

# Mountain Wine

April – June 2024

## Winter Ango Sesshin Dharma Talk

*This lecture was given by Kwong-roshi at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center on Feb. 16, 2024.*

This sesshin is dedicated to the Buddha's Parinirvana Day, which occurs on the full moon, not the new moon, like Chinese New Year. I just found that out. The caption for this is "Buddha's Unspoken Words." What brings forth unspoken words? No anger, no greed, no ignorance. When cessation happens, greed, anger, and ignorance are Buddha's unspoken words. Also, they are your unspoken words. Because you are endowed with that quality that you are trying to restore. That makes the Buddha one of the greatest of human beings. When you look around the world, across the street, in your home, or in yourself, greed, anger, violence, ignorance, when that has subsided or finished, you are on your way to realizing yourself. Those are the obstacles. But it's interesting because what we think are obstacles are actually not obstacles. Each obstacle you have has an opening. Each obstacle contains its opposite, and that's freedom. In meditation practice, we dissolve those opposites. When those opposites dissolve, that includes the cessation of greed, anger, and ignorance.

In the beginning of practice, I would say it's not permanent, because we still have to make our foundation strong. Really strong (hits table). You can bear witness to anything because you have a foundation. So the most important thing is, do you have a foundation? Do you have something you can rely on? Think about it. What do you rely on? Your brain? Your heart? Think about it.

This is in Pali.

Atta dipa  
Viharatha  
Atta saranna  
Ananna saranna  
Dhamma dipa  
Dhamma saranna  
Ananna saranna

*Dipa* is light. *Atta* means you are the light. And you don't know it until you discover it, until you are restored by your direct experience of Buddha's knowledge. *Vihara* actually is the home or dwelling. What do you dwell in? Interestingly, over the last couple of years I've found out where you are supposed to dwell. Not in attainment. We're not talking about attainment, but our liberation and the liberation of others. Not you, not what you own.

"Dwell" is an interesting word. *Atta*, in the third phrase, means rely. Rely on yourself. But this is not the self who you think you are. It's a much more profound self. There's no name, no form. That's *Atta saranna*. *Saranna* is the word for rely. *Atta saranna*, do not rely on others. So first it's you are the light, dwell. What are you going to dwell on? What do you have to dwell on? You can't sit cross-legged wherever you go. What do you dwell on that's always with you?

The third line, *Atta saranna*, is do not rely on others. It's imperative! (Hits floor) Do not rely on others. Am I going to rely on my mom or dad? They won't live forever. Nothing lives forever. Nothing that you can rely on is permanent. Think about it. What can you rely on? Do not rely on others. *Atta saranna*. So first it's rely on yourself, and then it's do not rely on others or things.

*continues next page*



Sandokai is the intimacy of the relative and the absolute. Or it's the oneness of opposites, long and short, male and female. You can't think it out; you have to sit and clear your thinking. Or not think. Where do your thoughts come from? Your mind-source. You're looking in, not out.

And then *Dhamma dipa*. *Dipa* is light. *Dhamma* is light. "You are light." *Dharma saranna* means you can only rely on the dharma. There is nothing else you can rely on. You must have a direct experience into dharma. Then you will know what you are innately endowed with. Because as long as we don't know that place, if we can call it a place, you will rely on something other than that. It's fictitious and your life will be gone. You will die with that belief.

So *Atta dipa*. You are the light. Now *Dhamma dipa*, dharma is light, so when you put those together, you are dharma. And what is dharma? Dharma is the universe. It's Buddha's teaching, Dharma. And it's not man-made, because man-made has a beginning and end. *Dhamma dipa*. Dharma is light. *Dharma saranna*. Rely on dharma. And the last line, *ananna saranna*, do not rely on anything else.

So I gave this to the Shuso maybe twenty or thirty years ago in Poland for the Gadam Ango. I made some copies of this poem for him.

There is a very beautiful picture of Buddha's parinirvana. I'll put this up on the bulletin board.

There is a full moon. and arhats, bodhisattvas, animals, and birds, all come to his parinirvana, which means that he'll never be reborn again.

So, here it goes. Sandokai is the intimacy of the relative and the absolute. Or it's the oneness of opposites, long and short, male and female. You can't think it out; you have to sit and clear your thinking. Or not think. Where do your thoughts come from? Your mind-source. You're looking in, not out. As soon as we're born karma was created at birth from your mom. That's oneness. Out now, that's two. The separation has started already. Culture, tradition, education, media, you name it, confirms that separation. So meditation practice is going back to the oneness and even beyond that oneness, or what we like to call oneness.

Here are two phrases I was captured by in the Sandokai. I mean these are sutras we chant every day, and they have a really deep meaning that will free you from yourself, or your idea of yourself, which is habit energy that creates karma. Because you see things from a conditional way—short/long, beginning/end—and you live by those conditions because that's what we were taught. So it takes some time to unravel this knot.

"Where there is light, there's darkness. But don't try to understand this."

Don't try to understand it, because you can't think it out. It's not an object.

"Where there is darkness there is light, but don't look for that light."

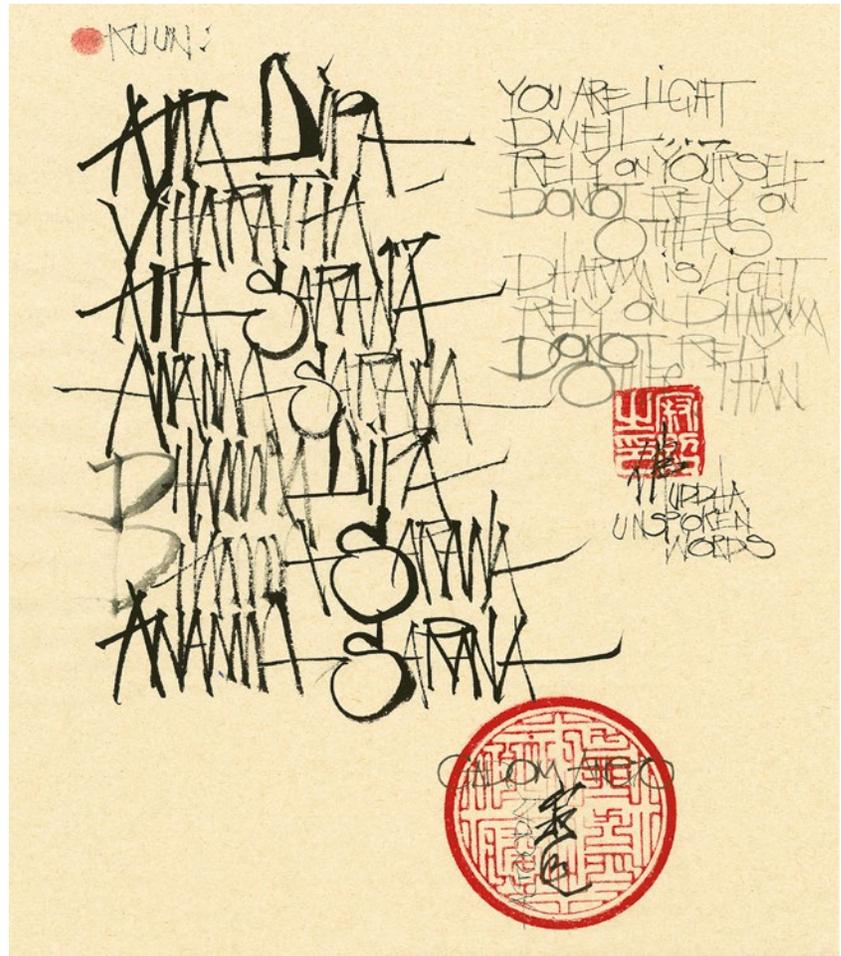
Same thing. How do you do it? In zazen, I believe you go to some place where there is no thinking. What does no thinking mean? It is the instant before or after the present. It's not even the present. It's before or after. I mean that's really profound because we're just barely on

the surface. It's the instant before or after the present moment, that's where we're going. You have to know where you are going. What controls that, or what makes our habit? It's because we think. It's because we discriminate. Thinking produces discrimination.

Discrimination produces expectation. Expectation produces knowing. It's before these four, and that's the prize in school. That's our education. I'm not saying thinking is bad. I'm talking about non-thinking, before you think. Your thinking will be much clearer and shorter because you do not think that much. The other is about subject and object, what we call non-arising (of thinking). This is something that you already have, but you need some kind of training and practice to let it come out. And that practice is, of course, sitting. Lots of sitting. So you will go into this place called non-arising of thinking. Which means there is no thinking. That is why people become attached to sitting, because they have arrived at that place. It's more than calm, more than serenity, more than equanimity. It's deeper. But the student still has to realize, that's what they have already. They are yet to realize it, and the teacher is there to point it out.

You know the sutras are great realizations that have been transmitted for a long time: 2,589 years to now. And I feel that not just the Buddhadharma but everything around the world is at a very low extreme. Aoyama-roshi is the Zen Master of the Nunnery and holds the highest position in Japan. They finally made her equal to the Eihei-ji abbot, the Zen-ji. She sits at the same level. And also, in the last big Soto Zen ceremony that Nyoze attended in Los Angeles, they translated all of it into English. They had never done that before. They are handing us the torch. And Aoyama-roshi, for her transmission ceremony, invited all her disciples, the nuns, to watch the ceremony. It is normally kept secret and it only takes place between the disciple and the Zen Master, but she wants it to not be lost. This is where we are. We're not in any advanced stage at all.

So you know your resolve must be strong. My resolve was strong because I couldn't speak very well in my regular life and I didn't have confidence. I was kind of withdrawn. And that's how I lived my life until I knew that this was not good because it would make me crazy if I stayed there. Zen was hardly even in a dictionary during that time. But Suzuki-roshi came and I was able to meet all the greatest



teachers of the first wave of the Zen Masters that came from Japan. Now they are all dead. I was fortunate to be in that position. What I'm trying to say is that you are on the path, but it's not only you. If your resolve is strong, the buddhas and bodhisattvas will appear to help you. You don't do it alone. That's how I felt. I was lucky.

Here's an example. The Taiwanese monks that came, and the late Sheng Yen, left a scroll with four or five characters. The first character was happiness. The second was compassion. And the last was "con" and "doy," which in Cantonese means something like "right on," or "on it." So "happiness" would translate as "blessings"—of compassion, contemplation on compassion. This is what Bodhidharma relied on. This is what Buddha relied on. This is what Dogen relied on. Contemplation means clarifying the mind. It means the non-arising of thinking. That's all that Bodhidharma did those nine years. And that's where your zazen should go. Hardly any thinking. And you can produce it at will with a strong foundation. That's what you need to do.

You have to say that the teaching and the ancestors were just great people because they left us their wisdom and knowledge. They didn't just keep it and die. They left it for us so we could know what to rely on. Nothing has arisen. Nothing now arises. Nothing will arise. Conscious clarifying mind. No thinking. Then again, I'm not saying that thinking is a bad thing. Thinking too much, maybe.

So with all this projection and grasping and owning things, they are all outside of ourselves since birth. And our teachers, like Vasubandhu who helped create the Yogachara School, knew from their own experience through meditation that it was not outside. They created a philosophy called Mind Only. Regarding seeing things outside yourself, how could you recognize anything if it were not inside you first? When you see a beautiful sunset, it's here (gestures toward heart) already. It's not out there. That's humanity's big mistake, thinking it's out there. It's in here first. Maybe that's a little bit too much. We have some time for questions. Yes?

**Student:** Roshi, you mentioned if one thought arises...

**Roshi:** If one thought arises, that's okay but it's just one thought. Two thoughts is thinking.

**Student:** So is that like the teaching of not following the thought, letting it go?

**Roshi:** It's the forbearance. Maybe forbearance is too big a word. It's the practice or training of non-arising.

**Student:** Then ten minutes later another thought comes...

**Roshi:** Yeah? That's fine

**Student:** They are not related?

**Roshi:** They are not related, even if they are the same, because ten minutes past, something has changed. Does that sound like a possibility?



*Winter Anjo theme brushed for the Shuso by Kwong-roshi*

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*End of Winter Ango sesshin, February 11, 2024*

**Student:** That's been my experience at various times, and I was concerned that if another thought came ten minutes later then you didn't meet that test.

**Roshi:** Yeah, there's no connection.

**Student:** Last week you mentioned something about completion of the self. Could you talk more about that?

**Roshi:** That is liberation. That is realization of your essence, your self nature, who you really are.

**Student:** Roshi, you said they (ancestors) left things for us; they died and left things for us. I think it's our sacred duty to do the same.

**Roshi:** Well do it. (Laughter) Do you remember Dae Soen Sa Nim? Koreans, well I wouldn't say all Koreans, but in a sense they make things very short. He used to say, "Don't make anything." That's what he meant. It's the same as non-arising. It's in our culture, our tradition. It's non-producing, non-productive. That's the essence. Because we are always producing, always making something. That's the habit energy. It keeps us going around and around in samsara. It doesn't liberate us. So he said, Don't make anything. He really meant it. Don't make anything, because we're always making something. Yes?

**Student:** Thank you so much. Could you explain more about where we are going, where we have been before and after the present? Could you explain more about this?

**Roshi:** It's kind of interesting. Psychology and some kinds of philosophy want you to be in the present moment. Even in religious things, they want you to be in the present mode. But it's before, because you are not thinking about it. It's before the present moment. Like in basketball, when shooting a basket, you're not in the moment. You're before the moment, when the mind is not thinking. The ball won't go in if you're thinking it should go in. It's before the thought. Or after the present moment, there's no thought, no thinking. Just stay with before. That's good

enough. That's half of it. If you got half, you got the other half as well. Yeah, it's interesting; if you get one part, you get all the other parts. We want to get all the parts. Before thinking is pretty good. But it needs training because we don't think that way.

**Student:** So when we talk about how the rest of the world getting the teachings is at an extreme low, and how the old teachers left us this Dharma that is to be treasured and cherished, is this dichotomy not also duality and thinking?

**Roshi:** No, I don't think so. You know, things wear down. Nothing is permanent. In fact in the Dharma they have stages. I forget what the names are. There was a time when after Buddha died, that the vibrancy of the Dharma lasted 100 or 200 years. And then for 500 years, it began decaying and now, we are in the last thousand years. You could think this is a duality or not, but it is a teaching.

**Student:** But who came up with that idea?

**Roshi:** It doesn't say who did, who discovered that. Maybe Buddha did. I don't know exactly but you can look it up in the dictionary. But nothing stays forever. It's impermanence. That's why Zen is good, because it's before the present moment. Because everything is changing and not in a straight line. We try to make it straight, and that's why we end up suffering. And that is when you have your realization, before the habit energy kicks in and then it's gone. And then here it is again, and then it's gone. Unless it's really strong. OK! ❖

# A Winter Ango Reflection

by Russell Bradley

Why travel from Alexandria, VA, to SMZC for Winter Ango 2024?

I was asking myself that question the first few days after I arrived...

My New Year's resolution for 2022 was to increase my sitting time from 20 minutes to 30 minutes. Little did I realize that 10 minutes would change my life. I began sitting with Del Ray Zen in March 2022 and, through them, connected with SMZC.

Since 1978, Suzuki-roshi's Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind has shaped my understanding of meditation. Through Roshi and Hojo-san, I am in direct contact with his lineage. I had visited SMZC twice before and was impressed with the familial atmosphere and sense of community. But those are the hows, not the whys.

I wanted to get a better understanding of the nuances of Soto Zen liturgy and practice. I have participated in a couple of Angos online and signed up to attend this February's Ango on site. Immersing myself in temple life, eating oryoki every meal, and the intensive sitting schedule seemed a sure way to deepen my training. The ambiance at SMZC is such that everybody and everything is your teacher.

Of particular interest to me was eating oryoki every meal, and I was not disappointed. Oryoki, along with soji and samu, offered me the opportunity to be fully present to the basic tasks of life. Coming from a Christian background, I already had a view of the shared meal as something sacred. But instead of once a week (whether the eucharist or Sunday dinner), during Ango oryoki was every meal, every day, three times a day. The silence and chants of oryoki provided nourishment to the spirit, while consuming food in the bowls provided nourishment for the body—a unifying experience.

I was struck by the fluidity of attendance, the openness and accessibility of Ango at SMZC. Some came for the sesshin, some came for weekends, some came for the dharma talks, some came when their schedule permitted. Just like online Ango, on-site Ango was open to whatever level of commitment one could give.

Other than the residents, there were four of us who were guests on site for the duration of Ango. We came from all over the country: one from Cambridge, one from Boulder, one from Seattle, and me, from Alexandria. I was the oldest and the only one who had not previously participated in an Ango or sesshin. A one-day retreat was the most intensive event I had participated in up to that point. I was the “new kid on the block” in spite of my age, but that helps to sustain beginner's mind.

I attended the Winter Ango Opening Ceremony online and arrived onsite Friday afternoon at the end of the first week. At first I had difficulty settling in with the six sits a day. I was doing fine for the day's first couple of periods of zazen, but the cumulative effects on my aging body had me pretty



beat up by evening zazen, and day by day I was wearing down. In addition to the neuropathy in my hands and forearms, my back had begun misbehaving. This led me to doubt my ability to meet the schedule during sesshin. After a discussion with Shuso, it was suggested I change from sitting on a cushion to sitting in a chair. It had become a matter of pride for me that after all these years I had worked my way from a chair to a meditation bench to a cushion, but pride doesn't contribute to clarity of mind, so I swallowed my pride and decided to return to using a chair in order to get through sesshin. Hojo-san then helped me find a chair of appropriate height and instructed me in proper positioning in a chair. Switching to the chair made a huge difference on how I felt at the end of the day, and in being able to complete the Ango schedule.

My practice stay during Ango wasn't all sitting, samu (work practice), and oryoki (formal meals). The life of the temple went on. There was a moving memorial service for the father of a sangha member. On the full moon, there was the Fusatsu Atonement Ceremony. On rest days there were teas in the evening. Ango officially closed with a Shuso

Celebration Dinner honoring Shuso Shin'ei Alison Brown. A camaraderie had developed among all the Ango participants. There were many moments of sharing and shared joy – drinking teas from the Book of Teas, shooting fireworks to welcome the Year of the Dragon, sampling Lebanese halawa and baklava.

I've only been back home a couple of weeks, but already I notice the impact on my life.

I am paying much more attention to my body. For example, focusing on the soles of my feet seems to address some of my equilibrium issues.

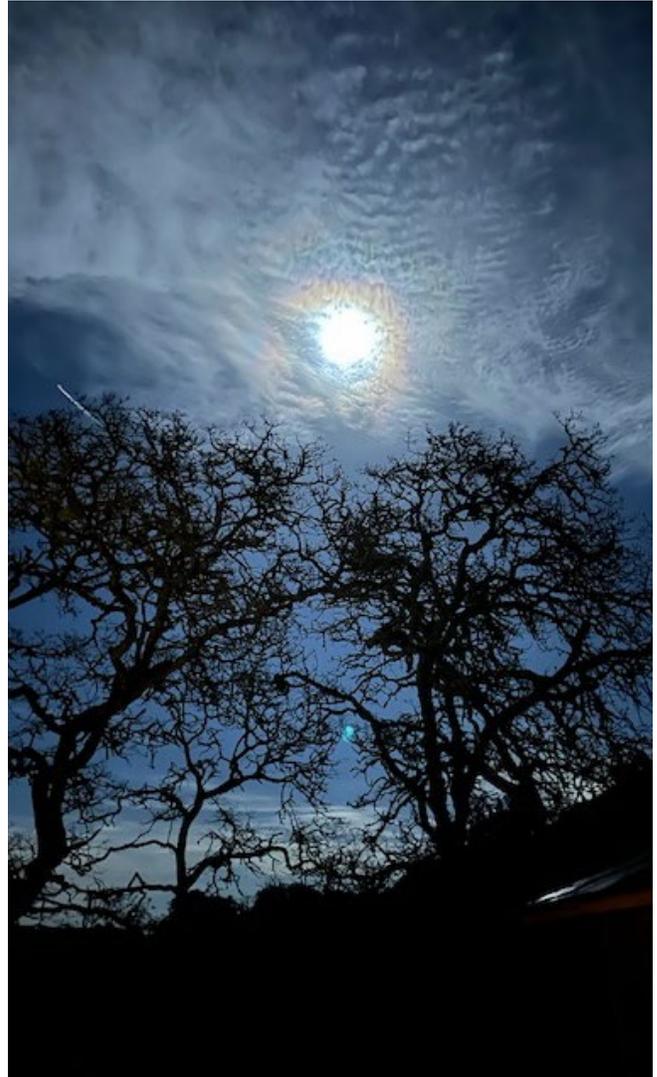
I am now doing zazen in a chair. In addition to minimizing back issues, I seem to have a better awareness of my tanden and better awareness of the soles of my feet.

I am gravitating towards a vegetarian diet. After three weeks on a vegetarian diet at SMZC, I noticed a certain bodily “heaviness” on returning to my previous diet, so I'm having more vegetarian meals and looking for alternatives when grocery shopping.

I am working with Nancy Seiko Reder and others to get a regular oryoki practice in place at Del Ray Zen.

But with all these takeaways, that's not why I came to SMZC for Winter Ango 2024.

There was a Fusatsu Atonement Ceremony the night before Ango ended. The ceremony was beautiful and very moving with the call and response, but taxing with all the prostrations. It was the first time I had taken the Three Refuges. After the ceremony, walking from the zendo back to the Genjo building, I encountered the full moon over the Valley of the Moon. The thin veil of clouds didn't obscure the moon, but instead magnified it and created a halo of rainbow colors. It was as if I was seeing the moon for the first time in all its glory. I couldn't have had that experience anywhere else but at Sonoma Mountain. ❖



After the ceremony, walking from the zendo back to the Genjo building, I encountered the full moon over the Valley of the Moon. The thin veil of clouds didn't obscure the moon, but instead magnified it and created a halo of rainbow colors. It was as if I was seeing the moon for the first time in all its glory. I couldn't have had that experience anywhere else but at Sonoma Mountain.

**Apr 27 Meditation Instruction**  
**(Includes Saturday Community)**  
**On-site + Online (Zoom)**  
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT  
 Perfect for beginners wishing to learn meditation form. Meditation is a way to calm the mind and find balance in your daily life. Join us for our regular Saturday Community program (included in the fee) immediately following instruction. Please arrive at 8:50 am at the Sangha House to check in.

**Saturday Community**  
**(Dharma Talk by Jason Shinmei Nichols)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Jason Shinmei Nichols following 10:30–11:00 am zazen.

**Apr 27–28 Zafu Sewing Workshop (Day 1/2)**  
**On-site (in Sangha House)**  
 Apr 27, 2:00 PM – Apr 28, 5:00 PM

Join us on site for this unique and rare opportunity to create your own Zafu! For this workshop, you can choose to make either 1 or 2 zafus. \$85 (Saturday Only) or \$120 (Both Days). 10–20% member discount.

**Apr 30 Spring Study Group (Week 8)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 7:30 PM–9:00 PM PDT

Explore the fundamental teachings of Buddhism and build a foundation for daily practice through discussions on the book “Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind” by Shunryu Suzuki-roshi.

**May 3–4 ‘Entering the Gate’**  
**1-Day Sitting**  
**On-site + Online (Zoom)**  
 May 3, 6:00 PM PDT–May 4, 5:30 PM PDT

This retreat is an introduction to Zen training and an opportunity for beginners and experienced sitters to plunge into the heart of Zen practice. RSVP and we will contact you to complete your registration. \$85/night & up. 10-20% discount for members.

**May 6 SMZC Closed**

**May 11 Meditation Instruction**  
**(Includes Saturday Community)**  
**On-site + Online (Zoom)**  
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community**  
**(Dharma Talk by Shindo Souza)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Shindo Souza, senior student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**May 18 Spring Sangha Gathering & Potluck**  
**Online (Zoom 10:30am–12:00pm) + On-site**  
 10:30 AM – 1:30 PM PDT

We are hosting an informal get-together for Sonoma Mountain Zen Center’s sangha members. This is an opportunity for members to connect, give feedback and hear about SMZC’s direction and plans for the future. Please bring your favorite dish (for 6-8 people) to share with everyone.

**May 24 May Fusatsu Ceremony**  
**On-site + Online**  
 7:30 PM–9:00 PM PDT

Come up & experience the Fusatsu Atonement Ceremony of confession, purification and renewing vows. Participate in this beautiful monthly Zen tradition.

7:30–8:00pm Zazen, 8:00–9:00pm Service.

**May 25 Meditation Instruction**  
**(Includes Saturday Community)**  
**On-site + Online (Zoom)**  
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community**  
**(Dharma Talk by Kashin Kwong)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Kashin Kwong, senior student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**June 1 Meditation Instruction**  
**(Includes Saturday Community)**  
**On-site + Online (Zoom)**  
 9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community**  
**(Dharma Talk by Nyoze Kwong)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Nyoze Kwong, abbot of SMZC, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**June 6–9 “Returning to the Ground of Being”**  
**3-Day Sesshin (1 to 3 Overnights)**  
**On-site + Online**  
 June 3, 6:00 PM PDT – June 9, 4:00 PM PDT

This retreat is a period of time set aside to let go of the conditioned self and resume our original nature in the spirit of Shakyamuni’s birth. RSVP and we will email you to complete your registration. \$85–160/night. 10–20% discount for members. (Please log in first to receive the discount.)

**June 10–11 SMZC Closed**



**June 15      Meditation Instruction  
(Includes Saturday Community)  
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community  
(Dharma Talk by Erik Zenjin Shearer)  
On-site + Online**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Erik Zenjin Shearer, a student of Kwong-roshi, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**June 21      June Fusatsu Ceremony  
On-site + Online**

7:30 PM–9:00 PM PDT

Come up & experience the Fusatsu Atonement Ceremony of confession, purification and renewing vows. Participate in this beautiful monthly Zen tradition.

7:30–8:00pm Zazen, 8:00–9:00pm Service.

**June 22      Meditation Instruction  
(Includes Saturday Community)  
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community  
(Dharma Talk by Nyoze Kwong)  
On-site + Online**

10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Rev. Shinryu Okuma, a Soto Zen Buddhism Baikaryu Official Instructor from Tendoji in Sapporo, Japan, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**June 23      Summer Workfest  
On-site**

8:30 AM – 12:30 PM PDT

In the spirit of together-action, come help breathe new energy into the center with friends and families of the Sonoma Mountain Sangha. Bring a pair of work gloves if you have them. Light lunch will be provided afterwards. RSVP to offer your hands of compassion!

**June 24      SMZC Closed**

**June 29      Meditation Instruction  
(Includes Saturday Community)  
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

9:00 AM–12:00 PM PDT

See description in previous event, April 27.

**Saturday Community  
(Dharma Talk by Tokan Stepanek)  
On-site + Online**

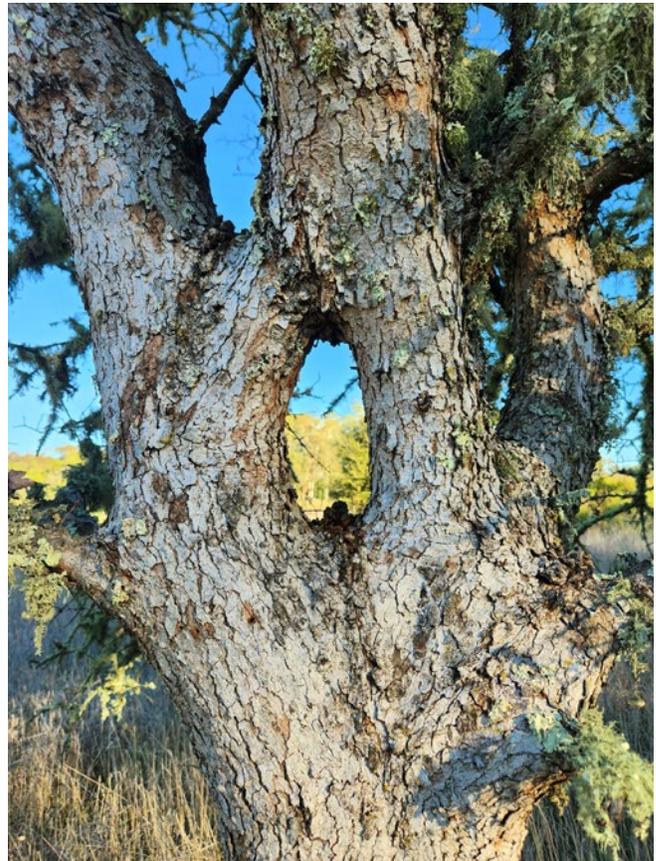
10:30 AM–12:00 PM PST

Dharma talk will be given by Tokan Craig Stepanek, a student of Kwong-roshi and SMZC resident, following 10:30–11:00 am zazen. 10:30am–11:00am Zazen, 11:00am–12:00pm Dharma Talk.

**July 5–6      ‘Moment to Moment’  
1-Day Sitting  
On-site + Online (Zoom)**

July 05, 7:30 PM PDT – July 06, 5:00 PM PDT

This retreat is an introduction to Zen training and an opportunity for beginners and experienced sitters to plunge into the heart of Zen practice. RSVP and we will contact you to complete your registration. \$85/night & up. 10-20% discount for members.



**Morning Zazen: Monday–Saturday, 5:15–7:00 am**

**Evening Zazen: Tue–Fri, 7:30–9:00 pm**

Ongoing online Zazen on Zoom. For more info, visit the online Zendo at <https://www.smzc.org/online-zendo>.

# Shuso Interview, Winter Ango, 2024

by Katsuzen King



*Shuso Shin'ei Brown offers opening talk at start of Winter Ango.*

Shin'ei Alison Brown served as Shuso (head student) for this winter's Ango practice period.

*Can you tell us a little about your background and how you were selected to be Shuso?*

I have been practicing Zen formally for twenty-seven plus years. I began at Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon, studying with Abbot Kyogen Carlson, my root teacher. I took Jukai in 1997, becoming his formal disciple in November 2001. I worked very closely with Kyogen until his death in 2014. I lived at Dharma Rain for close to eight years, then moved to Eugene in 2017. I began practicing at Buddha Eye temple in Eugene with Abott Ejo McMullen. Ejo had had a meaningful professional relationship with Kyogen. I became a formal disciple of Ejo's in 2020, and took Koji ordination in 2023. In July 2023 I participated in a pilgrimage with Dharma Rain Zen

Center. Sonoma Mountain was one of the temples we visited. I asked to return, and newly appointed Abbot Nyoze Kwong suggested I consider being Shuso.

*I imagine it may have been somewhat challenging coming into a new Zen community and assuming the position of Shuso. How did it go, and was it hard getting acclimated to the practice and community here at Genjo-ji?*

I was fairly relaxed and confident throughout the Ango and prior to coming. I have faith in the dharma and in my practice. I did not know the particular forms at Sonoma Mountain or the organizational structure. Although I came a month early, the forms here are very particular and more elaborate than what I am used to. This took continuous attention and learning while being Shuso. I am still learning the forms at Sonoma Mountain.

*Could you tell us how you chose your theme for the Ango? What new insights did you receive by focusing on this theme, reflecting on it, preparing, and then delivering your talks?*

"All Dharmas are birthless and cannot be extinguished, one who awakens this is the Tathagata." Eulogy of the Sumaya Heaven, Avatamsaka sutra, chapter 20.

The Hua Yen/Avatamsaka is a sutra I have worked with throughout the years, one I particularly love. It is related to mature practice, quite difficult, and not well known. It is a sutra that forms a basis for Zen practice and our morning chants "Harmony of Difference and Sameness" and the "Precious Mirror Samadhi." As an artist I find the sutra inspires imagination, as well as being true to a strict formal practice: the quest as an alchemical process. The Hua Yen/Avatamsaka teaches about a cosmos of identity and interdependence.

Two years ago I intensified my study and practice with the Hua Yen/Avatamsaka. I found that any tendency to identify with feeling/thought, to build a story, no matter how small, around the opposites of right and wrong, good and evil, self and other, etc., is to attach to a self and create suffering. Throughout the Ango I had a number of important insights in regard to my karmic patterns, stepping beyond their pull much faster. To stay close and embedded in the ultimate, while active, compassionate, and engaged with the world: This turns everything around. The sutra reminds us that all is but mental construction. "When the knot has eyes and shows itself as wisdom, the karmic knot or the complexes disentangle, and it does disentangle, disengaging itself from outworn ways, metamorphosing, revealing its undivided face."

*What sort of advice or help did you receive from Kwong-roshi, Hojo-san, or other students?*

*What support was especially valuable for you?*

Kwong-roshi's continuous pointing toward non-arising, this one-mind. In the Ocean Mudra Samadhi, our true nature is change; one-mind as all beings. This is important to remember as we meet the myriad things, to trust this moment and let be. I find deepening recognition and clarity, the freedom to relax as I am.

Abbot Nyoze was helpful with forms. He was most patient and continually corrective. I enjoyed our conversations in regard to form, and how they contribute and inform his practice. He gave suggestions as to their deeper significance. Kashin was instructive, pointing to the value of forms, insisting they be performed with proper intent and accuracy, and she is wonderfully sensitive to beauty. Students were supportive and positive about my readings and talks. They were generous, sharing their practice with me, and that was helpful.

*Can you tell us what texts or material you shared for the readings following the morning meals?*

The readings after both morning and afternoon meals were chosen from the recommended book list given to the community for the Winter Ango: Hua Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra by Francis Cook, Entry into the Inconceivable: An Introduction to Hua Yen Buddhism by Thomas Cleary, The Flower Ornament Scripture, translated by Thomas Cleary, and The Ocean Mudra Samadhi: 32nd fascicle of Dogen's Shobogenzo, translated by Kaz Tanahashi. I included my own poetry, shared personal practice experience, and commentary in regard to the readings. I tailored the readings to focus on what was pertinent to helping people form some relationship to the sutra, and how the sutra touches on basic Buddhist teachings of compassion, emptiness, and interdependence.

*Can you tell us how our practice period compares to others that you have participated in?*

The practice container at Sonoma Mountain was tighter and felt more enclosed than at other centers where I have practiced. This was one of the reasons I wanted to return and practice here. The forms were specific. It was expected that we would participate in every event and follow with considerable exactitude Sonoma Mountain's forms. I appreciated this, as it meant we had to participate and learn. It contributed to the intensity, structure, and rhythm of the practice period for me. I have never related well to formal Zen structure or understood the value of the forms in Zen practice as well as now. And the trees, such consummate meditators, whose depth, and silence contribute to the sense of enclosure on the mountain.

*The Mondo ceremony marking the end of Ango is especially powerful. How did it go for you? Did it turn out as you expected, or were there surprises?*



*Upper: Sheryl Gyonyo at altar as Shuso Shin'ei Brown begins Dharma Encounter. Middle: Shuso Shin'ei reads the Ango theme to begin Dharma Encounter. Lower: Shuso Shin'ei receives the shippei from Abbot Nyoze Kawong at close of the Ango practice period.*

I felt the Mondo ceremony was challenging, and participants asked genuine and wise questions. I thought it went well. The Mondo embraced the straightforward truth of my own practice —relaxed, okay just as I am.

*What plans do you have now that Ango has ended?*

I want to get back to my life as a poet and artist. I miss my teacher and my home temple community. I would like to continue to teach the dharma, sharing my practice, creative life, and insights with others, much of which is particular to my own journey.

*Thank you for leading our sangha during this time. Do you have any concluding thoughts you'd like to share?*

I have one of my poems, many of which I shared during Winter Ango as part of my readings and talks.

### **Tree in the Mountain: A Rite of Passage**

Tell me your story,  
In our story is the original seed,  
Our promise. Like the light of the new moon.  
Like a centuries old woman, hidden,  
Her life, like a labyrinth.  
An echo perhaps, a memory, from before the earth is born.

The tree in the mountain, she is veiled.  
Warm, protected, quiet and unhurried, she  
Patiently waits, teaching me to wait. Her golden branches  
blaze within the mountain, our actions  
Leave no trace. Root, branch, pebble, and stone: my  
Flesh and bone: an integral part of the mountain.



*Top: Lunar New Year celebration in Sangha House  
Bottom: Close of Winter Ango, February 24, 2024*

Deer scamper, their magic antlers and  
Jewel-like eyes, a god disguised.  
Geese fly, their feathery bodies, glide  
atop the stream, appear  
Then disappear. Traveling in and through the dream.

Myriad petals unfold an ancient truth, death  
Her fertile field. Unnamed  
I name her. The mystical tree where heart-mind blooms.  
Animals come, rest upon her branches, nestled  
Within her leaves. Sing  
A magical song, ring tiny bells. A great tree is  
Alive within the mountain,  
New life turning toward the sun, radiant! ❖



# Winter Ango 2024 – Passion And Enlightenment

by Sheryl Gyonyo Hamilton

I had the pleasure of attending the final week of Winter Ango this past February.

First, a big thank you to the Shuso, Shin'ei (Alison Brown). A disciple of Abbot Kyogen Carlson from 2001 until he died in 2014, she is currently a student of Abbot Ejo McMullen in Eugene, Oregon, and took Koji ordination in 2023. Shin'ei offered a wealth of talent and experiences including living in multiple Zen Centers throughout her adult life, a love of Hua Yen Buddhism, and her talent in poetry and visual arts.

Her theme for the Ango was taken from the Avatamsaka Sutra: "All dharmas are birthless and cannot be extinguished, one who understands this sees the Tathagata." A further quotation also included in the theme was: "When the knot has eyes and shows itself as wisdom, the karmic knot or the complexes disentangle, and it does disentangle, disengaging itself from outworn ways, metamorphosing, revealing its undivided face."

I applied that theme to the particular karmic knot that I have been leaning into for the last five years: sexual desire. It has been a rough road, and this Ango helped me a lot.

Here is another quote from the Avatamsaka:

Foolish people  
Spend their entire lives  
Wounded and poisoned  
By the thorn of love.  
To cause these people  
To seek Bodhi  
Is what the entire Buddhadharmā  
Is for.

Sexual desire as a pathway to liberation started for me right after Rohatsu in 2018. At that time, I met Ragaraja the wisdom king of passion, at the San Francisco Art Museum. He teaches, "passion is the same as enlightenment." This made no sense to me at all. But I put Ragaraja on my altar, found his mantra and mudra, and started practicing. We became friends, but I still didn't understand his message.

Over the following four years, I used a lot of strategies to try to stop sexual desire. This just made it stronger.

About a year ago I started to wonder what would happen if I just went with it but didn't act on it. Then I found Garchen Rinpoche and his empowerments on YouTube for Vajrayogini and Chakrasamvara practice, which are very helpful. H.H. the Dalai Lama also has a wonderful Heruka empowerment available on YouTube. Tantric practice with a Buddha is very liberating since it is 100% based on compassion and healing. This practice taught me how to transmute sexual desire through my heart (middle dan tien), and head (upper dan tien) into love and bliss. Tantra works. But it has to be about com-



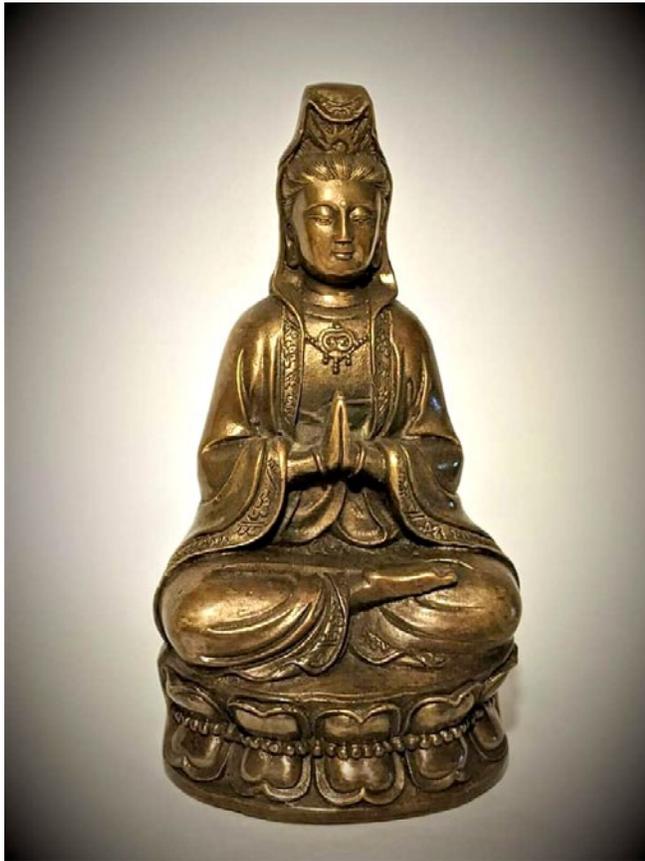
passion and liberation.

I also had to ask for help. And I had to put up some boundaries. This was a powerful heart-opening experience, but it was not easy. There was some withdrawal involved, and I had to confront my own true emotional landscape without the distraction of desire.

Being liberated from pleasure is the same as being liberated from suffering. Both are removed by realizing the union of all things as Buddha-mind. In the end, liberation brings incredible relief and gratitude.

Ragaraja is right. Passion really is the same as enlightenment.

I was very grateful to Shuso for holding the space for further exploration and realization of this theme. Perfect timing, as always. ❖



## Three important bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism

### Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin/Kwan, Yin/Kannon/Kanzeon):

The Bodhisattva of Compassion embodies the compassion common to all Buddhas. She is often depicted with multiple arms and heads, symbolizing the ability to reach out and help countless beings simultaneously.

### Manjushri:

The Bodhisattva of Wisdom embodies transcendental wisdom that cuts through ignorance and delusion. Manjushri often holds a sword that symbolizes cutting through ignorance, and a book or scroll, which represents the wisdom teachings. Manjushri is often displayed on the altars of Zen meditation halls.



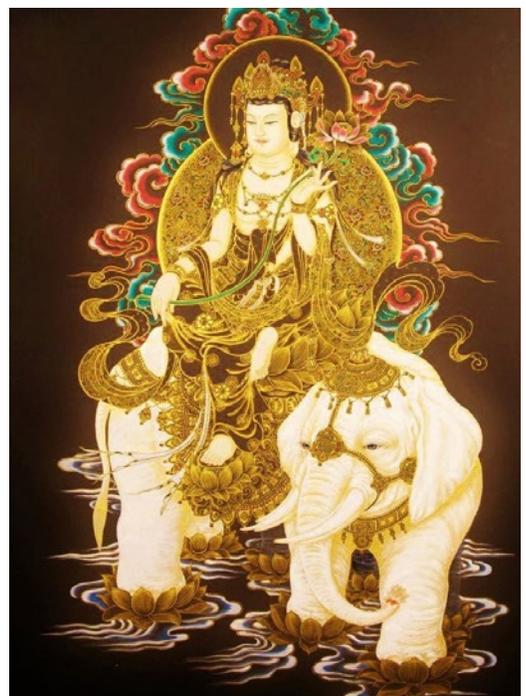
### Samantabhadra (Puxian):

The Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue or Practice is associated with generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom. Samantabhadra is often seen riding a white elephant.

## What are bodhisattvas and who is the bodhisattva of compassion?

A bodhisattva is not considered a deity in the same way that gods or goddesses are, in many religious traditions. Instead, a bodhisattva is a being who, according to Mahayana Buddhist beliefs, vows to attain enlightenment (Buddhahood) for the benefit of all sentient beings. Bodhisattvas are compassionate beings who have chosen to postpone their own awakening to help others along the path to liberation from suffering.

Bodhisattvas are revered in Mahayana Buddhism, but they are not considered omnipotent, or creators of the universe. They are considered to be spiritual guides, exemplars of compassion and wisdom. Bodhisattvas are worthy of devotion and respect, but they are not deities in the traditional sense.



# As It Is – Sangha Inquiry

In *The Heart of Understanding*, a collection of commentaries on the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra, Thich Nhat Hahn gives the meaning of the bodhisattva and the nature of Kwan Yin:

“Bodhi means being awake, and sattva means a living being, so bodhisattva means an awakened (or enlightenment) being. All of us are sometimes bodhisattvas, and sometimes not. Avalokita is the name of the bodhisattva in this sutra. Avalokita is just a shorter version of Avalokitesvara. The Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra is a wonderful gift to us from Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. In Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese, Avalokitesvara is translated as Kwan Yin, Quan Am, or Kannon, which means “the one who listens and hears the cries of the world in order to come and help.” In the East, many Buddhists pray to Avalokitesvara or invoke the name. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva gives us the gift of non-fear because he has transcended fear.”

Many centuries ago in India, Avalokitesvara was represented as the male bodhisattva of compassion. He appeared in China in the early centuries of the Common Era, and gradually transformed into a female figure. One theory credits the influence of indigenous East Asian cultures with their reverence for female deities of compassion and mercy. As Buddhism spread and adapted to different cultures, Avalokitesvara’s compassionate qualities became associated with maternal attributes. This led to the emergence of Kwan Yin as a female bodhisattva.

Over time Kwan Yin has become one of the most beloved and widely worshiped bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism, particularly in China, where she is seen as a sympathetic being of mercy who hears the cries of suffering and responds with empathy and loving-kindness.



## EDITOR’S NOTE

In this issue of the newsletter, we are featuring a new section, *‘As It Is—Sangha Inquiry’* which focuses on questions from community members. We welcome any questions you may have about Zen or the Dharma. In addition, we plan to highlight some of the pieces of art and statuary found at the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. You may email your questions to [flacoking@aol.com](mailto:flacoking@aol.com). ❖

# New To The Sangha

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## **Zoe Nobari**, Ils de France, Ivry

I was born in Tehran, Iran, did my studies in the U.S., and moved to France with my husband. We have two adult daughters. About them, I should mention that spending time with them from their birth till their moving out has been the best years of my life. I have always had an eye for beautiful things (art), order, harmony, and peace. My attraction to Zen stems from these main attachments!

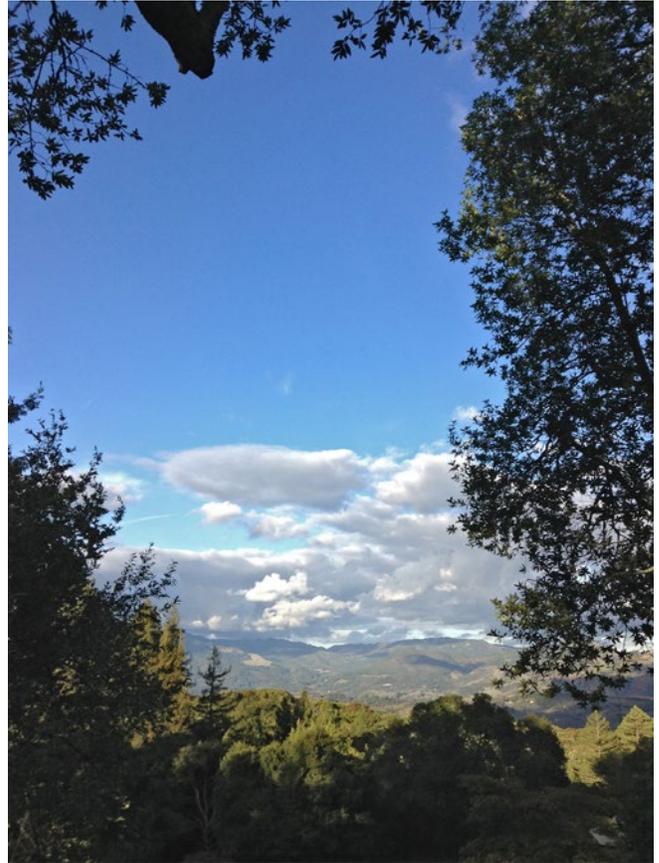
Since my youth, which is some fifty years ago, I have felt at home with Zen teachings, and have always practiced as a part-time self-declared student while giving the bulk of my attention to other areas—education, raising two daughters, working as a therapist, and following the current established by the conventional settings I have lived in. I have kept my spiritual practice as a personal and private treat.

## **Garry Paul Gillooly**- Tampa, Florida

I am joining the Sangha from Tampa Florida. Over the last thirty years I have spent most of my working life as a professional cook. In 2019, at the age of 40, I started working on a degree in philosophy at the University of South Florida. Most of my research has been about Western subject/object dichotomy and the writings of Dogen and Kyoto School philosophers. After graduating in 2022, I started teaching high school social studies for my local public school district. Teaching high school gives me the freedom to pursue residential practice during summer breaks. Studying Dogen's writings, particularly Uji and Genjo-koan, has been a primary interest for the last thirty years.

## **Michael Donnoe**, Fair Oaks, CA

I've been practicing Soto Zen since the late 1990s, and was given the dharma name Kichu Jika" ("Joyful Devotion, Song of Compassion") by Reb Anderson-roshi at Green Gulch Farm in 2001. I'm also an Episcopalian, and very interested in Buddhist-Christian dialogue and practice. I live in the Sacramento area with my best friend Santiago, a scruffy Cairn terrier, and enjoy spending time creating art, sitting zazen, cooking for family and friends, and traveling. My practice interests include eco-dharma, LGBTQ sangha and practice, and sewing a new rakusu with my teacher. I first heard of SMZC from Kwong-roshi's books, which have meant a lot to me over the years, and I'm interested in joining the SMZC Sangha because of the style and nature of practice here, and the welcoming and friendly community.



When plants grow up into the sky, the sky does not care. The sky is always ready to accept things. Our big mind should be like the sky. We should accept things as it is, and we should not discriminate between things as the sky does not discriminate.

— SHUNRYU SUZUKI-ROSHI  
NOVEMBER 13, 1969



# Sonoma Mandala Spring Update — March, 2024

by Shunryu Kwong

As we emerge from winter, the spring flowers are beginning to bloom on Sonoma Mountain. With the drier weather, the Zen Center can continue its work to complete the Sonoma Mandala.

The Zen Center has made progress toward completing the County's conditions of its Use Permit (UPE13-0049). Of the 98 conditions of Conditions of Approval, there are only 2 left to complete. One of these is Condition 79, which requires the church to close violations on 17 structures. To date, the Zen Center has remedied/closed violations on 14 structures through a combination of demolition, building remodeling, and new construction. To complete the structure's violation work infrastructure, like the installation of a new septic and water systems, had to be completed simultaneously. Over 25 building permits have been received and completed at a cost of over \$3 million.

To help complete the County's Conditions of Approval, the Zen Center has re-hired architect Chris Dorman of Dorman Associates to work with me. Chris previously worked with the Zen Center to complete the demolition of the cabins and the construction of the Genjo Building, Ando Quarters and the Sangha Cabin. Chris and I will start work on the permit drawings for the Sangha House Remodel in April and will submit for building permit this summer. They will also start work on the Community Building (Wisteria House) permit drawings in April and will submit for building permit this winter.

I have been meeting with Paul Discoe to complete the application for the Zendo (Manjushri Hall) building permits.

Shizue Seo, architect for the Sanmon (entry gate), has received comments from the county on our building permit application and is working with structural engineer Mark Level on responses. That building permit should be issued shortly. Material acquisition and preparation are underway, and the project is on track to begin construction this summer.

## The sequence of Mandala building projects will thus be:

Sanmon (entry gate)  
Sangha House remodel  
Community Building (Wisteria House)  
Zendo (Manjushri Hall)  
Kwong office (Inryu studio remodel)

Construction of the Wisteria House and Manjushri Hall will depend on the Zen Center's ability to raise funds. Please support the Sonoma Mandala by volunteering and donating to the campaign. ❖

## Theme for Winter Ango 2024

Shuso – Shinei (Sacred Flower)  
Shinei Alison Brown



## The Avatamsaka Sutra and the Hua Yen

*“All dharmas are birthless and cannot be extinguished,  
one who understands this sees the Tathagata.”*

Avatamsaka  
—Eulogies of the Suyama Heaven,  
Eulogies of Mount Sumeru

The cosmos is perceived as a wondrous jewel, a nexus of interdependent causes and conditions. Colorful, imaginative, and challenging, the Avatamsaka is considered the crown of Buddhist sutras, one of the earliest Buddhist literatures to enter China. The Hua Yen School evolved in the seventh century, drawing insight from the Avatamsaka. The Hua Yen was highly influential in Zen practice forming the basis of two main sutras we chant in the mornings, Precious Mirror Samadhi and the Harmony of Difference and Sameness. It is key to deepening your understanding of compassion and interconnection in your meditation, and daily life practice. *When the knot has eyes and shows itself as wisdom, the karmic knot or the complexes disentangle, and it does disentangle, disengaging itself from outworn ways, metamorphosing, revealing, its undivided face.*

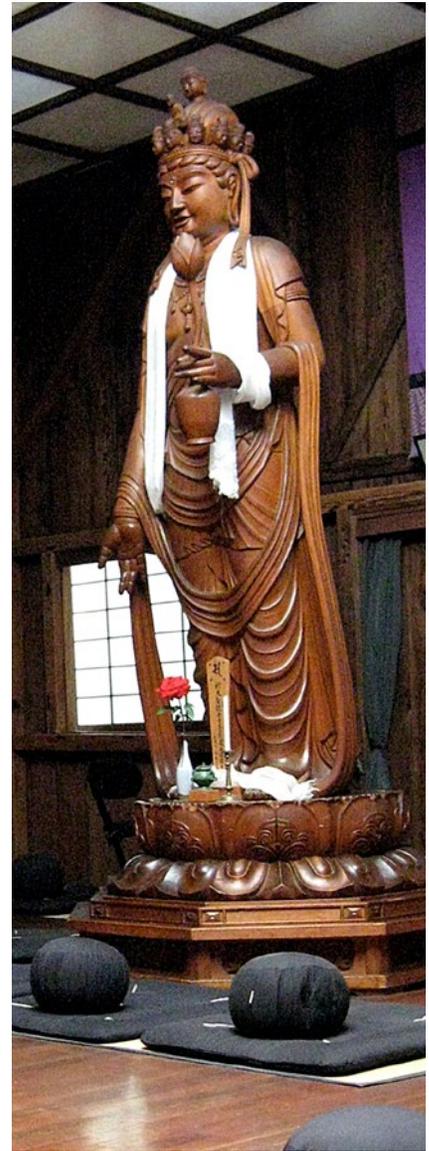
# Zen Dust News

by Carol Adams

Here on the mountain, lush green grasses abound and myriad bright-faced wildflowers reach for the sun, encouraged into vigorous bloom following the generous winter rains. The welcoming of Spring is often heralded as a time of rejuvenation and renewal. For Zen Dust, we have been busy with Spring cleaning and freshening up the store in preparation for our Spring Sale. Beginning April 1st, all statuary and incense bowls will be on sale at 10% off. We have a huge selection of beautiful, well-crafted statues...Enlightenment Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, Amitabha Buddha, Manjusri and Kwan Yin in various forms just to name a few. In addition, we have many lovely ceramic incense bowls perfect for your altar or for gifts. The sale will run the entire month of April so please stop by and take a look!

Also, we will have more 50th celebration T-shirts back in stock soon in medium and small sizes in black. We ran out during the Shinsanshiki event so if you missed out, now's your chance to have one of these special, one-in-a-lifetime T-shirts with calligraphy by Jakusho Kwong-roshi.

In addition, we continue to offer all your meditation needs with Zen-made items such as zabutons, zafus, jubons, support cushions and more. Please come visit Zen Dust during Saturday Community practice. Store hours are Saturdays from 12 to 1:15pm. For orders or questions, email [zendust@smzc.org](mailto:zendust@smzc.org), or call (707) 545-8105. ❖



All Contributions  
Help Maintain  
the Buddhadharma!

## DONATE ONLINE SMZC.ORG

In order to continue to offer our programs and ensure the future of SMZC, we are asking for your support. Your donation is tax deductible. Sonoma Mountain Zen Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Tax ID #23-7304793

# Membership

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We invite you to become a member of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center. Our purpose is to offer Soto Zen meditation practice and its basic teachings to people of all religious faiths. The practice of meditation allows us to see beyond our one-sided perception of ourselves and the world so that we are able to participate in society with clarity and peace. We are a lay residential practice center and a non-profit organization relying on membership dues, guest practice programs, Zen programs, and contributions to sustain our operating cost. *Call or visit soon to join us in actualizing the Dharma!*

## ONLINE RESOURCES ~ Dharma Talks & Events

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**SMZC's website** conveys the essence of our practice to others and invites their participation at the Zen Center. It is found at **[www.smzc.org](http://www.smzc.org)**.

A selection of Dharma Talks by Jakusho Kwong-roshi and more are available online in video, audio, and podcast formats.

Roshi's **Vimeo** channel offers several of Roshi's and Shinko's Dharma talks plus other notable events from SMZC. Please check it out! Just go to **[www.vimeo.com/smzc](http://www.vimeo.com/smzc)**.

Talks by Kwong-roshi and senior students are now available on the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center **YouTube** channel (search by **@sonoma-mountainzencenter**). Talks will be posted one month after the live talk.



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Suzuki-roshi quote on pg. 12 from  
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and Awakening of All Beings”



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