



CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER

NEWSLETTER

July & August 2025



Zenki in Japan

In May, Zenki Kathleen Batson traveled to Japan for *Zuise*, which involves a series of ceremonies at each of the two Head Temples of Soto Zen—Eihei-ji, founded by Eihei Dogen Zenji in the 13th Century, and Soji-ji, founded by Keizan Jokin Zenji in the 14th Century. During *Zuise*, one is ceremonially considered abbot for one night at each of these Head Temples. It is an important opportunity for a transmitted priest to express their respect to and gratitude for these two Founders and our Soto Zen heritage.

Pictured above, Zenki at Eihei-ji in Fukui, Japan. At left, an image taken by Zenki while visiting Rinso-In, Suzuki Roshi's temple in Shizuoka Japan. Rinso-In is now led by Suzuki Roshi's son, Hoitsu Suzuki, and grandson, Shungo Suzuki.



30th Anniversary Celebration

Saturday, October 11

On October 1, 1995, the Chapel Hill Zen Group moved into its current location, occupying the Gaitan and current Zendo areas. This was and is our first dedicated space. Since then, the Zen Center's activities have spread into the Community Room and Annex. We then created two additions—the current Entry Room, and then an extension and renovation of the Community Room and Annex to include ten additional feet toward the parking lot. The Sangha has grown and matured, slowly adding more programs, ceremonies, and teachers to become what the Zen Center is today. We hope you will join us in celebrating this happy event, which will include a Taiko Drum Performance!

Pictured above, *Red Cedar Mountain Temple*, calligraphy by Hoitsu Suzuki Roshi, son of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi.

Instrucción en español

Instrucción y orientación sobre zazen ahora disponibles en español. Envíenos un correo electrónico para programar a info@chzc.org.

Holiday Closures

The Zen Center will be closed on Independence Day, **Friday, July 4**, and on Labor Day, **Monday, September 1**.

Looking Ahead

We are planning to have Rohatsu Sesshin, led by Zenki Kathleen Batson, December 5–12.

Dharma Talks

JOSHO PAT PHELAN

Sunday mornings, June 29, and July 20 at 10:30 AM

ZENKI KATHLEEN BATSON

Sunday mornings, August 10, and 24 at 10:30 AM

Study Groups

YOGACARA STUDY GROUP

Monday evenings from 5:30 to 6:30 PM

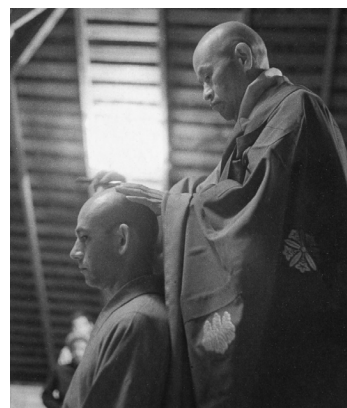
We will continue studying the Yogacara sutra, the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra*, primarily the translation of John Powers titled the *Wisdom of Buddha*, and Reb Anderson's book, *The Third Turning of the Wheel*. **There will be no meetings on July 28, August 25, or September 1.**

SEEING ONE THING THROUGH STUDY GROUP

Thursday evenings from 7 to 8 PM

We will continue reading *Seeing One Thing Through*, *The Zen Life and Teachings of Sojun Mel Weitsman*. **There will be no meetings on July 3, or August 7.**

Please log on 5–10 minutes before the study group begins so we can start on time. Everyone is welcome and there is no charge.



TO JOIN ALL ZOOM STUDY GROUPS

Via computer: www.zoom.us/j/821378615

Via phone: (646) 558-8656

Meeting ID: 821378615

Above, image of Sojun Mel Weitsman's ordination ceremony with Shunryu Suzuki.

Precepts Weekend

Saturday and Sunday, August 9 and 10

We will have the Lay Precepts Ceremony, *Zaike Tokudo*, on Sunday afternoon, August 10 at 1:30 PM. Tim Hinton is preparing to receive the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts. You are warmly invited to attend, witness and support this ordainee. A potluck reception will follow.

In preparation for receiving the precepts, there will be an informal sitting on Saturday, August 9 from 9 AM–4 PM. Everyone is welcome to join this sitting at whatever time may work for you. Please bring a bag lunch if you will be attending around noon. We will break for a bag lunch at this time, followed by a work period.



All-Day Sittings

Sundays, July 20, August 24, and September 21

All-day Sittings begin on **Saturday night at 7:30 PM**, and continues on Sunday from 6 AM to 5 PM. Orientation on Saturday includes instruction in the oryoki meal form, and assignments. The day will include zazen, a Dharma Talk, Dokusan and a work period, as well as breakfast and lunch.

It is alright to sit half of the day, but please sign up in advance, and please speak to Josho or Zenki if this is your first All-day Sitting. The suggested donation is \$15 for members, and \$25 for others; however, if you are inclined to offer more, that would be very helpful in maintaining the Zen Center. Oryoki sets are available for use by those who do not have their own, and a \$5 donation is appreciated.

Please sign up by the Wednesday before the sitting at info@chzc.org. For more information on the oryoki meal form, see www.kannondo.org/getting-started/oryoki.



Baika

Saturday, August 16 from 10 AM to noon

You are invited to join us in singing *Baikaryu Eisanka*, Japanese Soto Zen Buddhist hymns with bell accompaniment. No experience necessary! Please contact Chris at ccensullo@yahoo.com if you are interested in attending. For more information about *Baikaryu Eisanka*, see www.sotozen.com/eng/practice/baikaryu.

Children's Program

INFORMATION & PLANNING MEETING

Wednesday, July 23 at 7 PM via Zoom

Zenki will lead an information and planning meeting for restarting the weekly Sunday Children's Program. All interested parents and caregivers are welcome. Please email Zenki at info@chzc.org if you plan to attend.

TO JOIN ZOOM MEETING

Via computer: www.zoom.us/j/85659804526

Via phone: (646) 558-8656

Meeting ID: 85659804526

Virtual Peer Group

Wednesdays, July 9, August 13 and September 10 at 7 PM

This is a monthly online meeting that gives members an opportunity to share individual experiences, receive encouragement, and offer compassion in a safe, supportive environment. Our goal is to build a thriving virtual community based on Soto Zen principles and to help one another deepen practice in daily life. The Virtual Peer Group meets monthly on the second Wednesday of the month.

For more information, please contact Al-Nisa Berry at alnisa.berry@gmail.com or Maura High at maurahigh@gmail.com.

Living with Impermanence

by Zoom Once a Month

An informal discussion group that shares how we experience impermanence in our lives, including life changes, illness, aging, and death. We usually begin with participants sharing what they are currently thinking of or dealing with. Discussions then usually emerge spontaneously to raised concerns. Silence is frequently a response after someone shares and we trust in that silence.

Please contact Carol Klein at carollyklein53@gmail.com or Kris Garvin at krisgarvin@gmail.com, if you would like more information. Everyone is welcome.

Sangha Net

A network of volunteers who offer short-term assistance to those in the sangha in need of help due to transitions in life such as illness, disability, or death of a loved one. Examples of tasks include shopping, arranging for meals, or transportation. 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.

Body of Buddha

TALK 1, AUGUST SESSHIN, 2024

by Zenki Kathleen Batson

Good morning. Thank you for being here. In Zen practice, we emphasize the non-dual nature of body and mind, and knowing with our physical being. We pay close attention to our physical posture in zazen, and attend to our experience of the world as received through our senses. Through our senses is the only way we can actually experience it. In our practice, we learn that our senses are the gateways through which we experience the one reality that we are in with all existence, and we learn that we each experience that one reality in a unique way due to our life experiences and the perspectives that arise from them.

Over the next three days, as we sit zazen together and attend to our own body/mind experiences in real time moment after moment, I would like to explore the body of Buddha. What we mean by this in our Zen tradition, and what it might imply for our practice and how to live our lives.

It is estimated that Siddhartha Gautama, the person who would become known as the Buddha, lived sometime in the 6th or 5th century BCE. *World History Encyclopedia* gives the dates for his life as 563–483 BCE. I am not sure if anyone knows the exact dates of his life anymore. I started looking at various historical analyses about his life because for me it helps to conceptually solidify in my mind his existence as a real human being who walked this same (ever-changing) earth that we are living on now. In thinking of his actual existence as a human, I then find myself considering all the beings that have lived here between his conventional human lifespan and ours. It is hard for me to fathom. It gives me a different perspective about my life. Especially when thinking in terms of the notion of there being just one reality which we are all a part of throughout space and time.

Okumura Roshi often teaches us that all existence and everything that has and will occur, all happen within the lifespan of Buddha. This idea of all time being the lifespan of Buddha and all existence being the true body of Buddha can be found in the *Lotus Sutra* and is part of our inheritance as Mahayana Buddhists. So in the development of the practice of Buddha's way, there was an evolution from using the word Buddha to refer to a single awakened human being, to it also refer to all space and time.

Sidhartha Gautama, the human being we call the Buddha, was born in the border area between present day India and Nepal. He was a member of the Śākya tribe, hence the epithet Śākyamuni, which means sage of the Śākyas. Gautama was his family or clan name. Gautama means descendants of Gotama which I read literally means Excellent Cow in Sanskrit. So his tribe or ethnic group was Śākya, his family or clan name was Gautama and his given name was Siddhārtha which in Sanskrit means "one who achieves a goal."

We are taught that Siddhārtha Gautama was a human who became a great teacher. He focused on the nature of suffering and he was known to not answer various questions about the nature of existence that he felt did not address the issue of suffering. In the "Parable of the Poison Arrow," also known as the *Cūlamālukya Sutta* which is part of the middle length discourses, in the *Majjhima Nikaya*, a monk asks 14 metaphysical questions regarding the nature of the universe. These include things like: Is the world eternal or is it not eternal? Is the world (spatially) infinite or is it not? Is a being imbued with a life force identical with the body or not identical? Does the Tathagata exist after death or not? Does the Tathagata both exist and not exist after death or does he neither exist nor not not exist after

death? The Buddha responded that he never said he would answer such questions. He then compared his teachings to a physician pulling a poison arrow out of a patient. He compared such metaphysical questions to the patient who was shot with a poison arrow refusing to be treated until someone answered his tangential questions such as, who shot this arrow? Where was he standing when he shot it? What type of poison is on the arrow that is killing me? In the time it would take someone to answer such questions, the person would die from the injury. The Buddha said he chooses instead to focus on simply pulling the arrow out. So Buddha focused on the nature of suffering and what we can experience and know with the faculties we have as human beings. That is, what we are able to experience with our own bodies and minds.

The word Buddha means Awakened One in Sanskrit and Pali, and as I love to share, the Sanskrit root *Budh* means to awaken, or, to open like a flower. After his awakening, the man we call the Buddha expressed that he was only the most recent in a long line of Awakened Ones or Buddhas. He said that what he was teaching was not his creation, but his rediscovery of a timeless truth which he called an ancient path and this ancient path was discovered by others in other times. This in part, is why when we chant the names of Buddhas and Ancestors, there are several names before we get to Shakyamuni. We call them the Seven Buddhas before Buddha. You will notice that there are actually only six names before we get to Shakyamuni which makes Shakyamuni the 7th. Okumura Roshi explained why this is but we can leave that for another time.

Thich Nhat Hanh stated that all true Buddhist teachings contain the Three Seals. These seals are the truth of impermanence, the non-self or interdependent nature of all phenomena, and the truth of the nature of suffering. Sometimes a fourth Truth is added, the truth of nirvana which can be described as the inaccuracy or silencing of all concepts. If we consider the Buddha's teaching to be these truths and these to be true, then it makes complete sense that he simply saw what has always existed—the truth. In early Buddhism this idea of there being many Buddhas throughout space and time, as Shakyamuni said was the case, seems to have evolved quickly. I read in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* that people describe all these various Buddhas as doing the same things and being very similar, making our Shakyamuni less unique than we tend to consider him to be. All the Buddhas throughout space and time apparently sat in lotus in their mother's womb, took 7 steps at birth, renounced the world after experiencing the 4 signs (old man, sick man, dead man, and a mendicant) and all the various Buddhas could only differ from one

another in 8 small ways such as the length of their lifespan, their height, what kind of tree they sat under, when they experienced awakening, etc. All the various Buddhas throughout space and time also have similar experiences and awakenings and they all have the 32 marks or characteristics. A "long, broad tongue" is one of the thirty-two marks or physical characteristics of a Buddha, for example. William Edelglass of the Barre Institute says that "a long broad tongue" is able to speak kindly to others and a buddha cares for others with her speech like an animal who licks its young clean. Last night I shared this verse by the poet Su Shi:

*The sounds of the valley streams are his long,
broad tongue; (meaning the Buddha's tongue)*

The forms of the mountains are his pure body

At night I heard the myriad sūtra-verses uttered.

How can I relate to others what they say?

Exemplified by the poem above, we know that in our own tradition Buddha's body comes to mean something much more vast and profound than the human physical body of Siddhartha Gautama while also allowing Siddhartha Gautama to remain human.

In all Buddhist traditions including early Buddhism the Buddha has at least two bodies, a physical body, and a body of teachings and qualities. In part, describing the Buddha as having two different types of bodies allowed followers to take refuge in the Buddha even when confronted with whether it felt appropriate to take refuge in the impermanent, decomposing *physical* body of the historical human we refer to as Buddha. The Buddha himself explained to his followers that he has two bodies. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, "When he was about to pass away, the Buddha told his disciples, 'Dear friends, my physical body (*Rupakaya*) will not be here tomorrow, but my teaching body (*Dharmakaya*) will always be with you. Consider it to be the teacher who never leaves you. Be islands unto yourselves, and take refuge in the Dharma. Use the Dharma as your lamp, your island.'"

That was the birth of Dharmakaya, the body of the teaching. So the origin of the Dharmakaya is simple in that it originally meant the body of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings and the characteristics of a Buddha and a Buddha's behavior. This Dharmakaya was in contrast to the Rupakaya or material body of Shakyamuni Buddha. Early Buddhism teaches that buddhas are so profound that only one can exist at a time. In contrast, Mahayana traditions which follow the Bodhisattva ideal, have teachings

which describe scenes full of Buddhas in various realms and speak of Buddha fields. In Mahayana Buddhism, the broader category in which our Zen tradition belongs, the Buddha developed three bodies or aspects, the *Trikāya*. The word *kaya* means body in Sanskrit. These are the *Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya*, and the *Nirmanakaya*. We paid homage to these three bodies of Buddha before we ate our breakfast this morning.

The *Nirmanakaya* is defined as the emanation body, transformation body, or manifestation body. The *Nirmanakaya* is what appears in the world and expresses the activity of a Buddha. Sometimes it is described as a mind-made body. It appears in the world and acts for the benefit of beings. The historical human being we call Buddha, is the *Nirmanakaya*. So in a way, *Nirmanakaya* gives a new explanation to the nature of the *Rupakaya*, the form body of Shakyamuni.

The *Dharmakaya* as we know it today represents the truth body, the indescribable body, or the absolute aspect of truth. As I mentioned earlier, the *Dharmakaya* originally meant the body of Buddha's teachings and the unique qualities of a buddha. It was distinguished from Shakyamuni's *Rupakaya* or physical body. Within Mahayana Buddhism and the development of three bodies, the *Dharmakaya* transformed to representing the truth body with a transcendent quality in that it is conceptually incomprehensible in its totality. It is the source of all other forms of Buddha. The *Dharmakaya* is the absolute and is beyond discrimination and non-discrimination. According to *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, as Mahayana Buddhism evolved, the *Dharmakaya* evolved even further to have two aspects: the nature body which describes the ultimate nature of the Buddha's mind, free of all defilements, and a wisdom body which is all inclusive consciousness.

The third body is the *Sambhogakaya*. This is defined as the bliss body or enjoyment body of Buddha. It is also called the reward body. Some say it refers to something that is only visible to advanced practitioners. In the glossary of *Moon in a Dewdrop*, *Sambhogakaya* is the "enjoyment, bliss body, or purified body and it is the body that experiences the fruits of practice and bliss of enlightenment." Sometimes the *Sambhogakaya* is described as a kind of interface between the *Dharmakaya* and *Nirmanakaya* bodies. When a Buddha manifests as a celestial being, distinctive but not "flesh and blood," this is the *Sambhogakaya* body. Often Shakyamuni is depicted this way in Buddhist art. On the "Learn Religions" website it states, "Buddhas depicted as idealized, transcendent beings in Mahayana art are nearly always *Sambhogakaya* buddhas. The *Nir-*

manakaya is an earthly body that lives and dies, and the *Dharmakaya* is formless and without distinction—nothing to see. A *Sambhogakaya* buddha is enlightened and purified of defilements, yet he remains distinctive." I read that some teachers compare *Dharmakaya* to vapor or atmosphere, *Sambhogakaya* to clouds, and *Nirmanakaya* to rain. Clouds are a manifestation of atmosphere that enable rain to appear. From most Mahayana perspectives, only the *Dharmakaya* body is "real." The *Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya* bodies are just "mere appearances" or emanations of the *Dharmakaya*. We can extrapolate this by saying that everything we perceive is a mere appearance and an emanation of the *Dharmakaya*. This is how all existence comes to be seen as the body of Buddha.

When we chant about these Three Bodies of Buddha in our Meal Chant, we are paying homage. We are publicly expressing special honor and respect, so it feels important to me to try to understand what we are expressing this honor and respect to. Ultimately we can say there is nothing separate and therefore we are expressing honor and respect to all reality itself.

At the same time, we have relative reality in which we explain the world to ourselves and we use these words to describe the indescribable reality. When we speak, I think it is generally helpful to try to know what we are talking about. In our Meal Chant we say,

Homage to the Dharmakaya Vairocana Buddha

Homage to the Sambhogakaya Lochana Buddha

Homage to the Nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddha

Homage to the Future Maitreya Buddha

*Homage to all Buddhas in the Ten Directions,
past, present, and future*

Homage to the Mahayana Saddharma Pundarika Sutra

Vairocana is the name given to the *Dharmakaya*. According to *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, "The origin of *Vairocana* can be traced back to Hinduism where he is a relatively minor deity associated with the sun.... It is not until the emergence of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that *Vairocana* comes to be widely regarded as the buddha who is the personification of the universal truth of the religion." It also says that in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, *Vairocana* is "described as a buddha who mastered the bodhisattva path by performing all types of virtuous deeds, hearing the dharma, cultivating meditative practices, and realizing the truth of the dependent origination of the dharma realm in which each and every thing in existence is in

multivalent interaction with all other things in a state of complete and perfect interfusion. In this case, Vairocana as the reward body (Sambhogakaya) is called *Rocana* or *Lushena* in Chinese to distinguish him from Vairocana as the Dharmakaya Buddha. "We call the Sambhogakaya Locana. Maitreya is the buddha to be, and the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* is *Myōhōrengekyō* in Japanese. We call it The *Lotus Sutra* in English. Dogen Zenji often references portions of the *Lotus Sutra* in his teachings. As I mentioned earlier, the idea that the lifespan of the Buddha is eternal comes from the *Lotus Sutra*.

Ultimately in our Zen practice here, we don't spend a lot of time contemplating these details and we don't think it is all that useful to our practice to spend a lot of time talking about them. However, we reference them. We chant them. The teachings we study reference them, and they have meaning so I wanted to look at them closer to gain a greater understanding of our tradition, and to understand the context from which our teachings arose. I also find that describing the Buddha in this way with these various bodies helps my image-oriented mind grasp more easily the relationship between concepts that would otherwise be abstract for me without imagery associated with them. These teachings also bring the Buddha to vivid life

all around me. All of this is Buddha's body, and according to Dogen also the True Human Body.

One can easily go down a never ending and multifaceted rabbit hole of information about the three bodies of Buddha, how they evolved in various schools of Buddhism over time, and what they represent. When I find myself going down these rabbit holes I can hear my teachers gently calling me back with the questions, "What does this have to do with practice—with *your* practice? With your every day life? I am drawn to explore the body of Buddha in this way because I believe that whatever we engage with and see is an expression of the Truth—of what is, and is therefore a Dharma Gate to Buddhist teachings. If we see all the world as the body of Buddha, and as the body of the Buddha's teachings, then this teaching of the Three Bodies of Buddha has everything to do with our practice and our daily life. To experience all the world as the body of Buddha also affects *how* we engage with everything in our daily life. So tomorrow we will continue to explore this further.

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CHAPEL HILL ZEN CENTER



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SCHEDULE

TUESDAY EVENING

7:00 PM *zazen*
(Zen meditation)
7:40 PM *kinhin*
(walking meditation)
7:50 PM *zazen*

SUNDAY MORNING

9:00 AM *zazen*
9:40 AM *kinhin*
9:50 AM *zazen*
10:30 AM service

MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY MORNING

6:00 AM and 6:50 AM *zazen*, 7:30 AM service

Meetings at 5322 NC Hwy 86, Chapel Hill, NC
2.5 miles North of I-40 exit 266



Joshu Pat Phelan, Abbess
Zenki Kathleen Batson, Vice Abbess

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Life (Birth and Death)

I am able to not hang on to anything. That's my secret. I believed my teacher when he said, "Don't get caught by anything." I really believed it. And then, not only did I believe it, I started acting it out. So that's where I'm at. Don't get caught by anything. I'm able to not dwell on something. The news is what the news is. My anger is what my anger is. That's all. And I try to do what I can to assuage my...everybody's anxieties. I don't have much anxiety. I'm gonna die. I'm on my way. What should I do, worry about it? Everybody does this. Nobody escapes. This happens to every single person that's ever lived.

What should I worry about? What's there to worry about? I am just not that kind of person. This is what I decided when I was young. I said, "I'm just gonna live my life all the way up to the end. And when it's time to go, I go." That's part of...that's life. Life is death. So we experience it every moment. Here we are next moment, here we're not. This happens every moment.

— Sojun Mel Weitsman
Seeing One Thing Through
p. 211-212



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.