing forms with your eyes, hearing sounds with your ears, smelling odors with your nose, tasting flavors with your tongue, every movement or state is all your mind. At every moment, where language can’t go, that’s your mind.”

Shibayama Zenkei Roshi, who was the abbot of Nanzen-ji monastery, wrote *A Flower Does Not Talk* and commentaries on the *Gateless Gate*. In the former, he explained the word “mind” as Bodhidharma was using it, saying that it represents “Fundamental Absolute Truth. The Mind here doesn’t refer to thought or emotion, nor does it refer to human psychology which is an object of scientific research. It is not the consciousness, nor the psyche which is dealt with by psychiatrists, either. When we go beyond all these, wash them off, and transcend their limitations, for the first time we can reach the Mind which is also called Buddha Mind, the Absolute Mind, the Spirituality, or the Truth.”

But let’s not call it anything, OK? We have such great fortune to be able to come together this way, sitting together, searching for what we think is out there, over and over and over again, until we come to see that we’re just making something up, and then, finally, we plunge down, and discover the absolute stillness at the very center of it all. □

*peering out from a burl  
mushrooms look like baby birds  
wet autumn morning*

*– Shinge Roshi*



## Mindfulness in the Woods

By Cathy Shrady

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

– Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

**T**welve college students contemplate this quote daily (it is posted in their composting toilet) as they participate in St. Lawrence University’s Adirondack Semester. Just as programs abroad immerse students in other cultures, this program immerses them in nature.



Yurt in the Adirondack woods

They live deliberately and simply in a yurt<sup>1</sup> village, in the woods on a lake at a remote site in the Adirondacks. The village is powered by a solar array, requiring awareness and economy of energy consumption. There is no cell phone service here, and students forgo the use of other electronic devices, including computers. No Facebook, Twitter, texting or instant *anything*. They have discovered the

art, joy and patience of letter writing and eagerly anticipate their weekly mail delivery. Most of our food is from local farms, and the students cook for themselves, learning to make wholesome meals and bake bread, understanding that their meal preparation is a gift to the community.

Their days literally consist of chopping wood and carrying water and other chores to maintain the village, in addition to carrying a full-semester load of university courses, optional wood-working class and organized hiking, rock climbing, white-water paddling and other trips for recreation and class.

Awareness is the theme that subtly underlies this program; students study the natural and cultural history of the Adirondacks, take a creative expressions course and consider Western and indigenous approaches to nature while they attempt to live sustainably with as little impact

as possible in this beautiful landscape. I have the great good fortune

Cathy Shrady is director of Outdoor Studies and the Adirondack Semester, associate professor of geology at St. Lawrence University, Canton, NY

of being director of this program. It requires me to live on site several days a week and teach one of the courses. My days there often begin with a paddle on the misty lake and zazen on the dock as the sun rises and the loons call. And yes, they pay me for this!

Though the setting itself is skillful means, how best to introduce the concept and practice of mindfulness to this group of 18- to 20-year-olds, something I wanted to incorporate into my course? As it so happens, Jikishin James Douglass, who is now a resident at Hoen-ji, is a very recent graduate of St. Lawrence *and* an alumnus of the Adirondack Semester. I invited him to give a mindfulness workshop, thinking that the students were likely to pay far more attention to their contemporary and peer than this fifty-something professor.



Jikishin James Douglass meditating with his peers

And they did. Jikishin did a magnificent job! His gentle, centered presence was noted by all, and he was entirely convincing when he enthusiastically declared, “Mindfulness can be FUN!” He instructed and led us through a series of short practices: sitting, walking, mindful eating. And, he introduced a STOP! exercise that became their homework: choosing a sound – meal bell, loon call, chattering red squirrel, laughter – it was up to the student. Whenever they heard their chosen sound they were to stop for the count of three deep breaths and refocus before resuming whatever they were doing. In their journals, all the students wrote that they enjoyed this exercise, and several were so taken by it that they planned on continuing the exercise throughout the semester, even though it was only a two-week assignment.

Jikishin’s masterful teaching is best illustrated through the beauty and power of the students’ own words. They *got* the message. Following are some excerpts from their journals, published with permission.

*“I am sitting here on a quest to be mindful. I pick at a piece of bark, fingering the puzzle-like layers, so neatly packaged together. There is a little bird: brown with a beige belly. It hops from branch to branch of a small tree looking at me, twisting its head to every side, twitching in a curious way. I turn my head at it, mimicking its curiosity. The wind is blowing, consistently, sometimes towards my left, sometimes towards my right. Then far off it grows as right here it subsides, then the gust comes to me and I can no longer hear those far off winds. Maybe that’s what mindfulness is: being able to hear those far off winds even as the closest gusts swirl about me.”*

– Christine Biles

*“Class on Tuesday was exactly what I needed. The day before I had felt overwhelmed and had lost all confidence ... but after class I felt alive. It allowed me to focus on life here. That this is it. ... But most of all, more than mindfulness, he reminded me that I was lucky to be here.”*

– Courtney Davis

*“Sitting in our lotus positions with our knees touching the earth immediately widened the individual ‘self’ to encompass much more than just me. Movements in my body send out small vibrations throughout the soil. These vibrations are faint, but detectable nonetheless. I imagine earthworms and other insects in the soil feeling these movements. In doing this, I am connected to the soil, the animals in the soil, and essentially the Earth. With this one small movement of touching my knees to the soil my entire sense of self shifted. In the past I was thinking of self as something that was mine to begin with that I could give out. I think self is something that was never really ours to begin with. The self has always been shared because it is no one’s for the taking. It’s possible and even probable that the word self has only recently come to mean me or mine.”*

– Lindsay Houston

*“Sometimes you have to get lost to enjoy the experience of being found even if the only one finding you is yourself.”*

– Krysia Kornecki

Other exercises we have done in class have used sounds to focus attention and we have examined the difference between silence, quiet and stillness:

*“Rising and falling as I breathed, the earth breathed me. I felt stillness both around and inside me. All was calm, even the wind. But I did not have a sense of silence. My mind spoke to itself and the wind and animals and bugs spoke as well.”*

– Christine Biles

*“Quiet: hushed still whisperings of the cogs of the world turning, everything moving but at a lower volume level. Stillness: everything at rest, hardly any motion, tranquil and peaceful. Like a blanket of snow just recently dumped on a landscape and everything is in its burrow or nest. Magical, sacred.”*

– Emilie Wetzel

*“I focused on the sound of leaves falling. I heard a large gust of wind and then loud, distinct sound of leaves falling. As the detached leaves fell through foliage, they created a clapping sound. The leaf in transit ... sometimes dislodged other leaves. It was like the trees were applauding.”*

– Thomas Roseen

*“It’s all music. And when the wind combines with the hemlock needles gently falling down the bark and a Belted Kingfisher chrrrring by, Nature has started a symphony.”*

– Matthew Bartolotti

One chilly, wet September morning we sat by the cozy wood stove holding class in the kitchen. The assigned readings were about water. After about an hour of discussion and the fire so warm, the yawning started, just as another rain shower began beating on the metal roof.

“Bathing suits on NOW! Meet at the dock!” The students looked at me, astonished, but did as I asked.

“Immersion in water experience – everyone in the lake!” And we all (myself included) jumped in the lake.

There was no yawning during the remaining hour and a half of class! More excerpts from student journals:

## Rake Leaves

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves.  
Body...mind...occupied*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves.  
Bird sings...cars pass.*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves.  
Breeze coats skin, stirs hair.*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves.  
Why didn't I...why don't I...*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves  
Body...mind...song...sky*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves  
Breeze...bird...hair...car*

*Breathe in  
Breathe out  
Rake leaves*

*Breathe in, Breathe out, Rake leaves.*

–Amy Doherty

"I think one of the most important aspects of class today was our discussion regarding living in the now and how it lends itself to those moments where you feel really alive. I thought the comment questioning how much of our lives we live in the past or think about the future was very powerful ... It seems that we really don't spend all that much time living in 'the now.' I think our meditation exercise confirmed this, how most of us couldn't even make it to 10 breaths focusing solely on the now, but would have to restart every few breaths. When we dipped into the water this morning that was certainly a 'now moment.' It was cold and that's what we all felt, we weren't reminiscing about a ski vacation or a sunny day at the beach, but rather living in the moment of the goose bumps and shivering bodies, the cold toes we only hoped the warmth of the kitchen would restore. Not reliving the past, or planning how to do it next time, it was now. This was very refreshing (and certainly woke us all up a bit) but it was only after discussing 'now' that I realized there was more to jumping in the water than a way to mix up our morning class."

– Luke Reed

Often, as I read their journals, I catch my breath, humbled and awed by the depth of insight, wisdom and sheer beauty of the writings of ones so young. They can rival Thoreau and give me much hope, these, my students – my teachers. □

<sup>1</sup> *Our yurts are modern adaptations of the structure used by central Asian nomads for centuries. They are like durable and insulated wood-and-canvas round tents.*

### Dark Water, One Frog

*Dark water, one frog  
water skaters make circles  
July birds singing*

*Summer haze  
dappled fawn hesitates  
leaps over puddles*

*Red berries, green leaves  
willows finger water  
man running dog*

*Old willow drinks  
its reflection in the pond  
Canada geese.*

*Another July  
American flag swims underwater  
And you?*

*Jewel weed  
nothing to pop  
too soon or too late?*

*Weeding woman  
spreads petals in the grass  
new life*

–Amy Doherty

## Zen Photo-synthesis

By Myorin Catherine Landis

During summer's silent retreat, we were supported by many beings, visible and less so, two-, four-, six- and no-legged. Heavy rains the first few days drew out little mushrooms, parades of them filling the path – Nyogen Senzaki appearing among us. By Day 7 they are all but gone, a few blackened stipes only remaining.

Nature is *here*, not at a "nature center." Cicadas. Waxwings. Whimsical clear notes of song sparrow from down near the creek. Even a robin, late in the year, singing at moments near dusk and dawn. Full moon, Saturday night, and a star at dawn, daily. So you should think in this way of all this fleeting world. Turkey vultures. Scum. *Cannibis*, discovered while dog walking, with a handy watering bottle next to the pot (it looked dry so I gave it a drink). At night, tree crickets, rhythmic pulses of northern true katydids. Just names for this sea of surround-sound in the shadow of the earth.



Jade chrysalis  
Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Windows wide open, air coming and going. Listening practice, all day. Vehicle noise, rising and falling, sometimes a siren, wailing and fading away. At night, short bursts of static electricity from insects in the trees, creatures with eyes like the tiniest spheres of dew, reflecting the cosmos. We might say *Amblycorypha oblongifolia*, but that is just a name for it, a label in a language soon to be gone. One of these katydids perched on my tent in broad daylight, placid insect with leaf-like wings, needle-thin legs. Northern true katydids, blinking trills of tree crickets. Bats, barn swallows, fireflies, wrens. Clouds of moths fly up with every step along the path, walking the dog. Tracks of raccoon and muskrat impressed in the soft mud near the creek.

Meanwhile, within a jade chrysalis, pendant from switchgrass, a caterpillar combusted, reworking its flesh from milkweed worm to flaming monarch. Despite the outward appearance of stasis, a crucible of change.

As sesshin deepened, I experienced the plasticity, fluidity of this milieu we call "property." Call it "nature," "cicadas," "sky," – just names that reinforce the apparent solidity of forms. From the star at dawn to the bubble in the stream. □

## O-Bon at Auburn Sangha

*The Sho Shin Sangha, started in 2008 at Auburn Correctional Facility, held its second O-Bon celebration on Sept. 16 and 17. Tommy, a member of the young Sangha, gave a Dharma talk on Sept. 16. This letter was written the following day.*

Dear Zen Center friends,

May this find you well and enjoying a strong practice.

This evening, when study group ended, it concluded our two-day observance of O-Bon. Sho Shin Sangha has greatly benefited from this observance. I wish you all could have been there.

Everything ran smoothly and compassionately. The volunteers, Jikyo, MyoEn and Nancy, brought their expertise from scheduling the two days, to assigning officers, to creating a convivial environment supportive of the practice, to serving meals that were out of this world (probably the healthiest and tastiest meals I've had in months), to leading us through the ceremonies, to being there for us individually. So I guess in a way you were there, through their actions and kindnesses.

We contributed as well, of course. We were told a few weeks before that it would be a big help if we could make our own decorations. Boy, did we. Creative, creative, creative. Of course, origami was available, but so were streamers, wind charm-type decorations, crocheted bears, fish, boats, beautiful snowflakes that decorated the floor and were visible for kinhin.

## Sho Shin Sangha Dharma Talk

*The following Dharma talk was given by Petros Bedi on June 18 at Auburn Correctional Facility. It was typed by Michael Shane from handwritten notes.*

**W**hen I first came to Auburn, I didn't know if there was a Buddhist group. I told myself that if there was I would not get too involved. I'd just participate in the services and keep doing my in-cell practices. I told myself that I already knew what to do, and if I needed any Dharma advice I'd write to Zen Mountain Monastery.

In the back of my mind was the question, "Why don't I want to get involved?" For awhile now, I have questioned myself when I plan to do things in a certain way or when I

I was so happy that the Sangha produced these beautiful decorations because it showed their dedication and commitment. The public talks and readings were terrific and heart wrenching. Tommy's Dharma talk brilliantly illustrated the power of the practice to help us end conditioned cycles (like violent ones). Nancy's reading of "Please Call My Name" was heart wrenching. Jikyo's instructions and insights were helpful.

This experience reinforces what a Buddhist community can be. We are incarcerated Buddhists and don't have access to Sanghas, retreats, Buddhist websites, music, etc., but the one thing most precious to us all are the Three Treasures. By reaching in and out, we create this interweaving of intentions to practice, to transform the world through Dharma. This is something worthwhile for us to continue to work toward.

As Jikyo ended the services this afternoon, she took us through a guided O-Bon visualization. We each had our own lantern, and in our hearts, we met you at the Zen Center and walked with the lanterns down the long path and eventually ended up on the water's edge. It is dark and the only light is coming from the lanterns. We release them into the water and they begin to move away. After awhile they blur, and we are left with one another. Thank you for bringing us along! Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, Bodhi svaha heart sutra.

In Gassho,  
Michael Shane Hale  
Auburn Correctional Facility

try to avoid something. This helps me to get to know my mind better by seeing if there are any hidden reasons. Questioning myself, I saw that I don't get involved with people or groups easily. I became a little suspicious about this. Maybe this was a defense mechanism that I'm not aware of and don't want to be aware of. The funny thing is that my path unfolded in such a way that I'm here with the group doing the Dharma talk. I'm getting more involved than I had planned.

Last Friday, Jikyo asked Tommy and me how long we had been practicing before we came to Auburn. I thought Jikyo was just curious; then I realized she wanted one of us to do the Dharma talk. By the time I realized this, it was too late. I had just finished bragging about practicing for nine years with the Buddhist group in another prison. I agreed to do the talk.

Back in my cell, I said to myself, "If I knew about the talk, I would have told Jikyo that I had been practicing for awhile," giving the impression this wasn't



a very long time. She probably would not have asked me. As I considered the various ways I could have avoided doing this, I became aware of my resistance and questioned it. I saw that coming here and talking about my practices and challenges was a challenge in and of itself for me.

I decided that whatever I say, I have to be honest. Otherwise, what is the point. Being honest as much as I can with myself is part of my practice. I have agreed with myself not to be in denial about things that I don't like about myself. In this way, I would like to know my mind better and not suppress anything, but work with it and try to understand its causes. I don't mind letting my defenses down with myself. The mind is tricky and suppression can happen without being aware of it. But if I am on point, my awareness will increase and I'll better understand how the mind does things.

Being honest with myself is one thing. It is not that hard, relatively speaking. Being honest with other people ABOUT myself is not as easy. When I remember to watch my mind during interactions with others, I see how skillful the mind is in manipulating circumstances and even manipulating itself. I would like to be true to myself and others. I think this would be to experience freedom.

Over the years I have been conditioned to perceive myself and the world around me in a certain way. The way I do things is determined by this conditioning. Sometimes, I try to act in a way that projects an image of myself that I would like or that I think others would like or accept. I think others do this, also. I think the majority of people do it to a certain extent. For example, here in prison, we like to project a tough-guy image, an image of someone who doesn't snitch, or associate with certain classes of people.

When I speak with people, especially when I meet new people, I catch myself trying to project a likeable image. Sometimes I stop before I speak, sometimes I become aware while in the middle of it and at other times after I have already finished. Sometimes, I am aware even before I start, but I still go ahead with it. When I catch myself doing this, I have a talk with myself, especially when I meditate later that day. I ask myself questions such as:

*Why do I feel that it is necessary to present this image? Why do I need to be liked or accepted? Why do I want the attention of others? Why do I need their approval? Am I afraid that if I don't do this people will not like to hang out with me and I will feel alone? Am I afraid of being alone? Am I afraid that if others don't like me I will not like myself either? I see that when others praise me for something, I like myself more. Why does my happiness depend on how other people see or treat me?*

The most important question that I ask is: Who is it that wants to be perceived this way? Or that wants to be treated well by others? After all, the characteristics that I would like to show people about myself are just ideas and

concepts; they are not real. I think that they are not real because the image changes over time. Characteristics are added and taken away. If they were the real thing they would be with me for life. If the characteristics are not real, then what is real?

Projecting and trying to maintain a self-image can bring a lot of trouble. About two years ago, a friend of mine was going to court. He had to go to Rikers Island for a few weeks. Before leaving for Rikers, a guy he knew asked my friend if he could hold my friend's radio until he came back. My friend had one of the loudest radios allowed in prison. Because those radios have since been prohibited, the radio's value has grown. My friend let the guy hold his radio while he went to court. When my friend returned, the guy holding his radio had been keeplocked (restricted to cell for 23 hours) and was in a different block (prisoners are arranged internally according to blocks [e.g. A,B,C, etc.] and generally isolated from the others) because he had gotten into a fight. My friend was sent a message that the COs (correction officers) had taken the radio when he was moved. This was a lie. People knew the guy had sold the radio.

When I found out about this, I got really angry. I went to my friend and told him that when this guy gets out of keeplock, he has to go. He needs to learn a lesson. My friend agreed. Although he is not a violent person, he was concerned about how he would be perceived if he didn't do anything.

Later that day, when I sat to meditate, this subject came to mind. I was still a little angry, but not as much as when I was talking to my friend. Sitting there I said to myself, "Here I am meditating for the purpose of attaining enlightenment. I also recite the Bodhisattva's Vow. Who am I kidding? My ways have not changed at all since I started this practice." I asked myself, "What do I really want? Do I really want to end my old views? Do I want to even put some effort to ending my old views?" I saw that there was something in me that wanted to let go of the old ways and to understand myself and my life.

I started to reflect on why I wanted to do something to this guy. Was it because of the radio, which wasn't even mine? Was I concerned about my friend's property? I realized that it wasn't about the radio. It was about the principle of being disrespected. We (prisoners) use the term "principle" a lot in prison and in the streets. It is not about the radio, it is about the principle, we say. It is not about the cigarettes (prison currency) that he owes, it is about the principle. We do a lot of things over this principle. A lot of guys are in the box (special housing unit [SHU] where inmates are punished by having all property removed and 23-hour lock down) right now over principle. A lot of guys are in prison because of principle. I know a few.

By keeping and selling the radio, was this guy treating my friend like a nobody? Was I hanging out with a nobody? Does that make me a nobody? Is this the reason I feel I have to do something, to prove that I'm not a

nobody? This mental conversation went on and on, and it was very disturbing discovering the true reasons behind the action that I wanted to take. That was depressing. I thought I was sick. I felt hot and cold, back to back. One moment I was sweating, the next I was shivering. I thought I had a fever. I started to blame Buddhism. Many Buddhist teachers say that if you practice, things will change for the better. As far as I was concerned, things were getting worse. I wrote a letter to Shugen Sensei at Zen Mountain Monastery and told him what was going on, that I thought if I practice things would get better, but they were getting worse.

*I would like to experience what is left if I let go of all these concepts and ideas about myself, letting go of the old and new nests.*

At that point, I felt that if we carried out our plan and did something to this guy, I would have to deal with my personal disappointment as a Buddhist practitioner, because I wasn't supposed to do such things. If I got a fever just thinking about it; who knows how I would have felt if I had done something. If we didn't do this, then I would have to deal with the injury to my

ego. That was the conflict in my mind – between the old ways of principle and the new ways I wanted to practice as a Buddhist practitioner. This bothered me for the next few days. I received some relief when the guy was transferred to another facility. This also brought relief to my friend, who was also a member of the Sangha. Today, I feel glad that the guy left, because I don't know how I would have handled the situation.

The lesson I got from all of that was seeing what the principle was about. It was my image – not the radio, not my friend, not his image. It was about the image that I was trying to protect. The image that I wanted people to see was being threatened, and the only way to protect it was through violence. It bothered me that I was concerned more about myself than the situation or my friend. So my challenge is letting go of my strong sense of self.

Shugen Sensei didn't respond to the letter I sent him, but about a month later he made his bi-annual visit to the Sangha. He asked me about the letter. I told him how hard it is to let go of my old ways. "It is up to you," he said. "You can stop this or keep doing the same thing and repeat the cycle over and over. You see where your old ways got you." I agreed with him, but that didn't make things easier. I remember reading something the Dalai Lama had said: "The development of wisdom and compassion is a wide round curve that can be negotiated only slowly, not a sharp corner that can be turned all at once. It comes with daily practice." I try to keep my daily practice going.

Based on my understanding, practicing Buddhism correctly doesn't involve replacing one conditioning – my old way, which is a bad conditioning – with a new conditioning – a good one, the Buddhist practitioner's way. When Shugen

Sensei recently came, he gave us to read in our cells "Guidelines for Studying the Way," by Zen Master Dogen. One quote struck me: "To follow Buddha completely means you do not have your old views. To hit the mark completely means that you have no new nest in which to settle."

I see that I need to work with holding onto my self-image. I would like to experience what is left if I let go of all these concepts and ideas about myself, letting go of the old and new nests. I have to get over the fear of doing that. I need to keep working with that fear, face it, resist the tendency to escape from it, experience it and understand it.

Before coming to prison, when I was about eighteen or nineteen years old, I passed a prison and saw its walls. "Those guys over those walls are fearless," I said to myself. "They are not afraid to break the laws, they are not afraid to fight, kill or even die. That's the way I want to be."

Having been in prison for awhile, I now believe the opposite. I think almost every violent act in prison is done out of some kind of fear. We just don't see it as fear; we see it as common sense. We say I had to punch him in the face or stab him, because he disrespected me or my friend. The majority of us agree with it. We will say, "Yes, YOU HAD TO DO THAT. I would have done the same thing."

It is important to become aware of the different forms of fear, especially the ones that come as common sense. To be continuously on point, aware of the way we respond to the moving circumstances in life. To meditate as much as possible in order to go deeper into the mind, to go beneath the superficial and intellectual mind, which works only with ideas and concepts. That is the only way to experience what is real.

As Shugen Sensei said, "We have to die to the illusory nature of who we think we are, and then come back to life."

It's a beautiful August day. I spent the morning in my cell taking notes from Buddhist scriptures and other materials while enjoying the summer warmth. Most Tuesdays I'm in class, but we are on our summer break.

This morning had been productive, leaving me feeling good after having organized my notes and written two letters. At about 11:30, we left our cells to go to lunch. Going to the mess hall, we must walk through another block. Most of the men in the block were in their cells, as they had not been let out yet. As we walked, I noticed a young kid about 10 feet ahead of me looking anxiously

*Tommy began meditating several years ago at another prison. Initially, he hoped to gain self-mastery and better control of his mind. But that's not all that happened, as is illustrated by his story.*

## Lunch in Auburn Correctional Facility

By Tommy Morris

into every cell, at people walking beside him, turning to look behind him. My first thought was that he was looking for an enemy whom he believes is here in Auburn.

Entering the mess hall, I joined one of the two lines leading to the serving counter. Only a foot of space separates the two lines. As I waited, my peripheral vision picked up movement to my left. I turned in time to see the young kid turn around and swing at the guy behind him. The punch did not land cleanly. The guy he hit was a quiet dude who always goes to church. The targeted man pulled his head back in shock. Then the young kid threw another punch with all his weight behind it. This one landed flush, and the church dude fell down on his hands and knees. Blood poured from his nose onto the floor.

An immediate wave of sorrow washed over me, as if the pit of my stomach became a black hole of sorrow.

The kid hesitated, like he didn't expect the man to go down so quickly. Maybe a second and a half elapsed, and then the kid began punching the man again.

Standing there overcome with sorrow as the C.O.s ran over yelling for everyone to step back, all I could do was mentally repeat over and over: "May you both be free from suffering . . . ."

I began to feel a disgust for violence that I had never felt before. But I just remained present, aware of my breathing and the black hole in my stomach, and trying to project my silent prayer: "May you both be free from suffering . . . ."

The C.O.s had the kid on the wall; the dude finally stood up on shaky legs, on the C.O.'s orders. He was clearly out of it, probably suffering a concussion, maybe a broken nose.

Scenes like this are not uncommon for prisoners. I've seen worse. Many of us have known these scenarios for much, if not all, of our lives – in prisons, our neighborhoods and even our homes.

My sensitivity to violence had dulled considerably after so many years of conditioning. This is an aspect of myself that troubled me and became part of my motivation to practice meditation, begin to understand my mind, and seek some inner peace.

My usual reaction to witnessing such a scene would be indifference, or anger at seeing someone hurt for no apparent reason.

That was not the case today. I was simply present, witnessing this scene with a heavy heart. The usual mental judgments did not come up. I just remained present with clear awareness of my own sorrow, the suffering of both men and the raw energy of violence that left me with a feeling of disgust.

All of these feelings were present within my being, while consciously remaining aware of my breath, remaining present and aware of all this energy.

The C.O.s escorted both men out of the mess hall and instructed us to get back in line.

With my appetite gone, I got my tray and sat down with my fellow prisoners.

Conversation began about what we had just seen. It was obvious to all of us that the young kid was looking to go into the box, hoping to avoid an enemy.

A couple of guys expressed sadness at seeing the dude get beaten down; he was a quiet, church-going guy who didn't bother anyone. Yet within two or three minutes guys were making jokes about it as they ate. I forced down a little food myself before giving up and leaving the mess hall.

It's common for guys in prison to joke about incidents like this. It's a show of indifference and a defense mechanism on many levels. Underneath is a feeling of hurt. Everybody present suffered, including those of us who merely witnessed the assault. The young kid obviously feared that someone was here in Auburn who would harm him. Looking for a way out, he projected his suffering by assaulting someone else, who in turn suffered physical pain, injury and probably mental confusion and fear, wondering why he was being assaulted.

There is the suffering of those who witnessed the scene. We felt sorrow for the victim through our human capacity to empathize. I also felt sorrow for

*Perhaps (pain) will break us like those who have lost their minds in prison. Or perhaps it will break us like those who have come to the realization that we no longer wish to cause pain and suffering to other beings.*

the young kid, knowing that his violent actions were a projection of his own suffering, like all violent actions.

Witnessing such a scene can bring up feelings of our own past experiences or what we may have witnessed our loved ones go through. In some way or other, it has an effect on us even if we are not conscious of it. That's why prisoners were joking about the incident minutes after stepping around the pool of blood remaining on the mess hall floor. This defense mechanism is an effort to hide or escape the sorrow we feel inside. It is also a projection of our suffering, an effort to avoid suffering that only creates more suffering in the form of ignorance and delusion.

Many of us believe that if we allow ourselves to feel empathy and compassion, the pain will make us weak and break us down. Perhaps it will break us like those who have lost their minds in prison. Or perhaps it will break us like those who have come to the realization that we no longer wish to cause pain and suffering to other human beings, or any beings for that matter.

After lunch I walked back to my cell reflecting on the nature of suffering and violence. Once in my cell I covered the bars with a sheet. I needed to be alone with my thoughts and feelings. With tears in my eyes, I quietly chanted the Metta Sutra. □



## Joshua Forman House 200th Birthday

Throughout 2010, the Zen Center has marked the 200<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Joshua Forman House – its home – with special events, starting with workshops and readings by poets Peter Levitt and Chase Twichell in the spring and culminating in October, with a Tibetan sand mandala, a ceremony honoring the Onondaga waters, the installation of a new large-scale sculpture by Seneca-Cayuga artist Tom Huff, a joyous Soh Daiko drumming workshop and concert, and an art auction.



Joyous boom of Soh Daiko drums fills the neighborhood  
Photo by Togan Tim Kohlbrenner

Born from the previous weekend of ceremonies that honored the interconnectedness of the great traditions of Zen and Tibetan Buddhism and the Haudenosaunee and Western peoples, blessings rained upon the Zen Center with color, vitality, rhythm and resounding joy in the form of Soh Daiko, the “harmonious drums of peace.” The spirit of generosity evoked through the Bodhisattva of Compassion in the form of the Tibetan Sand Mandala and through Thanksgiving for the healing and cleansing energy of the life-giving Onondaga waters extended its nurturing, loving reach with exuberant song, dance and delight as the whole Valley bounced and rocked under the drummers’ exhilarating rhythms. Just as the Gaden Shartse monks had poured the remaining sands of the mandala after

*story continued on next page*

### Thunder of Compassion Rocks the Valley

By Jishin  
Betsy Robson



Shinge Roshi and Capital Campaign Chair Linda Lowen watch the drummers / Photo by Togan Tim Kohlbrenner



Gaden Shartse monk focuses intently on the sand mandala / Photo by Diane Grimes



its ceremonial dissolution into the waters of the Onondaga Creek with grace and unity, Soh Daiko's 13-member troupe showered all in their proximity with energetic encouragement and the vitality of harmony.

At the workshop, which took place the day before the free open-air performance, Teddy Yoshikami, who shares with Merle and Alan Okeda the thirty-year veteran status, invited all of the more than thirty registered participants to join in stretching-breathing exercises in unison to get the juices flowing. We stretched and inhaled the crisp autumn air as the afternoon sun warmed our shoulders beneath the blue sky and wind-blown orange leaves. Awake to the sublime moment, we were already of one mind.

The troupe explained the kinds of instruments used and how they are made. Aside from the giant wooden two-headed drums, the instruments included the conch shell, the *fu-e* (bamboo flute), the *shekere* (bead-covered gourd), cymbals, a huge gong, and metal "drums." The meaning of the Soh Daiko characters were explained and we learned that although *soh* (僧) is a common Chinese character for monk or priest, its original meaning before Buddhism was akin to "harmonious peace," and that *daiko* (太鼓, also spelled *taiko*) means big (fat) drum. The Soh Daiko name was given by a priest at the New York Buddhist Church, which nurtured the advent of the modern-day group and continues its support.

We learned the "words" used to describe the various beats and with which one memorizes the rhythms. We repeated the onomatopoeia and sounded out parts before striking the skins in the traditional format. Before knowing it, the troupe had deftly guided us into performing complex rhythms one would have thought impossible for beginners. The troupe also introduced the concept of *ki-ai* (気合, *ki* being energy or spirit and *ai*, a harmonious connection), which is expressed in spirited sudden yells that encourage and invigorate. The troupe was very generous in getting everyone involved, and the class ran well past the slated two hours.

Sunday's free community concert began with inspiring words from Shinge Roshi and former broadcast journalist Linda Lowen to mark the culmination of the Zen Center's five-year capital campaign. Gratitude filled the air as Shinge Roshi and Linda recounted the accomplishments and remarked on the significance of the Zen Center's work in the context of the larger community. Meigetsu Rebecca Beers, board president, read the edicts from the mayor and the county executive officially proclaiming October 17, 2010, as "Zen Center of Syracuse Bicentennial Commemoration Day of the Joshua Forman House."

The sun gleamed through once again and the wind sent yellow leaves across the grass stage in front of the Forman House porch as the performers, emblazoned with red and white *happi* and gold sashes, took their places in a dramatic stance. Baboom! The show began, and the sunny, vivacious spirit of the performers expressed through the rhythms permeated all of our cells and the very atoms of the trees and rocks and leaves, vibrations of unity again

bringing us to an awakened body-consciousness of one mind.

Yelps and whoops syncopated the precision and beauty of dynamic patterns of sound and sight; an exact and brilliant choreography of dance and dramatic strikes, twirling and movement invigorated and excited us all. As the music continued we heard variations upon the underlying vital strength and boldness of positivity, all carefully coordinated in utmost cheerfulness. Even in the complement of delicacy and soft filigree of quiet patterns that broke the resolute backbeat, the strength of enduring constancy and intention was celebrated.

With some 150 in attendance, the Zen Center grounds were filled with life. The many children who attended inspired self-conscious adults to abandon themselves to the beat and the entire range of diverse Syracusan faces beamed together in appreciation. But when the ancient masked demon appeared to haunt the unsuspecting fisherman, many of the small children's captivated faces moved from delight to sudden terror. Yet they stood steadfast and brave, weathering the storm just as the fisherman himself and coming to a happy resolution.

The event ended with a reception that featured sushi and other Asian vegetarian offerings. Gift bags were provided to each in attendance. The bags, assembled by Daiku Linda Piddock, contained daffodil bulbs and a beautiful tiny book of Sangha-written *haiku* selected by Shinge Roshi and prepared by Linda Lowen, each bound with a small branch from the ZCS grounds. Each booklet was imprinted on the cover by Miyo Hirano with the traditional red chop of Hoen-ji.

The ZCS Sangha extends great gratitude to the Soh Daiko troupe for helping to further transmit the spirit of live-giving compassion awakened earlier in the month along this Onondaga Creek. As the Haudenosaunee "Words Before All Else" most eloquently express, "we go forward with one mind."

The day was gloriously the best that October in CNY could offer – startling blue sky, a myriad of jeweled leaves: green, scarlet and amber.

Entering the Joshua Forman house, I tentatively moved toward the sand mandala and stood transfixed as the monks focused on the intricacies of their work. One of them kindly offered an explanation detailing the symbols for the Buddha of Compassion and the lotus blossoms surrounding all. The vivid colors and precise designs were mesmerizing.

Edging my way outside toward the creek area, I gazed at Tom Huff's sculpture from a distance. I could discern the hawk at the top, the turtle at the base, the meditating

## Honoring and Giving Thanks to the Onondaga Waters

By Gay  
Montague

human in the middle of the column. It looked so substantial, so natural, so in keeping with the surroundings, as if it had simply emerged from that spot by some force within the earth and had not just recently arrived by truck and been planted with the help of a crane! As I drew closer, the other symbols gained clarity: the eel, the beaver, the butterfly and other Haudenosaunee clan beings.

Taking a seat, I marveled at the setting – the magnificent foliage, the sheer wonder of the sky, the air of subdued excitement as we anticipated the ceremony and the meeting of these two ancient cultures, Buddhism and the Six Nations.

The Hokku drumming coming from inside the zendo foyer compelled me to turn within and to ponder the meaning of this monumental occasion. Tibetan monks had traveled thousands of miles to participate with the Haudenosaunee to honor creation and to share traditions at the Zen Center.

I felt enormously privileged to witness this ceremony, and thought of the many who had laid the groundwork for this time of coming together: The Ancient Ones, the Wise Ones, the Gentle Ones, the Creative Ones – all loving and honoring our Mother Earth while offering reverence to her daily and seasonal miracles.

Individuals stepped forward to offer the best of themselves and their communities: welcoming remarks, words of thanksgiving, heartfelt poetry, singing and guitar music, reflections on art, the bathing of the magnificent sacred sculpture with water from Onondaga Creek, chanting to open its spiritual eye, and finally, a gathering of humans finding peace and joy, which will remain long after that day.

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*Wendy Gonyea, a member of the Beaver Clan who has been active in education and in supporting her community, read two poems during the Honoring and Giving Thanks to the Onondaga Waters ceremony, one of which follows (see next page).*

Poet Wendy Gonyea reads her poem, *The Brink*. Seated beside her is Onondaga Nation representative Clint Shenandoah, who offered the Thanksgiving Prayer, first in the Onondaga language, then in English.

Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis



## The Brink

I spotted one today.  
Deep in the woods where Grandpa goes to get firewood.  
The tall trees make way for a stream spilling over a waterfall  
You can hear its constant rush long before you see it.  
We often sat on the flat rocks to rest, Grandpa and me,  
the green moss providing a soft cushion.

Following a worn path, my peaceful thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a piercing yell,  
the sound echoing throughout the valley.  
Instinctively alert, I stopped and listened.  
My heart was racing.  
Then, I saw “him.”

He was sturdy and tall. He spoke words unfamiliar to me.  
He seemed to be talking to the trees, to the wind, to the hills.  
Long braids brushed the water’s top when he knelt  
Strong hands cupped a drink, and another.  
Like the coat of a deer, his clothing blended into the woods.  
A pouch hung at his side.  
He wore moccasins with specks of red and yellow.  
He was a native ... a Native American, and ...  
he was alive!

I rubbed my eyes, blinking to assure myself what my eyes beheld  
As I stepped slowly, carefully closer, he straddled the stream,  
quickly disappearing into the woods.  
Branches rustled. Birds fluttered from nests sounding alarms as he passed them by.  
Then, silence.  
I stood.  
Stunned.

I was taught that they were extinct.  
The first people of this land, “they were conquered,” my history teacher said.  
Museums display relics and evidence of their existence.  
You can buy plastic toy figures in the gift store.  
All that remains are their names, like our school, Oneida High. There’s  
Onondaga Lake, Seneca River, Mohawk River Oswegatchie, Allegheny ...

But, I knew they were wrong.  
I knew, because  
I spotted one today.

-- Wendy Gonyea

## Art Along the Creek: A New Sculpture by Tom Huff

By Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat

One of the highlights of the October cultural events celebrating the bicentennial of the Joshua Forman House was the dedication of a ten-foot-high sculpture carved in Indiana limestone by Seneca-Cayuga artist Tom Huff.

The piece was commissioned by the Zen Center as the first in an envisioned series, Art Along the Creek. Funding was received from the Gifford Foundation, the Welch Allyn Foundation, Syracuse University's Hendricks Chapel, and Brainard Fancher, with matching funds from GE.

I have known Tom for about 30 years, since I first interviewed him for a review of an early version of his "Tonto's Revenge" (now re-installed at ArtRage Gallery, Syracuse).

The majestic sculpture installed along Onondaga Creek at the Zen Center incorporates a meditating figure, surrounded by clan animals, birds and fish, and various creatures native to the Onondaga Valley – symbolizing, Tom told us, the special relationship between the Zen Center and the Haudenosaunee people, particularly the



Three traditions come together to honor the Onondaga waters: Monks from the Gaden Shartse Monastery in India; Shinge Roshi, abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse, and Seneca-Cayuga sculptor Tom Huff, whose 10-foot sculpture includes Haudenosaunee clan animals and a meditating figure. Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Onondaga Nation. "We have similar ways and beliefs," he said.

"Some 20 years ago, [Onondaga Faithkeeper] Oren Lyons spoke at a world environmental conference. "Oren asked everyone there, 'What about the birds and animals of the world – who will speak for them?' and I told myself, one of these days I'll make a sculpture based on his words. That sculpture is now here, at the Zen Center."

More of Tom Huff's art work can be seen at the Everson Museum's group show Oñgweson gyastoñh – Haudenosaunee: Elements through Jan. 16, and in a solo show at the Warehouse Gallery, Tom Huff: The Window Projects through Feb. 19.

sound older than time  
children wonder what it is –  
creekside mandala

– Toku Ellen Grapenstater

## Peter Levitt: A Rare Treat

By Toku Ellen Grapensteter

"A Flock of Fools is based on the *One Hundred Parable Sutra*, and yet there are only ninety-eight parables to be found. When I first noticed this I asked Kaz if he had seen the two missing fools. He said he had looked but was unable to locate them. I told him I had also tried to find them, but was unsuccessful as well. We looked at each other for a long time after that, but didn't know what to do."

–Peter Levitt, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia

Quoted from *A Flock of Fools, Ancient Buddhist Tales of Wisdom and Laughter From the One Hundred Parable Sutra*, translated and retold by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Peter Levitt

On April 27, the remarkable poet and teacher Peter Levitt offered a workshop and reading. His humor, warmth, insight and humility created a wonderful atmosphere. The workshop was a pleasure and the poems sparked a Dharma connection with every word.

His published works include *Within Within*, called "a beautiful and necessary book." Many thanks to Syracuse University and the Student Buddhist Association for co-sponsoring this rare and inimitable treat.



# A Visit from Poet Chase Twichell

By Kaity Cheng

In my brief and beloved nine-month residency at Hoen-ji, I was consistently touched by how much the residents helped each other. Many of us had quiet, solitary tendencies, yet I could count on each and every resident to dive into the flurry of activity that preceded each meal or ceremony. It always felt like a miracle to me, and Chase Twichell's visit was no exception.

I enjoyed Joe's company in the early stages of preparing dinner for Chase's first evening with us: squash puree soup, risotto, herb salad. Joe's stories and jokes accompanied my peeling and chopping until he left to buy rhinestone glasses from the dollar store. Then Kimpu came in and graciously agreed to bake scrumptious lemon poppy squares. The chocolate banana bread was baked the night before, so we were set for first Thursday tea. I left the kitchen, gathered the flowers, and went over to the Forman House to refresh the arrangements. I didn't leave myself enough time to do all the arrangements, but Jisho came to the rescue. The flowers she arranged in minutes seemed to pop out of the vase; each stem was somehow allotted space so that the blooms emerged like bright lanterns.

Chase was due at the train station any minute, and I was stuck in traffic. I was tired and anxious about making her wait. I arrived at the station, panting and sweaty, only to learn that the train was delayed. I collapsed on the patch of grass outside the Regional Transportation Center and tried to unwind a little. When the train did arrive, I was met by a bubbly, bright, completely down-to-earth being. My fears that I would be too exhausted to talk subsided, when I found myself in Chase's relaxed, alert presence. She shared various anecdotes about her life in an Adirondack town, or the "sticks" as she called it. When we arrived at Hoen-ji, I asked her if she wanted to settle in her room, and she said, "No, I want to be social." Taking only a minute to put on her sitting robes, Chase headed downstairs and struck up conversations with the residents and Sangha members who had begun to pour in.

Just before our Thursday evening sit, Jikyo, Joe and Kimpu helped with the salad. It was tremendous, wonderful help, and I couldn't be there to micromanage the dressing. I skipped the first sitting so that I could blend the squash soup, slip food into slow cookers, garnish the salad and clean the kitchen a little bit. The parking lot was full, our guest was ushered into the Hoen-ji palace of silence, and all seemed right in the world.

The second sitting was a sweet surrender after the day of non-stop activity, and afterward we gathered in the Dharma Hall for first Thursday tea. I was grateful Chase's visit coincided with a warm evening of treats and conversation. After tea, the residents were joined for dinner by Shinge Roshi and Chase.

On Friday, April 2, Chase offered a craft talk at the YMCA Downtown Writers' Center. It was attended by the Syracuse University MFA poetry students, the DWC PRO poetry students, Shinge Roshi and a handful of Sangha members. Chase gave an incredibly rich account of Zen practice, poetry and their powerful combination. She expressed how a poem's power is not in what its words mean, but how the words mean. We all have experienced this – a Dharma text is read once, then put down. Weeks or years later, you revisit the text and find the words are floating on a sea of meaning and coming at you in a fresh way.

She also discussed how self-consciousness censors the poet, and referred to the uncensored kid mind. Chase then shared some wondrous haiku composed by elementary school children. I sensed the child in Chase – when she told us stories about the children in her family, she did an excellent impression of a kid's voice. Before meeting Chase, I had been struck by how personal her poetry was. She doesn't shy away from the subjects of childhood sexual abuse, depression or breast cancer. During her craft talk, she listed these three topics as the skeletons she continually withdraws from her closet. These skeletons appear in her poems without any self-pity. Instead, she directly addresses the experience of childhood sexual abuse, and proves that all experience, no matter how traumatic, can be honored through art.

Later in the evening, at Syracuse University, Chase read from her collected works, *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been*. The reading was followed by a Q and A and a book signing. The following day, Chase returned to the "sticks," and I felt I had been transported to a mysterious place, where poetry goes and prose cannot. □

## Felled

*(To a two-hundred-year-old maple)*

*Old Friend.*

*They took you away  
This morning in  
The pale stale air of winter.  
Harsh remedy  
Removed you from my sight  
Limb by beautiful limb.  
There will be no leaves  
For you this spring,  
No crows to mock me  
From your heights.*

*Oh, why, Old friend?*

*Your presence gone  
So easily,  
Not by wind or rain  
Or snow.  
You go to the harsh  
Chainsaw reality  
Of men and might  
With coffee hands,  
And rope  
and no chance at all  
To fight.*

*– Amy Doherty*



## Dropping into Awareness

By Shiju  
Ben Howard



Photo by Shiju  
Ben Howard

As I pick up my teacup on this cold winter morning, I'm remembering the story of the Zen student who asked Shunryu Suzuki, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, why the Japanese make their teacups so thin. Being so delicate, the cups are easily broken.

"It's not that they're too delicate," Suzuki Roshi replied, "but that you don't know how to handle them. You must adjust yourself to the environment, and not vice versa."

Suzuki's Roshi's point is well taken. We must adjust to our surroundings. However, if you are living in Western New York in the month of January, you may be feeling a little resistance to Suzuki's wisdom. It is not so difficult to adjust to one's environment when, as now, a lean female cardinal is coming and going from our feeder, her orange beak and tan feathers catching the early-morning light. But it is not so easy when your driveway is filled with snow, the sidewalks are icy, and you're already sick of scarves and parkas. Here in Alfred, New York, we know how to handle such conditions, but that doesn't mean we like them.

Yet the significance of the student's question and Suzuki's response transcends the question of adjustment. What the story vividly illustrates is the way in which preconceptions – in this instance, that teacups should be sturdy and equipped with handles – influence and often govern our perceptions. And it also exemplifies the resistance that many of us bring to the unknown, whether the new or foreign object be a Japanese teacup or an all-electric car.

For a more immediate example, please pause and consider any preconceptions that you might have brought to the reading of this column. Perhaps you expected something other than what you've encountered – a discussion of meditative methods, for instance, or an explanation of *satori*. Or, conversely, perhaps what you have so far read accords with your expectations, and you are more or less satisfied. In the first instance, you might choose to read something else; in the second, you might choose to read on.

There is, however, another option, which is to examine your expectations and your present response in the light of awareness. Looking closely into both, you can discern your

assumptions, your fixed ideas, and the judgments they've engendered. And you can become aware of those mental processes, even as they are arising, continuing, and passing away.

In *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, a core text for Zen students, awareness of this kind is called "mindfulness of the mind in the mind." That somewhat cumbersome phrase refers to awareness of mental phenomena in the very moment when they are occurring. Such awareness is not the same as discursive thinking. Rather, it is a kind of effortless seeing, its object in this case being the thoughts that cross our minds. In contrast to fear, worry, and resistance, open awareness liberates the mind, both by illuminating our mental processes and by revealing the empty, or ephemeral, nature of mental events.

Such awareness cannot be awakened by an act of will. There is no switch to turn it on. However, it can be cultivated through the practices of sitting and walking meditation. And when it occurs, it can be felt in the mind as a spacious receptivity and in the body as a subtle shift of orientation – a shift from the confines of the head to the expansiveness of the *hara*, the body's center of gravity, situated in the lower abdomen. Viewed from the standpoint of the *hara*, even the most destructive thought loses much of its power.

Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi, abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse, has likened this felt shift from thinking to awareness to an expectant mother's experience of her baby "dropping" into the pelvis shortly before birth. In this instance, however, the baby is the mind itself, as it settles into awareness, fully cognizant of whatever is occurring. In that silent, open space, habitual thoughts and self-protective judgments can be recognized for what they are and nothing more. And even a traditional Japanese teacup, however breakable or difficult to handle, can be appreciated as something useful, beautiful, and new. □

*From Entering Zen, Ben Howard's new collection of essays on Zen practice, coming soon from Whitlock Publishing, with a Foreword by Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi. Howard's blog, One Time, One Meeting, is at <http://practiceofzen.wordpress.com/>.*

*Here is a mind that knows  
birthless birth, deathless death  
and breathless breath –  
yet here there are  
ravenous tigers, bone-chilling rage  
and scrambled being.  
10,000 times the novice mind  
evades extinction.*

*– Nyozan Steven Fuller*

# Meditation and Forgiveness

By Jeanette Powell

New year traditions of many cultures and religions include a soul-searching process. We think about what we have done, where we have been, where we want to be, who we want to be. This reflection helps us to find a way of living that can make the most of our lives. It is a time for us to choose life.

We think about what “life” means for us. What gives us joy? What motivates us? How do we know we are “alive?” What do we consider “living?” If we look at our lives and find something missing or we feel dull and empty, what are we dragging? What is encumbering our progress? Have we resigned ourselves to toleration of the feelings we have had for many years? Do we endure old feelings and hurts and pain that cling to us like a favorite old sweater? What stands in the way of our living a full life?

My own struggle is with forgiveness, what it means to me and what it does not.

After meditating for many months, I began to see the part that meditation played in my struggle with forgiveness. Meditation for me is a kind of letting go, dropping everything and beginning not to think, to rest my mind in a kind of a blissful state. This experience of “letting go” showed me another way of being and another way of living. I could see forgiveness as letting go, and I

was halfway there.

I read an article

recently that said if you cannot forgive you can't dance, sing or smile. This is a description of the emotional blocking that can happen when we hang onto old pain, hurts, guilt and shame. We can get stuck and not even realize it. We cannot really choose life if we are locked in the past or if we are stuck.

But what is forgiveness? The consensus I found in my search is that we have to define it for ourselves in a way that offers us the life and living we seek. I can share some ideas about what forgiveness is and is not to many people.

Forgiveness is not:

1. Excusing or condoning a wrong. It never approves or justifies behavior that is evil, wrong or

reprehensible.

2. It is not a pardon, although in some instances we may wish to pardon.
3. It is not denial or treating a wrong as if it did not matter or denying that you have been hurt.
4. It is not forgetting.
5. It is not canceling the consequences for destructive or illegal behavior.
6. It is not given because the offender deserves or has earned it by repenting. Forgiveness depends not on the offender's behavior but on the *desire of the victim to heal*.
7. It is not reconciliation or restoration of the offender's former position of trust or power.
8. We are not necessarily doing the person who wronged us a favor by forgiving. Some wrongdoers don't care at all about what they have done.

So what then is forgiveness? I think forgiveness is a gift. I think about it better when I split the word into two words. It is *for giving/gifting to ourselves* first and foremost. It is not a gift for the person who caused us pain although that is not out of the question in some instances.

*For giving* takes time and effort and learning to let go. We can get into the habit of retaining hurt, guilt and shame and we need to practice and learn to let go. Here is where meditation plays a huge role in the practice of letting go.

1. It is not allowing the wrongdoer to have a hold on our lives and our emotions. In fact, by *for giving/gifting* we are regaining power that we may have lost to the wrongdoer.
2. We are being self gifting in a healthy way when we *for give*. When we *for give*, we give ourselves back the energy it takes to harbor ill feelings toward someone. It allows us to free ourselves from the dangers of cynicism and bitterness.
3. *For giving* does not mean forgetting. It means that the sting may be gone from the memory, and we have a willingness to detach.
4. *For giving* is not an instant process. It may begin by simply knowing it is something you want to get to, even though your heart is not in it. To completely *for give* requires venting feelings, regaining perspective, being faithful to accomplish the goal and allowing for healing. We know we have succeeded when at the deepest level we are reminded of the memory but not held hostage by the old feelings.
5. We need to *for give* ourselves, as well. We need to be responsible for our own actions, but we also have to stop holding ourselves hostage and forgive ourselves, accepting our innate ability to make mistakes. Let them go and move forward.

6. For *giving* does not obligate us to a repeat performance. Sometimes we need to avoid certain people and situations, because it is wise and prudent.

7. By holding a grudge, we become voluntary victims, giving the offender the power to make us miserable, and that is not freedom.

As we look over this long list of what forgiveness is and is not, I think you can see why I prefer to use the term “letting go” and why I split the word forgiveness into two words, *for giving* or better, *for gifting*. I like to think of it as *for giving/gifting* oneself the freedom to let go of any negative feelings, to recreate one’s life, and to use one’s life and energy in positive ways. I want to dance and sing and love, so I am *for giving*. The gift of our meditation practice supports this process of self-gifting if we choose to use it this way. □

## Please Don’t Make Me Go to Dokusan!

By **Senju David  
Fisher**



Senju at the bell  
Photo by Jishin  
Betsy Robson

I’m sitting in the Dharma Hall. There are a few people ahead of me. I work at steadying my breathing and calming my racing heart as, one by one, each person takes his or her turn at the bell and goes up to Shinge Roshi’s dokusan room. Dokusan! That amazing, wonderful, and sometimes frightening face-to-face encounter with Shinge Roshi.

Finally, it is my turn. I ring the bell, rise and attempt to push through my sense of dread as I climb the stairs, trying not to think of this as one more opportunity to fail a koan or experience judgment of my performance – but feeling and thinking that anyway.

The performance script has been well written into the fabric of our lives. From early childhood education, we are trained to perform and tested to assess just how well we have performed. Our level of performance is measured using various scales, from percentages to letter grades. It is very difficult to break free of this performance-based system of analysis. It has been neurologically etched into our heads and is laden with all manner of negative associations.

In dokusan, the scale is very simple. You either pass, or you don’t.

For me, it is like being in a cage. There is something truer than true behind the bars, desperately trying to get out and be expressed. “I know! I know!” I cry inside the bars. I grasp two bars in my

hands and rattle the cage in frustration. One bar’s name is Fear. The other is Control. Erected long ago as a dualistic protection to mediate every test-and-fail situation, every possible rejection-and-reprisal encounter, it is easy to forget that the bars are there, influencing my decisions and reactions.

But not in dokusan. It is impossible to forget this as they become so obvious in full technicolor relief.

A while ago, I wrote the following e-mail to Roshi:

I’m crashing on the koan work. Late Sunday night something went “snap!” and ... [I am] experiencing a strong sense of doubt as to my ability to do this. ... There seems to be a disconnect between my felt experience ... and my ability to express and understand. Feeling a sense of dejection in ways that I have not since starting this koan last March.

It was October when I wrote that e-mail, and I was ready to give up. I had been working with this koan for eight months. I then went on to continue working with it for another year. While there were brief forays into a couple of other koans, we would return to this one particular koan again and again. I persisted through it, because I recognized that it went to the jugular of my performance issues, fears of inadequacy as well as my tendency to dissect, describe and analyze. And besides, I *knew* this koan and wanted to *live* it.

During this time, one dokusan at the beginning of a sesshin, I say to Roshi, “This is going to be an excellent sesshin,” and she immediately and emphatically replies, “You have no idea!” The phrase hits me with the gale force of all my worst fears. How presumptuous of me to think that I can assess this situation accurately! I feel ashamed and lacking.

Then, in the next heartbeat (amazing how many self-recriminations can occur in the moment between heartbeats), she says, “That’s a command, not a description.” I get up, bow, and in a kind of daze leave the dokusan room, chanting “that’s a command, not a description” like a mantra. The words make no sense to me as I leave the dokusan room, flailing around in the whirlwind of my own debilitating reaction of self-loathing. But I know that there is meaning in these words to be had, so I keep the mantra going, like a lifeline thrown to a drowning person. “That’s a command, not a description.” I place my zafu on the floor of the Dharma Hall and the moment my rear hits the cushion, “That’s a command, not a...” it hits me. “You!” (hey! notice! wake up!) “Have no idea!” (command).”

And then, suddenly, everything is pristine. I am shocked into the center of the eye of the storm. Dust motes lazily glide through their dance in the air. The wood grains of the table before me are cause for giddiness. The Idea Maker has suddenly left for vacation, and what remains is that which was always there, just waiting to be noticed and lived, without judgment, without

evaluation, without interpretation, without thinking about it and separating myself from that direct experience.

It is simply “dust motes lazily gliding through air.” □

## O-Bon Purified by Rain

By *Jisho Judy  
Fancher*

**H**oen-ji Sangha celebrated O-Bon on Aug. 21 and 22. O-Bon is a traditional ceremony remembering and honoring those who have passed away.

On Saturday, we lit a small fire and chanted to welcome those in the spirit world, then celebrated Mandala Day. On Sunday it rained and rained, sheets of rain. After a spectacular meal prepared by Jishin Betsy Robson, our newest resident, the ceremony in the zendo got under way. We were fortunate to have Jokei Kyodo Megumi Karis, from Dai Bosatsu Zendo, as Ino to lead us in chanting. Somehow the rain fit with the very moving ceremony as a purifying element.

The rain was continuous, requiring some adaptive modifications. A makeshift awning was erected over the outside dana (offering) altar on the deck of the zendo. Also, the Onondaga Creek level had risen and the current was too strong to safely launch our lantern boats in the creek. Huddled under umbrellas, we carried our lit lanterns, inscribed with the names of our loved ones, in a procession to the Sangha Grove and chanted. Then we gathered at the pond/waterfall to launch our lantern boats across the short but symbolically vast water’s surface. As soaked with gratitude as with rain, O-Bon was complete. □



O-Bon lantern boat / Photo by Diane Grimes

## ZeNature Workshop

By *Diane  
Grimes*

**S**ix students from my Syracuse University course in Communication and Contemplative Engagement and one Environmental Science and Forestry student attended a workshop called ZeNature on Oct. 2 at the Zen Center of Syracuse taught by Myorin Catherine Landis and sponsored by the Zen Center and the Hendricks Chapel Wellness Fund.

It was a big step for the students to come to the Zen Center, though they meditate daily (at least according to the syllabus). Shinge Roshi and Myorin had spent a class period with them, and they were used to hearing me talk about the center.

Many students commented on the serene and relaxed atmosphere. “Even though the center is located on a busy street, it still has a tranquil sense to it,” Jena noted. Several said it looked more like a house than a “center.”

Dee described the first activity: “We started the afternoon with a sitting.... Before we arrived at the Zen Center, I wasn’t sure what to expect, but upon entering the (zendo), I was very relieved to see how small it was.”

After sitting, we did walking meditation along the path and then sat outside to write in journals. Myorin asked us to free-write our thoughts about nature. The class had just done a contemplative writing activity, which they loved, so the timing was perfect.

Next, they went to work. “Catherine called it contemplative labor,” Beth recalled. “We weeded through the woods getting rid of unwanted plants in order to help the forest thrive.”

Dee shared this from her journal with me later: “All nature is beautiful, from the reddest rose to the most destructive hurricane. The power and strength of nature are what keep all humans humble. As humans we have somehow developed this mindset that we are in control of this world. When you see something like the tsunami of 2005 come along and wipe out whole towns, devastating an entire region, you realize that we are far from being in control. I anticipate the day when I can become part of nature.”

We discussed our connection to nature, death, and the fact that we breathe together with the trees. As Chrissy noted, “Everything has an energy no matter how small and everything is in relation to each other.” □



**The dark  
chocolate  
Buddha**

*Last year's Christmas gift –  
a dark chocolate Buddha from Cienna,  
my 11-year-old granddaughter,  
has been in the refrigerator  
since March to May of this year.*

*The dark chocolate Buddha  
is  
about 4 inches in height  
sitting  
in  
perfect posture,  
putting his palms together on his lap  
and  
smiling.*

*"O'bachan!" she calls me in Japanese as Grandmother.  
"O'bachan, eat the chocolate Buddha," she said  
last Christmas and thereafter  
whenever she comes to visit me  
from Rochester New York.*

*"OK, maybe soon,"  
I tell her,  
knowing  
she would love to share  
the dark chocolate Buddha  
with me.*

*The Buddha was at the kitchen window sill  
until the spring air, light and colors emerged in  
March.*

*I put the Buddha in the refrigerator.  
now  
he is sitting in the cold.  
Cienna has not visited me since April.*

*I can not eat the dark chocolate Buddha  
yet.*

*"OK, maybe soon."*

*–Fumio Hirano*

**Our Fall Poem**

*As we walk the path  
stepping on something  
Crunchy leaves  
The leaves are saying /Thank you/  
to the trees  
The leaves told the Buddha /Thank you/  
Other sounds we hear  
Birds chirping flying happy  
One bird sounded like it wanted food  
as it said /Hello Mother Nature/  
We heard leaves blowing on the trees  
The wind is saying /Thank you/  
We smell the trees  
Trees smell good  
We saw leaves red  
green brown yellow  
A doggie  
Squirrels playing hide and seek  
We found black walnuts on the ground  
They looked like balls and apples  
and we found leaves  
and a mushroom that doesn't  
have a family any more  
no stem  
We heard the mushrooms growing quietly  
We're all family  
Our friends are our family  
Even an air conditioner is our family  
It cools us down and we say /Thank you/  
Even the people who passed away  
Even the trees  
the squirrels  
the stream are our family  
Above us the cheerful blue sky*

*– By the Dharma Kids Poets  
Guided by Georgia A. Popoff*



Sangha Grove Jizo  
Photo by Diane Grimes

**A Creative  
Group of  
Children**

**By Myoko  
Jennifer Waters**

**T**he Dharma Kids program has been a wonderful experience for everyone involved. During the summer program, each child wrote his or her own book based on what Buddha taught – the Four Noble Truths. Then we compiled one book titled, "Life of Buddha." There are extra copies in the library for anyone interested in reading it.



Diane Grimes with Jade McKenney during Dharma Kids workshop  
Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Our fall program has consisted of a great lineup of local talents and events in which families share. Jennifer Johnston-Roy, founder of [www.celebratetodaychildren.org](http://www.celebratetodaychildren.org), came to teach us Reiki for children. We learned in a few very simple steps how to use our own energy to help ourselves and any friend in need of emotional or physical help. Thank you, Jennifer, for supporting our program, volunteering for the entire summer program and sharing Reiki healing tools that we can use for the rest of our lives!

In October, Georgia Popoff, poet, writer and teacher, joined us and engaged our senses, using nature to awaken us. With her help, we wrote a group poem.

“It is all the children’s responses to a very simple question at several points of our walk along the path: what did they notice, using

their five senses?” writes Georgia. “All the language is theirs. I just added the line breaks. I read what they said to them and we discussed a bit of the order, etc., and they all agreed with the way it turned out. It was just lovely. They are a creative group of children.”

We are blessed to have so many wonderful people in our community willing to come out and share. In December, we will do Tsa-tsa painting again – painting of small Buddha statues – with an eye-opening ceremony in the zendo with the greater Sangha. □

## Oaks

with thanks to Emily Dickinson (#520: I started early – took my Dog/And visited the Sea)

*I took the dog on a walk  
that had no beginning and no end  
we wandered into the park  
sniffing the bases of trees, and then  
trotted to our favorite spot  
under the arms of vast old oaks  
and in that place, we just sat still  
a long, long time*



– Myorin Catherine Landis

Photo of dog Nikita Chayat-Hassinger by Myorin Catherine Landis

## Living in Community at Hoen-ji

By Jisho Judy Fancher

At Golden Wind sesshin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo recently, I was drinking water from a Ball jar I had brought from the Residence. There was a residual smell of some food that had been stored in it – some meal we as residents had shared. Just that embodied the support of my own nen in practice by my fellow residents. We study, work, eat and practice together and, similar to sitting with others in the zendo, there is an intangible mingling of energy that strengthens our core of being.

As residents we are called to help in the ongoing work and life of Hoen-ji. This is the everyday practice: how we do our work, relate with others, communicate and work out meeting the needs for special events and everyday activities. We enter into this program of residential, intensive training as ourselves, not some idealized version of what we think a bodhisattva is. Thus, we are face to face with our habitual views and resistance. My inclination for the comfortable becomes clearer, and this points directly to my notion of separate self. Having others willing to call us on our own stuff supports the practice of right speech, thought and action.

I have found living in a community of practitioners has strengthened and deepened the root of my practice and, in gratitude, I hope this in turn contributes to Hoen-ji’s welcoming atmosphere.

Sometimes there’s discord, and living here is great practice. Most of the time it’s closer to a hybrid of the two. I can’t imagine not being here for it all. □



Hoen-ji residents from left to right: Sanghyeon Cheon, Caroline Savage, Kimpu Jonathan Swan, Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz, Joe O’Brien, Jisho Judy Fancher, and Jishin Betsy Robson. Missing from picture: Jikishin James Douglass. Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

## From the President of the Board

### Campaign Ends with a Boom

By Meigetsu  
Rebecca Beers



Meigetsu Rebecca Beers and Jika Lauren Melnikow served as jishas for the Honoring the Waters Ceremony  
Photo by Myorin Catherine Landis

Five years in the making, the Zen Center's 2010 Capital Campaign wrapped up with a bang – literally and figuratively – on Sunday, Oct. 17. The Soh Daiko drummers filled our hearts with joy, and the generosity of the Sangha and its friends offered an equal measure of financial security to carry the center into the future.

We are deeply grateful for all who gave so much to help put this temple on sound footing. So much nen. So much effort. So much generosity.

Gassho!

The goal was to raise \$200,000 for two objectives: paying down our mortgage and caring for our 200-year-old building. Through your generosity, the 2010 Capital Campaign had raised \$195,375, as of Oct. 21. Of that, \$54,000 went toward the mortgage, which now stands at \$118,768, down from \$300,000. That means we're within sight of being mortgage-free in perhaps as few as five years. Another \$61,999 went to capital improvements to the property, including new electrical work, plumbing, attic insulation, and remodeling of the third-floor bathroom in the Joshua Forman House; replacement of the small back roof, repair of the porches, and several new windows at the residence; and restoration of four chimneys and a multitude of small projects throughout the property. The remainder has bolstered our financial safety cushion; several significant pledges are promised in coming months.

What has made this possible is the strong practice of the Sangha. Faith in many forms. At times this campaign seemed a daunting goal, but Roshi had the long-range vision and the deep commitment to keep us focused. This ability to be unwavering, focused and direct – to go straight on the zigzag path – is an inspiration to us all.

Many people worked very hard for all the years of this campaign. The residents, as always, worked tirelessly, never seeking notice. But we appreciate deeply the work of Jikyo Bonnie Shoultz, Jisho Judy Fancher, Caroline Savage, Kimpu Jonathan Swan, Joe O'Brien, Jikishin James Douglass and our newest resident, Jishin Betsy

Robson, whose tasty repast was a highlight of every bicentennial event. This campaign would not have happened without their fixing, managing, buying, organizing, cleaning, orchestrating, cooking, leading and just plain seeing what needed to be done and doing it.

Likewise, the committee members – especially Program Chair Mokuon Karen Nezelek and Gyoshin Virginia Lawson, chair of the Development Committee – did a tremendous job, as did the chair of the Capital Campaign, Linda Lowen. From planning events to writing letters to creating haiku booklets to organizing work crews to setting up chairs, they were great. The art auction could not have happened so successfully – more than two-thirds of the work on view was purchased – without the admirable organization on the part of GetsuAn Ann Marshall, together with Mokuon, Gyoshin and Jikishin James Douglass, who managed to get our new website designed and up and running in time to put photographs of the artwork on the site – made possible through the great gift of Togan Tim Kohlbrenner's many hours of professional photography.

We also would like to thank renowned sculptors Jonathan Kirk and Takashi Soga; Roshi contacted Takashi-san at the last minute looking for a way to transport and install Tom Huff's 2,500-pound sculpture to its site along Onondaga Creek. Takashi-san called Jonathan, who brought his truck with its crane and winch to the rescue. Also, we are so grateful to Diane Grimes and Daigan David Arnold, whose ever-present behind-the-scenes efforts helped to make things run smoothly; and Senju Dave Fisher, without whose expertise the Zen Center's computers and, hence, its campaign would be off-line.

Lastly, but hardly least, we thank our contributors – our many angels, great and small, whose steadfast commitment and generosity are such a blessing.

### Sharing Shinge Roshi

You probably read earlier in this journal (if you didn't already know) that Shinge Roshi, abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse, will be made abbot of Dai Bosatsu with the retirement of Eido Roshi. She will be installed at 1 p.m. on 1/1/11. With this new role, she will not be the only one who's called to step up to the plate.

We will be, too. Roshi will need to delegate more, if she is to manage both jobs. And we will be called to say, "Hai!" when asked to help. Are you ready?

### If You Build It ...

Have you seen our new website? If not, stop what you're doing and take a look. It's cool! It's at [www.zencenterofsyracuse.org](http://www.zencenterofsyracuse.org). It's beautifully designed and so impressive. You click on things and relevant, timely, interesting stuff pops up for you to read.

But it's way cooler than that! It's a whole universe away from the old site. In that world, the webmaster was responsible for all updates and changes to

the site. Our former webmaster, Todd Relyea, did a masterful job of it, and we are grateful for his many years of dedication. But no single human being (with another full-time job) can keep up with the requests to change, update, communicate coming from a growing group of Sangha volunteers, committee chairs, etc.

Enter Jikishin. He came to us from St. Lawrence University with a freshly minted degree in computer science and a vision to redesign the site with new software that would make it interactive and accessible.

“When I assumed responsibility as webmaster for [zencenterofsyracuse.org](http://zencenterofsyracuse.org), I finally understood why the site had remained so static over all these years,” Jikishin wrote, when I asked for a short description of the project. “Making even the smallest change was frustrating for all involved. The administrator was usually swamped with other, more interesting tasks, while the author of the updates was all too aware of the time-sensitivity of the content to be posted. When I became a resident at the Zen Center, I seized the opportunity to build a new site that would address these difficulties and empower users of the site to make changes to its content.”

The idea was to build a flexible structure that the rest of us could use to enter content. If it all works right, Jikishin will essentially work himself out of a job, unless something goes terribly awry. The webmaster won't input content. I'll do it ... and Jikyo ... and Jisho ... and the committee chairs ... and many others.

The plan is starting to work. With 15 minutes of training, I was able to add a synopsis of the actions of the Sept. 20 ZCS Board of Trustees meeting – by myself. It's not rocket science. I think I can do it again for the Nov. 8 and Jan. 24, 2011, board meetings. Likewise, a dozen or so frequent contributors to ZCS will be trained in coming days to update website content in their areas of interest. The site will be much more dynamic, inclusive and current.

The credit goes to Jikishin, who spent days and weeks working on the design – and also to Senju, who helped him pull it all together in time to be operational for the October events. Shinge Roshi was instrumental in the look of the site, and Nick Cavanaugh helped get all the old content onto the new website. GetsuAn and I helped test it.

The beauty of the site is that it will grow and become more complex, multilayered and interesting over time. We've built it, and now it's time for our staff and volunteers – and the vast public out there – to come and use it. □

#### **Are You Getting Our E-mails?**

If your e-mail address has changed, you may not be receiving information about upcoming events and Sangha news. Please send us a note – by e-mail to [admin@hoenji.com](mailto:admin@hoenji.com) – to let us know your new e-mail address. We'll correct your e-mail address or add one, if you've never given it to us.

#### **Room 308**

*Outside the room on midnight break from death watch  
No one hears Jerome depart  
Or silence still his choking*

*Till siren cries, like midway barkers, bring us running.*

*Inside the darkened room, flashing gadgets light a grinning wax imposter  
That claims the bed to dare us:  
Mourn, and mock the being it usurps;  
Or, call the bluff.*

*– Konreki Randlett Jordan  
(at the bedside of a dying friend)*

## **From the Treasurer**

**By Toku Ellen Grapensteter**

We live in interesting times, economically as well as otherwise. While all around us we see signs of uncertainty and insecurity, we have been fortunate at Hoen-ji to be on sound financial footing.

Guided by Shinge Roshi, the conservative financial policy of the Finance Committee and the Board of Trustees has had positive results for the last two years. The hefty mortgage of more than \$300,000 only a few years ago has been reduced to less than \$120,000. The Capital Campaign has funded many overdue repairs, as well as a modest nest egg. And, while our members may be unable to increase pledges, they have continued to support Hoen-ji and work for the Dharma generously.

On a personal note, I was not raised in a wealthy or entitled environment. My parents were children of the Great Depression and taught us not to be wasteful. I put myself through school and have worked every year of my life since I was fourteen years old. I share this because it is part of a powerful personal motivation for good stewardship.

One of the many happy discoveries in my work at Hoen-ji was that this philosophy is shared by the leadership here. Our members know their gifts are not treated carelessly. Expenses are mindfully contained and our savings are not gambled. Indeed, there were no losses of assets during the global economic collapse – or at any time.

I continue to be very proud of all the good work that goes on here from residents, members and guests. I am happy to report that the practice of mindfulness, compassion, openness and integrity extends to mundane details



of financial housekeeping. I hope we will all continue to feel free to support Hoen-ji, knowing that our gifts are not only appreciated but also conserved wisely. □

## Sangha Passages

### Births ...

*The following babies were welcomed into Sangha members' families from the end of 2009 through 2010:*

Alia Kathryn Gordon, daughter of Fugan Sam and Julia Gordon, April 14, 6 pounds. She joins daughters Neve Grace, 4 ½ and Mira Isabel, 2.

Story Marie Komurek, daughter of Lilli (Melnikow) and Mike Komurek and granddaughter of Jika Lauren and Walter Melnikow, March 31, 8 pounds 13 ounces.

Zander Quinn Loose, grandson of Evelyn Dumanian and nephew of Alex Dumanian, Aug. 3, 8 pounds 14 ounces.

Hayden Evelyn Lund, granddaughter of Evelyn Dumanian and niece of Alex Dumanian, Sept. 6, 7 pounds 11 ounces.



Story Marie Komurek

Nadia Joelle Mitrus, daughter of Chosei Heidi and Chimon Bill Mitrus, Dec. 5, 2009, 5 pounds, 6 ounces.

Allison Rose Schubert, daughter of Doshin David and Cara Schubert, July 25, 7 pounds 4 ounces. She joins sister Madeline.

Calder Bell Staley, daughter of Horen Vaughn Bell and Brennon Staley, Sept. 17, 7 pounds 4 ounces.



Calder Bell Staley

### ... And Deaths

*We offer our Kanzeon chanting to those who have lost the following beloved family members from late 2009 through 2010:*

Craig Michael Byrne, cousin of Mary Jean Byrne-Maisto, June 30.

Sylvia Chayat, mother of Shinge Sherry Chayat Roshi, Aug. 18.

Anthony Cota, father of Joe Cota and father-in-law of Myoko Jennifer Waters, July 10.

Don Grapensteter, father of Toku Ellen Grapensteter, Jan. 8.

Linda Louise Leebens-Knigge, aunt of Kimpu Jonathan Swan, May 28.

William Klawitter, brother-in-law of Myoho Victoria Klawitter, Sept. 21.

Therese M. Lord, mother of Chris Lord, July 24.

Norbert Muench, great-uncle of Alex Dumanian and uncle of Evelyn and Peter Dumanian, Aug. 2.

Carrie Reagan, a member of the Tibetan Sangha, March 13.

Albert C. Savianeso, father of Michelle Miller, Sept. 12.

Gerald Allen Spencer, father of Kensei Jim Spencer, March 30.

Sara Sullivan, mother of Florence Sullivan and mother-in-law of Jikishi Celia Oyler, Sept. 25.

Edward Willoughby, partner of Carrie Reagan, March 7.

Andrew Pilgrim Witkin, son of Jerome and Lisa Witkin, July 13.

*The following people died late last year:*

Natalie Basford Fancher, mother of Jisho Judith Fancher, Oct. 12, 2009.

Michael Allen Grimes, brother of Diane Grimes' brother, Oct, 14, 2009.

### Working on Education Reform

Sangha member Jikishi Celia Oyler has been very busy this year serving as a strategic consultant to New York City's Deputy Chancellor for Students with Disabilities. They are embarked on a long-overdue reform of the special education system in New York City, and Jikishi's Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project was selected to provide professional development for teachers in 261 schools. Next year, the reform will roll out to the other 1400 schools.

### New members

The following people were acknowledged as New Members during sesshins in 2010: Benjamin Bogosian, Meg Gregory, Deb Badera, Tetsunin Pat Yingst, and Genko Leslie Del Gigante.

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*Continues on next page*

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