



We sit to make life meaningful. The significance of our life is not experienced in striving to create some perfect thing. We must simply start with accepting ourselves. Sitting brings us back to actually who and where we are. This can be very painful. Self-acceptance is the hardest thing to do. If we can't accept ourselves, we are living in ignorance, this darkest night. We may still be awake, but we don't know where we are. We cannot see. The mind has no light. Practice is this candle in our very darkest room.

Kobun Chino

Holiday Schedule

On **Sunday**, July 4, morning Zoom zazen will be offered, as usual, at 9:00 and 9:50. However, on **Monday, July 5, there will be no in-person zazen or study group meeting.** On July 5, Zoom zazen will be offered as usual at 6:00 and 6:50 am.

Chapel Hill Zen Center Reduced In-person Schedule

Out of a concern for everyone's safety due to the Novel Coronavirus, the CHZC is experimenting with a reduced in-person schedule. Currently, we are offering zazen at the Zen Center on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings at 6 and 6:50 AM for those who have been fully vaccinated for at least two weeks. If you would like to attend, please wear a mask in and out and for kinhin (walking meditation), and let us know before your first visit at: info@chzc.org.

We are considering opening for zazen on Tuesday evenings at 7:00 and 7:50 PM. The CHZC will continue to post updates about reopening via the CHZC email mailing list, the CHZC website (www.chzc.org/events.htm), and the CHZC Facebook pages. To sign up for the email announcements see: www.chzc.org/maillinglist.htm

We plan to continue having Zoom zazen while the Zen Center begins to reopen.

Zoom Zazen

The CHZC continues to offer zazen via Zoom on Monday and Friday afternoons from 1:00-1:40; Monday-Friday mornings from 6:00-7:20; and Sunday morning from 9:00-10:20. The Zoom link can be found on the Event Calendar section of the CHZC website at www.chzc.org/events.htm

In-person All-Day Sittings

Sunday, July 11, and August 8, 6 AM to 5:00 PM
We are moving toward having in-person All-day Sittings at the Zen Center, for those who are fully vaccinated. If you would like to attend, **please sign up by July 8, or August 5.** Attendance will be limited. *If, however, the infection rates go up for the Novel Coronavirus, we may return to having Half-day Sittings by Zoom on these dates instead.*

Please wear a mask inside and out of the building and for kinhin. You may take your mask off during zazen. The day will include zazen, a Dharma talk, zendo meals, a work period and an opportunity for Dokusan, a private meeting with the teacher. There will be assigned seating, so please say if you would like to sit on the floor or on a chair when you sign up at: info@chzc.org.

With a bow,

Joshō

Bodhisattva Ceremony

The Bodhisattva Ceremony, a renewal of vows and precepts, has its roots in ancient India. The Bodhisattva Ceremony will be held by Zoom, on Sundays, **July 25, and August 22**, at 10:20, following Zoom zazen.

Study Groups

Monday evenings, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM. We read and discuss Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *Transformation at the Base, or Understanding Our Mind*.

Tuesday Evenings, 6:45 PM - 8 PM. A *Lankavatara Sutra* study group, reading two translations by Red Pine and D. T. Suzuki. Please

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contact info@chzc.org for handouts. This study group may move to **Thursday evenings in July or August**, so please check the Event Calendar to confirm: www.chzc.org/events.htm

Thursday Evenings, 6:45 PM - 8 PM. *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out* will have its **last meeting on July 1**.

All the Study Groups are open to everyone, and there is no charge. Please log on 5-10 minutes before the study group begins so we can start on time. There is one Zoom link to access all the Study Groups, which is found on the Event Calendar section of the CHZC website: www.chzc.org/events.htm

Living with Impermanence

This informal discussion group meets on Zoom about once a month, providing the opportunity to explore conversations on aging, death and dying, as well as impermanence in general. Please contact Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com, Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com, or Senmyo Sherman at jeffsherman3333@gmail.com, if you would like more information. Everyone is welcome.

Sangha Net

The Sangha Net is a network of volunteers who can offer short-term assistance to those in the sangha in need of help due to transitions in one's life such as illness, disability, or death of a loved one. Examples of tasks can include shopping, arranging for meals, or transportation. During the pandemic, we will assist in ways that can allow for mutual safety.

If you would like to volunteer or if you need assistance, please contact Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com, Senmyo Jeff Sherman at jeffsherman3333@gmail.com, or Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com.

Eco-Dharma Discussion Group

When you realize the whole universe as nothing but yourself, you have to take care of it.

— John Daido Looi

The Eco-Dharma group informally explores together Buddhist teachings on the natural world, and caring for the natural world as an expression of the Bodhisattva Vow. We support and inspire one another in our efforts to make appropriate Buddhist responses to environmental concerns at a personal, local and global level. We hope to begin meeting in person again this summer. If you are interested, or have questions please contact: Chris at ccensullo@yahoo.com or Zenki at lulu@rubblebuss.com.

Children's Program

This program, like the Zen Center's other programs, has suspended in-person meetings at the Zen Center for the time being. But there are many ways we can still come together virtually. The Children's Program has many books and materials that can be shared — please just ask. Also, we are constructing a new mailing list; if you'd like to be added to it, please contact me, maurahigh@gmail.com, or leave a message at (919) 265-7045. I will contact you when we are schedule to resume the Zen Center's in-person program.

Organizing Against Racism

The local organization Organizing Against Racism is holding virtual workshops with REI, Racial Equity Institute, instructors. See: <https://www.oaralliance.org/> For the workshop schedules see: <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/new-events>

Over several years, some of us have taken this two-day workshop and have found it very informative and beneficial.

Scholarships for Racial Equity Workshops

The Chapel Hill Zen Center has a scholarship fund to help those who would like to take this workshop and other workshops on race who can't afford the full fee. For more information or to request a partial scholarship, please contact Ken Wilson at wilso003@duke.edu. Donations to this fund are also welcome!

Members' Library: New Acquisitions

Becoming Bodhisattvas: A Guidebook for Compassionate Action, by Pema Chodron; *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*, by Bernard Faure; *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, by Bernard Faure; *Silent Illumination*, by Guo Gu; *The Art of Simple Living*, by Shunmyo Masuno; *Stepping Into Freedom*, by Thich Nhat Hanh; *Understanding and Preventing Sexual Harrassment*, by Peter Rutter; *Black and Buddhist*, by Pamila Ayo Yetunde and Cheryl A. Giles.

Trees - A Dharma Talk

Zenki Kathleen Batson

Lately, I have been thinking a lot about the body, my body, in particular, trees and ceremony. I am going to try to share how I see these things relating.

Buddha means “awakened one” the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, says that from the Sanskrit root “budh” has the meaning “to awaken,” or “to open up” as does a flower. So you could say Buddhism is awake-ism or opening-up-ism. Looking up the definition of the suffix “ism” online I found that ism “has the quality of enlargement, and it carries you from the particular to the general.” As a Zen student when I think of moving from the particular to general of being awake, I think of the particular as moments of zazen to the general of every moment of life.

We read and think and study a lot in Zen which I believe is necessary for us. At the same time, at it's core, Zen is a body practice. Zazen is the act of *embodying* the teaching of Buddha. The prefix “em” is used to form verbs from adjectives and nouns. What we are talking about all the time is

being awake; to be awake with body and mind. Talking about it and being it are not the same thing. Our main practice is to sit down with our body and mind upright, and “to open up as does a flower.”

We are taught that what Buddha Siddhartha Gautama shared with us was not his own innovation. It was the rediscovery of timeless truths. Buddha called it an *ancient path*. We reference this in the Bodhisattva Ceremony and other important ceremonies when we first pay homage to the Seven Buddhas before Buddha.

According to Okumura Roshi the *Lotus Sutra* says that the teaching the Buddha wanted to transmit to all living beings is *Shoho Jisso*, the true character of all things, the true form of all beings. What we are to wake up to is the indescribable true reality of life. What is that? Well, if we could say it wouldn't be indescribable would it? We still talk about it all the same though. We use words like co-dependent arising of all phenomena. We talk about impermanence and the interdependent non-self nature of everything; we use shorthand for all this with words like *shunyata* or emptiness, or *nyoze* which means “like this” or suchness.

In Okumura Roshi's commentary on Dogen Zenji's *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, he says, “I think Dogen's understanding is that what buddhas and ancestors transmit is the *reality* of suchness – not the *teaching* of suchness but the *reality itself*.” Reality is manifested as physical form. Form is how we know reality – it is not something hidden inside form or somewhere out there – form is emptiness emptiness is form. The *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, or *San Sui Kyo*, is one of the very first Zen teachings I ever read. It begins, “Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way. Each, abiding in its phenomenal expression, realizes completeness. Because mountains and waters have been active since before the Empty Eon, they are alive at this moment. Because they have been the self since before form arose they are emancipation-realization.” Okumura Roshi says that in Japanese, the term “mountains and waters”

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refers to natural scenery and that the title means nature is Buddhist truth itself. The first time I read the *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, I was so moved I cried. Most people I know tend to see human beings as the high point of evolution – the smartest most evolved beings. This has always struck me as incredibly arrogant – we don't actually know how other living beings experience the world. I think we make a lot of assumptions. As some of the newest beings on the planet, and being young compared to some other beings, it makes more sense to me that we can learn a lot about how to live from other beings. We can learn from the way nature embodies truth.

Throughout my childhood, one of my closest and most consistent friends was a large birch tree in front yard of childhood home. You may find this a bit odd, but this being was a great companion to me. A kind of friend, a regular part of my play, a place of refuge. I would play and day dream among the branches. I would climb so high I would sway in the breezes and be able to see far beyond my neighborhood. I would quietly sneak through the front door at night to sit in this tree in the dark. No matter what my emotional state was, this being was present and open to me. I found solace and experienced joy with this tree. It was constantly slowly changing, and also completely consistent and dependable, completely upright, and open. The tree did not turn away and did not grasp. No matter how wildly the branches at the top swayed in the wind, the trunk stood firm and unmoving.

To be upright and open, steady and stable, while bending as needed, not turning away and not grasping – I see all these qualities as the qualities I make effort towards, moment after moment, with my body and mind in *zazen*. To find a teaching that stated that nature itself is Buddhist truth – the truth of being awake – of opening up, was like finding home. I had never found this expressed by a person until Dogen.

You could argue well that Dogen discussed natural scenery because that's what was all around him, but what about cityscapes now? What about litter and decay, the guy yelling on the corner –

do they express suchness? I would argue they do *if* we see them as suchness. We are surrounded by the suchness of the world, the true form of things as they are – *as it is*. We are surrounded by reality itself. An unsurpassed penetrating and perfect Dharma is rarely met with not because it is rare, but because we rarely meet it.

Early in my practice I thought the point of *zazen* was to calm my body and experience through the bodily sensations, without adding thoughts, so that I could experience what is “out there,” “as it really is,” so that I could experience the Truth, or reality. I didn't recognize though, the critical role my body plays in creating my experience of what I call truth. The co-dependent arising of my ears, with vibrations reaching those ears combined with the life force that is awareness creating what I experience as sound. The sound I experience from those vibrations and what my cat or a dog, or a bee experiences from those vibrations is not the same. Which one of us is experiencing the True Reality? Is there one reality known in many ways, or are there many realities? Dogen asked these questions in the *Mountains and Waters Sutra*.

In discussing the *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, Okumura Roshi explained that Yogacara seems to be telling us “that only consciousness exists, and each being sees its own version of water according to its own conditioned consciousness. For Yogacara teachers, nothing exists outside consciousness.” He went on to explain that Dogen, however, says that “the self and the world are working together within a relationship of interdependent origination.” “The relationship creates the view. As always Dogen asks us to ponder this deeply as he deconstructs any concepts we might cling to.” That the self and world together create the view feels important to me. It is an indescribable co-arising of reality between this relative body and the entire body of existence.

I spend time outside near trees almost everyday. When I feel sorrowful, unstable, or off kilter, I find being near trees healing. Old trees especially help my problems feel small. After the attack on the capitol, January 6, I felt compelled

to go looking for an old tree. I found the oldest on Duke Campus, around 300 years old. That tree has been standing, open, not turning away and not grasping, since before people called this place the United States. Being near it helped me to be able to stand more upright. I experience a wisdom there in the physical presence of that living being, continuously standing upright and opening to what is. I believe manifesting that same type of wisdom is what we are doing, or returning to in *zazen*. It is the reality of emptiness/suchness/interdependent co-arising/ etc. – what no words really reach.

Some folks refer to *zazen* as the ritual enactment of the Buddha's enlightenment. According to Taigen Leighton, "...*zazen* has been seen as a ceremonial, ritual enactment and expression of awakened awareness." At first this description bothered me. Isn't what I am doing in *zazen* real? Is it only a ceremonial enactment of something else that someone else did? Then I thought of the first line of *San Sui Kyo*, "Mountains and waters right now are the actualization of the ancient buddha way." We don't have buddha nature we *are* buddha nature, so we put forth effort to embody it. Robin Wall Kimmerer, author of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, is part Anishinabe, the native people of the Great Lakes region. Her elders teach that ceremonies are the way to "remember to remember." In *zazen* I am putting forth effort to remember over and over, to return to being fully present in this moment, the only one that exists. So if I think of ceremony as "remembering to remember" then *zazen* as a ceremonial ritual expression makes sense to me.

I think it is common in our culture, to see body and mind as separate. When we first begin to mediate we often think in terms of sitting in a certain position with the body to then do something else specific with the mind. It is pretty deeply ingrained for many of us to think of this body as separate from what we perceive as outside of it, without recognizing how our body contributes to what we perceive, and to see this body as a container for something else that makes us who

we are, and that this something else operates the body, is the controller – or the part where who we are resides. In his writings, Dogen consistently puts body and mind together as one word, *shinjin*, body/mind. Our bodies hold or store knowledge and wisdom. Our bodies store emotional memories, they store muscle memory for accomplishing tasks, our bodies accomplish a lot without direct conscious control – the heart beating, temperature regulating, etc.

In *zazen* we let go of thought and continuously return our attention to our full presence. As we let go of thought over and over, *zazen* allows the mind to experience being open and spacious. *Zazen* also gives the physical body the experience of being upright and open moment after moment so that being upright and open becomes part of our physical intelligence. I see it as being like an athlete practicing a movement until it comes automatically, or like someone who plays a fretless instrument practicing reaching back with their finger to hit a certain place on the string for a specific note over and over, until that finger knows exactly where to go every time the person wants to play that note. *Zazen* allows for the muscle memory of upright openness and nonjudgmental awareness to become part of our being. The body memory in part is how Buddhism, awake-ism, goes from particular to general; from the cushion into daily life.

I have noticed that if I bring my attention to more of my body throughout the day, I realize more of my being is engaged in upright awareness than I thought. Awareness is not all about the thinking part of body/mind. Over and over I can take a moment to notice how many parts of my body are just being awake, just upright and open. What are my feet doing? They are resting and ready. What about my elbows, my spine, my neck? These aspects of my being don't need my thinking mind's awareness to be awake and ready to respond. My brain can check in and discover how many aspects of the body are upright and aware. If the brain notices the curved spine, the tense neck, the bouncing agitated knee, then the knee, neck, spine find upright awareness again. All these aspects of the body have their own

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intelligence within them and ability to respond without the thinking analyzing mind.

Making effort to notice how much of my body is upright open and awake at any moment guides my mind. It helps the mind not grasp itself and feel like it is the controller. According to Miyazaki Zenji who was at one time the abbot of Eihei-ji, “Body and mind are one. Thus, if you straighten your body, your mind is straight.”

I have been experimenting with how much I can let go of my idea of self. I have been experimenting with viewing my body like a hive of bees or a flock of birds, functioning harmoniously without a self controlling all the others. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, when considering a flock of birds flying in formation, “You don’t need someone to hold the birds and keep them flying in one formation. You don’t need a self to create the formation. The birds just do it.” If you want to see amazing images of flocks of birds functioning as one body, look up “Starling Murmuration” on YouTube.

If I am having trouble noticing this, or am getting caught in my thoughts, I can “remember to remember” through ceremony. I can engage in any activity, no matter how mundane, as ceremony. If I am focusing on the movements of the body, I can quiet the thinking mind. When I dive into approaching my activity as ceremony there is a deep vivid richness in engaging in the world this way. This richness supports me in a way that feels similar to the way I felt supported by that tree as a child.

When you practice at a Zen center or in a monastery, there are many specific forms. Enter the zendo with the left foot. Bow with the hands at nose height, a hand width away from the nose, shoulders down, arms open. When serving food keep the fingers together, the thumbs under the handles of the pot, bend at the waist...It’s all actually arbitrary really, we just agreed to do it this way. It is ceremony; it is a way to remember to remember, to be awake, to open like a flower.

Sometimes I find words helpful for moving my busy mind towards a wordless awareness. In the book *Practices at a Zen Monastery* there are

many details for how to do things in a specific, ritualized way, and there are verses to accompany various activities. For example when bathing, “With all beings I wash body and mind, free from dust, pure and shining, within and without.”

When using the toilet, “As we use the toilet, may all sentient beings eliminate defilement, removing greed, hate and delusion.” But we don’t have to say specific things. We can just decide in any moment that we will engage in my activity as ceremony. No one even has to know. You could even try it right now with some random looking movement. Thiemo Blank, at Green Gulch Farm, had us do an experiment like that in a recent Dharma talk he gave that I was able to watch on Zoom.

A thought that occurred to me is that when I feel joyful moving through the world, it feels like dancing. So we can also approach mundane activity like dance. I looked up the definition of dance, and it “consists of purposefully selected sequences of human movement.” You don’t have to be a professional dancer to enjoy dancing. It doesn’t necessarily have to be graceful or take a specific form to be done with our whole body/mind. This is comforting to me as my body ages and I no longer move as I use to.

Dogen says, “The entire world of the ten directions is nothing but the true human body.” What is the entire world? I am sure I don’t know. It is mysterious. I can only honestly approach this with “don’t know mind.”

According to Dogen in *Shobogenzo Zuimonki*, “Sitting itself is the practice of the Buddha. Sitting itself is non-doing. It is nothing but the true form of the Self. Apart from sitting, there is nothing to seek as the Buddha Dharma.” What is a tree doing other than being the true form of itself?

Is a tree engaging in ceremony? I don’t think a tree has to remember to remember to be fully present. I don’t think trees have to wake up from illusions, (but I really don’t know).

Uchiyama Roshi said, “Enlightenment is nothing but awakening from illusions and returning to

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the reality of life.” We can engage in the ceremony of “remembering to remember,” to be awake and open, until more and more activity just becomes the activity.

Miyazaki Zenji said, “Dogen’s zazen means all aspects of life are Zen. Zen is not something particularly special, as many think. Zen means to be one with what is. If you walk, walking is Zen. If you speak, speaking is Zen.” The more we pay attention to what is actually happening in each moment, the more we can know about that moment. With more awareness of the moment we are in, we are more likely to make an appropriate response, a response that recognizes the entire world of the ten directions as nothing but the true human body.

We can think about and analyze all this, as I often do, and there are also other ways forward: quiet, body-centered ways forward, and playful, intuitive, poetic ways forward, that leave the indescribable, un-described. We can focus on opening and embodying awake-ness.

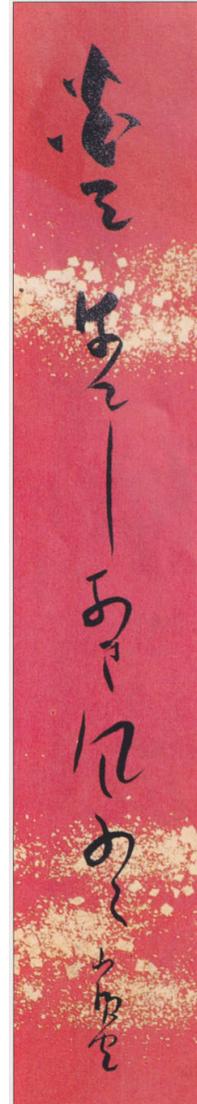
Dogen said, “The old plum tree is within the human world and the heavenly world. The old plum tree manifests both human and heavenly worlds in its treeness.”

Thank you very much.

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The Chapel Hill Zen Center Board of Directors are Kenneth Wilson, President; John Paredes, Vice President; Tripp Spivey, Treasurer; Chris Censullo, Secretary; Maura High and Alex Fine, Members-at-Large; and Josho Pat Phelan, *ex officio*.



Santoka, *Endless Scorching Sun*

If you would like to support the Chapel Hill Zen Center through a monetary donation, please mail checks to: P.O. Box 16302, Chapel Hill, NC 27516; or make a donation through MoonClerk: <https://app.moonclerk.com/pay/4yi5tx1i14xf>

Chapel Hill Zen Center



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Zoom Schedule

Sunday Morning *Tuesday Evening*

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

Monday to Friday

6:00 A.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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*Cool clear water
and fireflies that vanish
that is all there is ...*

Chiyo-ni (1702-1775)

a Pure Land Sect Buddhist Nun

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.