

## From the Abbot

### The Three Jewels

I spent the first week of September on Wolfe Island, Ontario, as I do each year, sitting at the edge of the lake amid the sounds of wind and waves, Great Lakes freighters making their way from Montreal to points west, calls of geese gathering for their long journey south. Each phenomenon in its own way perfect, each exactly in accord with circumstances. After a spring and summer of intense Dharma activity, the solitude in which to appreciate this was downright blissful.

Like the small flocks of geese that join together to form great arrows of momentum, we are returning to vigorous daily practice at our temples, guided on our journey by the Three-fold Refuge, the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. *Buddham saranam gacchami*: We take refuge in Buddha. *Dhammam saranam gacchami*: We take refuge in Dharma. *Sangham saranam gacchami*: We take refuge in Sangha. This Three-fold Refuge means we are vowing to awaken to who we truly are; to be intimate with the teachings of each moment; and to nurture and uphold our shared commitment on this endless path.

Our Three-fold Refuge takes place at three interrelated temples, which are indeed three jewels: Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji and New York Zendo Shobo-ji, both under the governance of the Zen Studies Society; and the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji, which has its own governing body.

We observe the same forms, chant the same sutras, cultivate the same attentiveness, and are inspired by the same ancestors. Increasingly, the flowing nature of the Dharma has brought a healthy and mutually invigorating exchange: practitioners based geographically at one temple sit sesshin and participate in programs at the others. Students who start out at Hoen-ji train and do sesshin at DBZ and then return; DBZ kessei participants and college interns continue their practice at Shobo-ji or Hoen-ji, and some of them become residents at the Syracuse temple. Shobo-ji members go regularly to DBZ for sesshin, samu weekends, various programs, and kessei, and occasionally to Hoen-ji as well.

In addition to the Dharma interaction among these three temples, there is further enrichment from members of other Sanghas. Following the retirement and later passing of his teacher, Joshu Sasaki Roshi, Dokuro Jaeckel Osho has been completing his training with me, and will become my Dharma heir in November 2017. He brings his students from Charles River Zen in Boston to DBZ, and also visits Hoen-ji and Shobo-ji (and will be leading Soen Shaku Sesshin in New York City November 11-13). Other ordained and lay students of Dokuro Osho and the late Joshu Sasaki Roshi have been attending sesshin and practicing at DBZ and Shobo-ji.

Our Japanese roots are being watered, too. The Ven. Shunan Noritake Roshi joined us at DBZ for our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary and last year's Golden Wind, and plans to return to DBZ whenever he can. Recently installed as abbot of Rinzaï-ji, Sasaki Roshi's temple in Los Angeles, Noritake Roshi told us, "So I am now your neighbor!" At Hoen-ji, we just had a three-day visit from Shihou-san Fuminori Tsukahara, who also attended the 2015 Rohatsu Sesshin at DBZ; his temple, Tokoku-ji, belongs to the Reiun group, headed by Noritake Roshi, at the Rinzaï Zen headquarters of Myoshin-ji. At an informal gathering Shihou-san affirmed that Myoshin-ji wants to help in any way possible.

Kessei at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, which began September 14, includes two monks from JunPo Roshi's Hollow Bones Sangha who are trained in Mondo Zen and have signed on for 1,000 days

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of traditional Rinzai Zen monastic life. JunPo Roshi has been conducting Hollow Bones Sesshin at DBZ for several years now, and our Sanghas are growing in togetherness.

Junryu Vardi Roshi, a New Jersey-based teacher in the White Plum lineage and an aikido master, continues to hold sesshin for his students at DBZ. He also offers teachings regularly at Shobo-ji, and several of his students attend our sittings. Also conducting sesshin for their Sangha at DBZ are Koshin Paley Ellison and Robert Chodo Campbell, co-founders of the New York Zen Center for Contemplative Care.

The mutuality of host and guest is a koan to be clearly realized, savored, and passed on to future generations of sincere Dharma seekers. To fully comprehend our relationship to all beings, and to be alert and attentive to the subtle ways in which that relationship is ever changing, is a key teaching of everyday life.

I returned from Wolfe Island September 10; the following day was the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11. We included Dai Segaki chanting for the deceased in our morning service, and the twelve-hour day at Hoen-ji continued with zazen, dokusan, yoga, Board and committee meetings, and a residents' meeting, concluding with Dharma Study, in which we have been deeply investigating Red Pine's translation and commentary on *The Platform Sutra: The Zen Teaching of Hui-neng*. Hoen-ji is planning a special day of thanksgiving October 15 to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of practice in our current home (the Zen Center of Syracuse started back in 1972 on the Syracuse University campus, and met for twelve years in my home before finding this spacious property in 1996). Keynote speaker for the anniversary event will be Sensei Michael Holleran, who spent 22 years in total silence as a Carthusian monk, and is now Dharma Teacher at Dragon's Eye Zendo, Church of St. Francis of Assisi, New York City.

Following Shihou-san's visit I left Syracuse for DBZ, where so many auspicious events have occurred during our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, including the unforgettable program of July 3. On September 14, we had our kessei opening ceremony, during which I met privately with each student; the next day, September 15, I conducted the ordination of Juyo Dennis Giacomo, DBZ's general manager. Juyo began his Zen training at Saiko-ji, a Soto temple in Japan, 35 years ago, and received Jukai there. Having spent the past five years living first half-time and then full-time at DBZ, he has made the decision to take this step. It is indeed heartening, and further inspires not only the dedicated students who have signed on for Rinzai Zen monastic training, but Sangha members at all three temples. I know he joins me in wishing that you make every effort to attend Golden Wind, Harvest, and Rohatsu sesshin at DBZ this kessei.

The fall training period at New York Zendo, with Koge Louise Bayer as resident monastic, has begun with a strong commitment to practice and caring for the temple, which has been beautifully refurbished. Plans for new programs and community outreach are under way. Dharma Study meetings will focus on *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*, translated by Robert Thurman. We just finished a very good 48<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sesshin this weekend. It will soon be 50 years since New York Zendo Shobo-ji held its opening ceremony on September 15, 1968!

Here we are, supported by the Three Treasures at our beautiful centers of Buddhist practice. We are so fortunate to have this human birth; to have encountered the Dharma; and to be able to devote our lives to the Four Great Vows. We owe so much to our teachers, and the best way to thank them is to uphold these vows. Every morning upon waking up, chant the Four Great Vows. Every night before drifting off to sleep, chant the Four Great Vows.

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Recently none other than President Obama, addressing the people of Laos while there for the East Asia Summit, said: "In countless stupas and in your daily lives, we see the strength that draws so many of you, from your Buddhist faith. A faith that tells you that you have a moral duty to each other, to live with kindness and honesty, and that we can help end suffering if we embrace the right mindset and the right actions."

Thank you, President Obama. And thank you so much for your inconceivable vow these eight difficult years.

Gassho,

Shinge