



Holiday Schedule

The zendo will be closed on Thursday and Friday, November 23 and 24. **The regular Sunday morning program on November 26 will be held as usual.**

The zendo will be closed from Thursday, December 21 through Saturday, December 30. However, **on Sunday morning, December 31, the regular program at 9:00 am will be held, and on Sunday night, December 31, there will be a New Year's Program beginning at 8:00. The zendo will be closed on Monday, January 1.** The on-going schedule will resume on Tuesday, January 2.

Sangha News

The Board of Directors is pleased to announce that the Soto Zen Headquarters in Japan has recognized and formally registered the Chapel Hill Zen Center as a Soto Zen Temple, with the name *Jogoji* or Calm Abiding Temple on Red Cedar Mountain. If you go to the website: <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/eng/index.html>, and click on "Soto Zen Temples" and then "Outside Japan," you will find the CHZC on the map.

Kyokushin Jokyo, Joel Feigin, received *Shukke Tokudo*, or Priest Ordination, from Sojun Roshi, Mel Weitsman, on September 23, 2017. We offer our warmest congratulations!

Dharma Talks

Choro Carla Antonaccio will give a public Dharma Talk on Sunday morning, November 12, at 10:30. Everyone is welcome.

Garden Dedication and Benefit Auction

The evening was a wonderful event of chanting, beautiful art, delicious refreshments, and music by Chris Censullo, Pline Mounzeo and Ken Wilson, and Zenki, Tray and Atticus Batson. This generated \$2,700 dollars for the Garden Renovation. We wish to thank all of the artists who so generously donated their work and others who offered art from their homes. We are also grateful to John Paredes and Andrea Ashdown who worked so hard to make this such a wonderful event.

General Meeting

The General Meeting, our annual members' business meeting, will be held on Sunday morning, November 19, at 11:00, following zazen. The nominees for the next Board of Directors will be introduced and the budget for 2018 will be presented. Everyone is encouraged to attend, but only Participating Members are eligible to vote. If you have agenda items, please contact the Board President, Maura High at maurahigh@gmail.com

Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony

On Sunday morning, December 17, we will commemorate Buddha's Enlightenment at 10:30 with a short talk directed to children followed by a candle lighting and special service in the zendo. At the end of service, the children will be given a gift of incense and a candle. ***The morning will end with pot-luck refreshments, beverages provided.*** Two periods of zazen, beginning at 9:00 A.M. will be held as usual.

New Year's Eve

On Sunday night, December 31, we will welcome the New Year with two periods of zazen at 8:00 and 8:50 followed by the Bodhisattva Ceremony at 9:20, and a Fire Ceremony at 9:50 followed by refreshments. For the Fire Ceremony, we write down the habits and tendencies, difficult states of mind, tangled aspects of relationships, and so on, that we would like to release. We will have an outdoor fire to burn our papers along with the name cards from Memorial Services held during the past year and incense stubs that have accumulated throughout year. Everyone is welcome for the whole program or to any part of it. ***The program will end with refreshments.***

Rohatsu Sesshin

December 1-8. For information, see pages 6 & 7.

Looking Ahead

All-day Sittings are planned for January 14, February 11, and March 18, 2018.

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Children's Program

The Zen Center's Children's Program offers a variety of activities for children age 5 through 15, including meditation, mindfulness, Buddhist teachings and stories, crafts, songs, and movement, as well as participation in Zen Center celebrations throughout the year. Parents are encouraged to volunteer to help with the Children's Program or attend the concurrent adult program of Zen meditation. This Fall, the program will meet on November 5 and 19, and December 17. For information, please contact Maura High, at maurahigh@gmail.com.

People of Color Sitting Group

Wednesday nights from 6:00-7:30

The POC Sitting Group begins with zazen at 6:00, followed by kinhin (walking meditation) with the option to stay for group discussion. Both those new to meditation, or experienced, are warmly welcome to join us or drop in as you like. For more information, contact Conal or Kriti at poesittinggroup@gmail.com.

Recovery Meeting

The Recovery Meeting meets on Tuesday nights at 7:30. This is a recovery group with a Buddhist perspective on the 12-Step Program which meets at the Chapel Hill Zen Center. The meetings begin with twenty minutes of silent meditation. For more information, contact: call 919-265-7600 or ZenandRecovery@gmail.com.

Prison Outreach

Members of the CHZC volunteer in both state prisons in North Carolina and the federal prison at Butner. We can always use more volunteers, and having volunteers present is usually a requirement in order for inmates to meet for religious services or to sit zazen. Potential volunteers need to have sat zazen at the Zen Center for at least a year. Orientation is required by each institution. If you would like more information, please contact Robert at jewelednet@gmail.com.

May Sesshin

Daitso Tom Wright, translator of *How to Cook Your Life*, will lead a 7-day teaching sesshin May 4-11, 2018. Daitso lived in Japan for over thirty years, and he practiced with Uchiyama Roshi from 1968 until the latter's death, and he was ordained as a priest in 1974. He was a teacher for the Kyoto Soto Zen Center until 1995, and then led Zen groups with Rev. Doyu Takamine in Kyoto and Tamba.

Chinese Calligraphy and Brush Painting

Jinxu Zhao will teach Chinese Calligraphy on Sunday afternoons from 2:15-3:45, on Nov. 5 and 19, and on Dec. 10 and 17. Chinese Brush Painting is from 2:15-4:15. Fees are \$20 for calligraphy and \$25 for brush painting. Please contact Jinxu at (919) 484-7524 or Jxznc@aol.com to register or for more information. Jinxu is also available to teach children's classes.

Practicing with Dying

Joshō Pat Phelan

In Zen monasteries and training temples in Japan and the United States, it's traditional to begin hitting the *han* fifteen minutes before zazen or Zen meditation begins. The *han* is a thick piece of wood, that is hit with a wooden mallet used to call monks to the meditation hall for zazen. A traditional verse is written on the *han* which has been translated into English many ways. But the translation we use here is:

Great is the Matter of Birth and Death,

Quickly Passing, Gone, Gone,

Awake, Each One Awaken,

Don't Waste this Life.

Impermanence is an important theme in Buddhism and in Zen, it is often referred to as the "Great Matter." In Japanese Zen both birth and death are included in the meaning of the word "life." So, great is the matter of *this* life. Nishiari Bokusan, a 19th century Japanese Zen teacher taught that when we are alive, just be 100% alive; and when dying, just engage in the activity of

dying completely. He said that thinking about death won't help you at all. In whatever way we may speculate about death or conceptualize the after-life, it is limited by our conceptualization process. Our thinking or worrying don't help us have a better death. Of course, it's natural to think about dying and what happens afterward. Most of us feel at least some fear or anxiety about death and the idea of losing everything we have and everyone we love. But in contrast to this, I've never heard anyone talk about being worried about what it might have been like for them before they were born or before they were conceived. What we were or what we might have been doing before we were born just doesn't bring the same kind of anxiety that the idea of death and dying do. As we trust whatever was happening with us before birth, I think we can trust whatever will happen to us after life.

One way to make use of the idea of impermanence is to remind ourselves that we are going to die. For me, I have to keep reminding myself that I am going to die, because I have such a strong habit of thinking about the future and constantly projecting my thoughts into a future time. So, it is hard to "think" about there not being a future for me – actually it's pretty hard to think about the "thinker" not being here. So, pay attention, be alive and present right now for this moment, this precious moment of life. One of my teachers said, "this moment is your palace."

Another way I practice with the idea of impermanence is to look at the question, if I knew that I was going to die in six months or in a year, how would I live my life right now – what are my priorities? *What* is most important? And how would I like to die? By this I mean, what state of mind would I like to have when I am dying? How do I want to engage with dying? And can my practice now be a support for doing that?

Buddha didn't say what happens after death. Although people have had near death experiences, I think they are pretty short, so I don't think anyone really knows. I think death is beyond our ability to conceptualize. I also think life, our living experience, is beyond our ability to conceive, that our thinking about and memories

of an experience are several steps removed from the actual experience.

Now, at my age, more and more people I know are dying or being diagnosed with serious conditions. So, death, the process of dying, and how to support someone who is near the end of their life have been on my mind. When I was a child, I assumed that death was painful or frightening, so I thought that the best thing would be to die suddenly in my sleep, just slipping away without really knowing what was happening. But as I got older and began practicing zazen, I began to think about how the process of aging, of becoming weaker and sick before dying, provided the possibility of coming to terms with one's life and of being able to tie up loose ends – giving the opportunity to apologize, to express gratitude and love, and say good-bye to those I care about. I also think that when people experience some pain and deterioration as they approach death, that it might make it easier to accept the inevitability and not resist the process of letting go and dying.

Suzuki Roshi said, "Sooner or later we die, and we will go to the same place we go to when we sit zazen." For a long time I've felt that the practice of zazen is fundamentally a way to prepare for dying. When we just sit and breathe, we have the opportunity to study and embrace breathing by being present with the whole breath, getting to know the myriad qualities that breathing can have. The breath can be high in our chest, refusing to go any lower; it can be tense or relaxed and effortless; it can be held or get stuck and not want to move much at all; it can be deep, slow, fast, restricted; or when we are exercising, it can seem as if the lungs and breath have a life of their own and the rest of our body is just accompanying them. The practice of letting go of the exhalation, breath after breath, completely letting go with no expectation that anything will follow, is one way to practice letting go and to prepare for taking the last breath, for allowing our breathing to come to its own end. This practice, like practice in general, is characterized by letting go and opening our hearts, entering the next moment with no expectation.

During zazen, when I realize that I am thinking, I try to let go of the thought, to let go of my storyline, as I exhale. Throughout our daily activity, when we are paying attention, we can study the inner feelings and sensations of letting go and the opposite, of resisting or contracting. We resist and let go in many ways: physically – in our muscles, emotionally and psychologically as well as through our breathing. Being aware of resistance or of letting go in any of these ways, at any time, is an entrance to becoming more conscious of what we are feeling and what we fear.

If you are with someone who is dying, I think one of the important things is to support calmness and do whatever helps alleviate fear and resistance to dying. I just don't see how fear can be helpful. Although I think it is comforting to express love and support, it is important to do it in such a way that doesn't lead to clinging or attachment, or impede letting go in any way. My own intention is to try to encourage the one who is dying to continue their path, not to get stuck in attachment or regret, but to go in the direction of freedom. There are a lot of words and ideas about calmness and developing a feeling of peace, but the challenge is how to communicate it, verbally or nonverbally, in a way that is appropriate and relevant to the individual. Sometimes just being a calm presence in the room is what we can offer. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, Sogyal Rinpoche emphasized the importance of listening, of allowing the person who is approaching death to talk, to express their concerns and regrets; he emphasized the importance of being a supportive presence as well as *never* imposing our own beliefs, but allowing and enabling the dying person to find these within himself.

When someone who is dying begins turning inward, away from the external world, and stops eating, speaking less, and sleeping most of the time, I think that their consciousness becomes less discursive and less conceptual. I have heard the process of dying referred to as “the deep work of dying.” At this stage I try not to touch the person unnecessarily or to try to talk to them in the usual discursive way, which I think can have the effect of pulling them back out to the surface

of things. The *Lankavatara Sutra* talks about language, saying that words arise in conjunction with discriminatory consciousness, or words come into being with discriminating or discursive consciousness as their basis. Once a person who is dying is no longer speaking, it is easier for me just to sit and breathe with them, letting the deep calm of simply being present be a support. Although from time-to-time, I might read aloud short passages that have meaning or give comfort, such as the *Twenty-third Psalm* or the Buddhist Refuges. But since it seems like there is less conceptualizing going on, I don't try to have conversations as I do in everyday life. Most of our conversation is driven by habit energy. So, the absence of speaking can be a support in the letting go of conceptualization and turning more deeply inward. And just sitting with a dying person, attending to your own breath and presence, or simply the breath and presence in the room, I find creates a unified, concentrated experience very much like my experience during sesshin or a meditation retreat.

In the book, *Preparing to Die*, Andrew Holecek wrote about dying from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective. The book describes eight stages of dying that correlate with stages of physical death and the withdrawal of consciousness, with detailed instructions about what to do in each stage. But at the end of these descriptions, he wrote, “My final pith instruction for what to do during [your own] death: release everything that will hold you back, look forward, let go – and relax.

For me, the concentration that develops during sesshin, after sitting period after period of zazen has a kind of momentum that carries over from one period to the next. And this more collected and settled focus reminds me of the concentration I feel when I sit with someone, or sit with an animal, who is dying. Both of these practices, sitting sesshin and sitting with dying, involve silence and a focus on the breath. During the time I practiced at the San Francisco Zen Center several people came there to die. The custom was for practitioners to take turns sitting zazen or just sitting quietly being present with the dying person until they died, and then to continue

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sitting zazen in the room with the deceased for 24-72 hours after their death, ideally for three days. The idea, as I understood it, was that by connecting with our own clarity and calmness of mind, that this supports clarity and calmness in the being making the transition from this life, both as they are dying and as the transition continues. Hopefully, the attitude of non-clinging and letting go, just being present, will support disengaging from this life and disentangling from this karmic identity.

When I was at the San Francisco Zen Center, I took a class about dying where we were taught a practice called conscious breathing or co-meditation. This might be done with someone who is dying, as they are resting or sleeping, or in the non-verbal state of actively dying. The practice is to join your breath to the dying person's breath. After your breath is coordinated with theirs, then add the sound of *ahhh*, softly, on the exhalation. So, you are just breathing with them, following their cycle of breath.

In being with someone who is dying, I find an intensity that displaces the usual trivia and comparative thinking that is in my ordinary mental landscape. The intensity is the fullness and completeness of each breath and each moment, that replaces the usual gaps of inattentiveness in ordinary life where the mind wanders looking for something interesting to latch onto.

To be able to engage in the present, hinges on an unconditional acceptance of just *this* person, this situation, as it is. In being a support for someone's dying, there is a feeling of how little can really be done to help or adjust the situation. The help to be given is to accept it with as little squirming and avoidance as possible. To be able to open to our own pain and the pain around us, I believe, makes it easier for the dying person to deal with his pain and, I think, helps alleviate fear. Fear and resistance are forms of suffering that only intensify pain. This whole-hearted acceptance of the full condition we find ourselves in, again reminds me of sesshin practice. In my daily zazen, there is too much room to squirm physically and emotionally, to continue thinking and comparing – to continue filling the gaps with

whatever the mind can find to grab onto. My mental habits are too fixed to be able to set them aside during meditation for 40 minutes once or twice a day. Unfortunately, for me it takes 40 minutes repeated 10 or 12 times a day for a couple of days to really change the momentum of my mental activity.

To accept the fullness of each breath, of each moment, even when it is characterized by failing patience and discomfort, takes a lot of practice and reinforcement. To be present with another's death takes the same unconditional acceptance needed to be fully present in zazen. Unconditional acceptance is outside the capacity of thinking, outside judgement, outside our comparing mind, and outside verbal consciousness.

I think a lot of the fear that we, human beings, have about death is based on conceptualizing what death is, standing outside it and thinking about it. I believe that the actual process of dying is much different from what we imagine. In Zen, there is not a lot of teaching about death or the after-life. In Dogen's text "Birth and Death," or *Shoji*, he wrote, "In birth there is nothing but birth and in death there is nothing but death. Accordingly when birth comes, face and actualize birth, and when death comes face and actualize death." Suzuki Roshi said, "For the religious mind there is no fear of death. The fear of death exists in the realm of thinking or emotions." He also said, "When you attach to something, that is the beginning of being afraid of death."

Physically we come into the world with an inhalation and leave it on an exhalation, and this may be true in our moment-by-moment rebirth as well. Practicing awareness of our breath is itself a meditation on impermanence because our breath is always changing, always moving, we are either inhaling, exhaling, or about to. Cultivating the attitude of completely letting go on the exhalation, without anticipating anything else, just exhaling and letting go with the whole body and mind, is a kind of renunciation where we renounce our expectations, which frees us just to be.

Sitting zazen and sitting with someone who is dying have the commonality of attention to the

breath and silence, and hopefully letting go. The more we can trust this non-discursive space, the more we can trust the unknown, and the more we will be able to trust our life.

Rohatsu Sesshin

Josho Sensei will lead *Rohatsu* sesshin from Friday night, December 1, through Friday afternoon, December 8. Sesshin is an intimate way to practice with ourselves and others. We begin sesshin together, we sit together, walk together, eat together, and work together. Our practice is supported by the entire universe and each of us is supporting everyone else. In order to help all of us settle into the schedule and our zazen practice, please arrive on time. It is possible to sit part of the sesshin, but please come to orientation on Friday night, and plan to sit for at least two days, and, when registering, clearly explain what part of sesshin you would like to attend.

Sesshin will begin at 7:00 on Friday evening with orientation and job assignments. Following orientation, silence will be observed. The zendo will be open by 4:00 P.M. on Friday; so please plan to arrive in time to settle in before 7:00 P.M. The sesshin day will include zazen, beginning at 6:00 A.M., kinhin, a Dharma talk, work period, formal meals served in the zendo. *Dokusan*, an individual meeting with Josho Sensei, will be available. The day will end around 9:30 P.M. The fees are \$40 per day for Participating Members and \$50 per day for others. Fees for the whole sesshin are \$280 for Participating Members and \$330 for others. There will also be an opportunity to make a donation to the teacher. **It is our intention that no one be turned away for financial reasons.** Scholarships are available. If you would like to request a scholarship, please contact Maura High at maurahigh@gmail.com. In the past, contributions received for scholarships were very helpful in allowing people to attend sesshin here and at the San Francisco Zen Center. **Please return your registration form by November 24, with a \$30 deposit.**

You are welcome to sleep in the zendo, and there may be some space available in members' homes

nearby. Please bring a pad for the floor, a sleeping bag, pillow, a towel and wash cloth, slip-on shoes, and layered clothes. Opportunities for bathing are limited. **Please bring work clothes.** For more information, please contact Josho at (919) 967-0861 or info@chzc.org. The Zen Center emergency phone is 919-933-0776.

Sesshin Guidelines

Follow the schedule completely. If you are unable to do so, please speak to Josho before signing up. If you become sick, or if a difficulty arises during sesshin, please speak with Josho or the Ino at that time.

No reading or writing, including Buddhist studies. Of course, you may read the sesshin schedule, but any reading that is not essential to the sesshin should not be done.

No talking. Please maintain silence and a focused atmosphere during breaks and work time.

Meal Practice. Please take some of each food being served unless you have a bad allergy to a particular food. Our meal practice is to accept what is offered. Tea, coffee and water will be available during breaks and before zazen in the morning. **If you have a problem with, or allergy to, any food, please indicate that on the registration form.**

Please do not use deodorants, aftershave lotion, or other cosmetics that are perfumed.

No smoking in the building or on the decks.

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Rohatsu Sesshin Registration Form December 1-8 —Applications Due November 24

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ E-mail _____

Emergency contact person: Name _____ Phone _____

Liability waiver: *prior to sesshin, you will be required to be sign a waiver whereby you release the Zen Center from any liability for accident or injury, and agree not to sue. You may request a copy of the form in advance.* Do you have a **medical condition** (e.g., diabetes, heart condition, pregnancy), allergies or **dietary restrictions**? If so, please attach an explanation.

I have an oryoki I can bring Yes No

I plan to arrive at _____ on _____ I plan to leave at _____ on _____

I can help set up (4:00 P.M.—6:00 P.M.) I can help clean up

I have enclosed my deposit/sitting fees \$ _____

Checks payable to
Chapel Hill Zen Center
P.O. Box 16302
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

I would like to donate toward a scholarship fund \$ _____

If this is your first sesshin with the Chapel Hill Zen Center, please attach a short statement about your zazen practice and history: How long have you been sitting zazen? How often are your currently sitting? Have you sat a one-day sitting or longer sesshin before? If so, when and with whom?

Where do you plan to sleep?

The zendo emergency number is (919) 933-0776. Please read sesshin guidelines on previous page.

Chapel Hill Zen Center



P.O. Box 16302
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
(919) 967-0861

Schedule

Sunday Morning *Tuesday Evening*

9:00 zazen	7:00 zazen
9:40 kinhin	7:40 kinhin
9:50 zazen	7:50 zazen
10:30 service	8:20 service

Monday to Friday

<i>Thursday Evening</i>	6:00 A.M. zazen
6:00 P.M. zazen	6:50 A.M. zazen

Meetings at 5322 NC Highway 86
2.5 miles North of I-40 exit 266

Joshō Pat Phelan, Abbess

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“It [enlightenment] is the understanding of all dharmas, but that understanding is non-obstruction. And why? For nothing is here understood or penetrated, since enlightenment is the sameness of penetration and understanding and one speaks of enlightenment because all dharmas are understood. And what is the understanding of all dharmas? There is here no enlightenment (bodhi), nor understanding (anubodha). And why? If one could apprehend enlightenment, then enlightenment could be seized in enlightenment; but there exists no enlightenment in enlightenment; it is thus that this enlightenment should be fully known.... And again a dharma does not exist by way of having the own-being of a non-dharma; when this is understood, one speaks of “enlightenment”.

Perfection of Wisdom in 2,500 Lines, Trans. Edward Conze

Embracing diversity, the Chapel Hill Zen Center expresses the fundamental connection of all beings by welcoming everyone to the practice of zazen.
May all beings realize their true nature.