

▶ **HELLO KITTY:** Roshi Kapleau comments on Nansen's demonstration and Joshu's response

SEEING WITH FRESH EYES: an interview with artist and Zen student Dave Dorsey

THREE WRITERS, three different takes on the use of technology in Zen practice



RECENTLY I ALMOST quit Facebook. A headline in the *New York Times* (“Do you have a moral duty to leave Facebook?”) got me thinking about it, not for the first time. So I did what many Facebook users do: I posted the article and asked the advice of my friends. Obviously, those who responded were a subset of my friends who have decided—so far—not to abandon ship, but their answers were strikingly diverse, ranging from the practical (“I have to be here because of my business”) to the emotional (“How else could I stay in touch so easily with my family and friends?”) to the angry (“Money and power override honesty and trustworthiness”). It was clear that all respondents had, as a result of their mixed emotions, thought carefully about how best to calibrate their Facebook usage.

By happenstance, several articles in this issue of *Zen Bow* are focused on the use of technology in Zen practice. Email, streaming audio, online forums, special interest groups, blogsites, and other technologies can all have a positive impact, providing useful information, emotional support, and inspiration for practice. Or not.

Meanwhile, I have remained on Facebook, bolstering myself with the mantra, “Facebook is for grandmas.” My decision to stay is tinged with regret, but it’s a good reminder that many choices in life—and practice—are not black-and-white.

Do you have an online resource that you have found particularly helpful? Would you like to share it in *Zen Bow*? We’d love to hear from you: zenbow@rzc.org.—CHRIS PULLEYN, Editor

ON THE COVER

PAINTING BY *Pieter Bruegel the Elder* | “The Hunters in the Snow” (detail), 1565; oil on wood, 117 cm × 162 cm. Part of a “Labors of the Months” series (of which five survive), depicting activities associated with the seasons.

 A publication of the Rochester Zen Center



KUNSTHAUS GRAZ, GRAZ, AUSTRIA

3 ■ SOUNDINGS

“My cushion is miles away”: an out-of-town member’s experiences with live streaming | *How memories flatter us* | *like an obsequious lackey* | Definition of samsara | *Q&A: Can I still have fun?* | Have you ghosted your teacher?

DAVE DORSEY

Painting attention

“Both painting and sitting require a willingness to stay in one place for hours.” An interview with Dave Dorsey. ▶ 8

ROSHI PHILIP KAPLEAU

Nansen kills the cat

A vintage koan commentary by the Center’s founder, the late Roshi Philip Kapleau. ▶ 14

ANGELA HÄKKILÄ

Distant bodhisattvas

A gender-questioning member finds warm support in a private online group. ▶ 18

22 ■ SIGHTINGS

Letter to the editor | *Reader reviews* | *Sacred conversations* | *Youth and family task force* | Hello Pain update

EDITOR

Chris Pulleyn | zenbow@rzc.org

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT

Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede | bodhin@rzc.org

COPY EDITOR

Cecily Fuhr | cecilyfuhr@gmail.com

ART DIRECTOR

Daryl Wakeley | darylwakeley@icloud.com

PROOFREADER

John Pulleyn

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

All readers are encouraged to submit essays and images at any time and on any topic related to Zen practice. Articles may be of any length. Suggestions for articles and artwork are also welcome, as are “found objects” such as quotations, haiku, and/or excerpts from articles in other publications. Submission guidelines may be found on the *Zen Bow* page of the Center’s website: www.rzc.org/library/zen-bow. For any and all questions and suggestions, please email Chris Pulleyn at zenbow@rzc.org.

SUBSCRIBING TO ZEN BOW

The subscription rate below reflects current postage fees:

	4 issues	8 issues
U.S.:	\$20.00	\$40.00
FOREIGN:	\$40.00	\$80.00

Please send checks and your current address to:
Zen Bow Subscriptions Desk
Rochester Zen Center
7 Arnold Park
Rochester, NY 14607

PLEASE NOTE: If you are moving, the Postal Service charges us for each piece of mail sent to your old address, whether you have left a forwarding address or not. If you change your address, please let us know as soon as possible. Send your address corrections to the *Zen Bow* Subscriptions Desk at the above address or email receptionist@rzc.org.

COUNTLESS GOOD DEEDS

If you’re thinking about financial planning, estate planning, or both, please remember that there are myriad ways you can help the Rochester Zen Center through planned giving. The right kind of plan can help you reduce your taxes significantly while providing for a larger, longer-lasting gift to the Zen Center. Because there is a wide array of bequests, annuities, trusts, and other financial vehicles to consider, you’ll want to work with your financial advisor to decide what’s best for you. Long-time Zen Center member David Kernan, an attorney who concentrates his practice in tax law, has generously offered to help point you in the right direction at no charge. For more information about planned giving and David’s offer, please contact the Center’s receptionist.

COPYRIGHT ©2018 ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER. FOR REPRINTS AND OTHER PERMISSIONS, PLEASE CONTACT THE EDITOR AT ZENBOW@RZC.ORG.

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN *ZEN BOW* ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS ALONE AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE VIEWS OF THE ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER, ITS DIRECTORS, ITS TRUSTEES, ITS MEMBERS, OR ITS STAFF.



SOUNDINGS



THE ENERGY OF PLACE

LIVE STREAMING IS not enough. I moved away from Rochester three years ago and have been live streaming the formal sittings as a way of staying connected to the Rochester Zen Center.

This live streaming has kept me tethered in a way that is both powerful and profound, and at the same time is not enough.

I am literally sitting with all of my Dharma sisters and brothers each time I tune in. It always makes me smile to hear a bird 1700 miles away from me!

I can recognize my friends when I hear them cough or ask a question during the “Coming to the Path” talks, or when their laughter breaks through. My ears stretch out to the sounds of the fans and the birds and the bells and blocks. As I listen to teishos sitting on my cushion, there is a sense of wellness because we are all here together at the same time in this moment. Right here, right now.

Still, I felt the need to come back to Arnold Park, and have been able to return twice. Life places many demands on me because I have a family: children, grandchildren, siblings and friends that fill my life with richness and have become my Zen practice away from the cushion. Fortunately, I was able to come back for three weeks this past July and August to train for two weeks and then attend the August sesshin. It confirmed for me what I had known in my body but did not realize in depth until I returned for this extended stay. The zendo in Arnold Park is a place like no other. The RZC holds 50 years of energy. It’s hard to describe, but I will try to put my experience into words.

There is no place like home. I was drawn here like a homing pigeon over eleven years ago, and continue to return. This is home for me in ways that are beyond words and time. Also beyond words and time is the feeling I get when I enter the zendo at Arnold Park.

The energy in the zendo, with and without people in it, drives deeply into me, enveloping me, surrounding me, taking my

breath away as my senses awaken. I feel the depth of ancient waves from all those that have gone before and all those here now—and of course this place will welcome all those who will come in the future.

I remember the first time I entered the zendo. Sitting during the workshop and taking instruction, I began to cry. The word “home” bubbled up into my consciousness. I was surprised by the thoughts: “I am home. I am home.” Then tears gently flowed down

THE MOULD OUR DEEDS LEAVE

Oct. 24 [1837]. Every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another. The oak dies down to the ground, leaving within its rind a rich virgin mould, which will impart a vigorous life to an infant forest. The pine leaves a sandy and sterile soil, the harder woods a strong and fruitful mould.

So this constant abrasion and decay makes the soil of my future growth. As I live now so shall I reap. If I grow pines and birches, my virgin mould will not sustain the oak; but pines and birches, or, perchance, weeds and brambles, will constitute my second growth.

—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

my cheeks.

The Center, my teacher Roshi Kjolhede, my Dharma brothers and sisters... I wish I had several lifetimes so that I could fulfill all of my secular responsibilities, and also spend the amount of time that I want to here at the RZC.

I am writing this after two weeks of training here, and a seven-day sesshin begins tomorrow. I want to capture the essence of my experiences live streaming, and later returning to sit in the zendo in Arnold Park.

1—The live streaming keeps me tethered, so I touch home through my ears. But the one sense is not enough. It is a way to structure my sittings while being so far away. I know that when it is 5 PM here (7 PM New York time), I can tune in and join the formal sitting in Rochester. My practice stays strong because of the live streaming. I tune in to the all-day sittings. Gassho for these. I may have wandered away from practice were it not for the live streaming. I have sat with four or five groups in Colorado, and they are lovely in their own way, but my experiences here at the RZC have bonded me to the place and people and our style of practice. I chuckle to myself in Colorado, knowing my cushion is miles away and we are sitting, still, together, and I am grounded in this and very grateful for it.

2—Actually being here at Arnold Park, I smell the incense, feel the air whoosh- ▶

ing through my hair as the fans swing back and forth. The bird's chirps are sharp and clear and so close now. I know you! My Dharma sisters and brothers sit all around me, behind me, beside me, on the other side of the divider... right here!

Live in the zendo with others, my body inside the room, the dim light encourages the inward focus and concentration to a much greater degree than when live streaming in my home. Throughout each sitting, the sequence of events is predictable and there is a comfort in the rituals; however, what is most profound is impossible to put into words. I will try to anyway. It is being in this room. Just this!

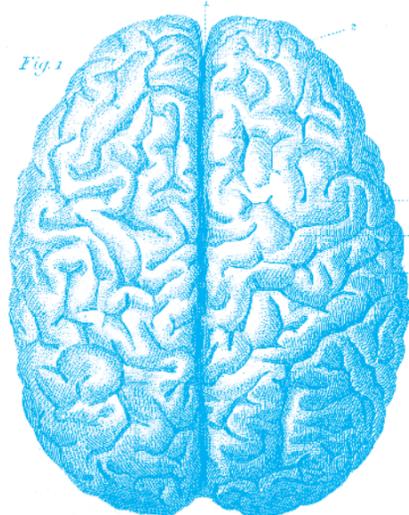
It is the energy in the room. It is the atmosphere and all that this implies—sight (eye), sound (ear), smell (nose), taste (tongue), touch (body), consciousness (mind). When I walk into the zendo, I enter into another world, another dimension. There is something so visceral, a thickness... and a deep sense, heavy with gravity as if silence itself has form. At the same time, there is a weightlessness and emptiness.... The people in silence, in that room, all these years... nearly 50 years of meditation in this room have transformed it into a place like no other.

Perhaps the years of silent meditation and chanting in this room have altered its physical reality.

I am envious of the members who live nearby, and only have to get into a car and drive over here. I have to plan for months in advance and buy an airline ticket and find caretakers for my dog and grandson in order to come here to meditate. Rochesterians are truly blessed with a place such as this. In real estate, they say, location is everything. Perhaps in meditation, location is everything, or at least a very important part. For me, I will always return. I must. —SUSAN ROEBUCK

HOW MEMORY FORTIFIES YOUR EGO

SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING and evidence strongly imply that our sense of self and all that goes with it (memory, language, emotion, perception, and so on) is supported by processes in our brain. Everything you are is a feature of your brain, and as such much of what your brain does is dedicated to making you look and feel as good as possible, like an obsequious lackey to a popular celebrity, who prevents her hearing any criticism or negative publicity for fear of upsetting her. And one of the ways it can do this is



by modifying your memories to make you feel better about yourself.

There are numerous memory biases or flaws, many of which aren't noticeably egotistical in nature. However, a surprising number appear to be largely egotistical, especially the one simply called the egocentric bias, where our memories are tweaked or modified by the brain to

present events in a manner that makes us look better. For example, if recalling an occasion where they were part of a group decision, people tend to remember that they were more influential and integral to the final decision than they in fact were.

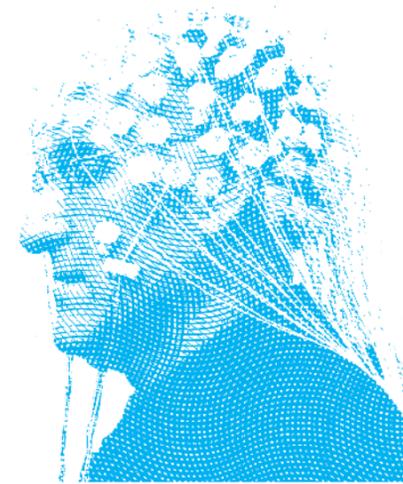
One of the earliest reports of this stems from the Watergate scandal, where a whistleblower told investigators all about the plans and discussions that he had taken part in that led to the political conspiracy and cover-up. However, later listening to the recordings of these meetings, an accurate record of the discussions, revealed John Dean got the overall "gist" of what happened, but many of his claims were alarmingly inaccurate. The main problem was that he'd described himself as an influential key figure in the planning, but the tapes revealed he was a bit player at most. He hadn't set out to lie, just to boost his own ego; his memory was "altered" to conform to his sense of identity and self-importance.

It doesn't have to be government-toppling corruption, though; it can be minor things such as believing you performed better at sports than you genuinely did, or recalling you caught a trout when it was in fact a minnow. It's important to note that when this happens it's not an example of someone lying or exaggerating to impress people; it often happens with memories even if we're not telling anyone about them. That last bit is key: we genuinely believe our memory's version of events to be accurate and fair. The modifications and tweaks made to give a more flattering portrayal of ourselves are, more often than not, entirely unconscious. —DEAN BURNETT, *Idiot Brain: What Your Head is Really Up To*

In the Mahayana, it is said that escaping the cycle of samsara through entry into nirvana is only possible during rebirth as a human being. In all other forms of existence, beings cannot end the cyclical process because they cannot recognize desire and ignorance as the driving forces of samsara and thus overcome them. —ADAPTED FROM The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen

THIS MAY SOUND paradoxical (like much in Zen!) but the essential unity of samsara and nirvana is based on the view that everything is a mental representation, and thus samsara and nirvana are nothing other than labels without real substance; e.g., they are empty. To the extent that one does not relate to the phenomenal aspect of the world but rather to its true nature, samsara and nirvana are not different from one another.

sam-sa-ra \səm-'sār-ə\ n [Sanskrit *samsāra*, lit., "passing through"] **1**: The cycle of existences that a being goes through until it has attained liberation and entered nirvana **2**: In Mahayana Buddhism, the phenomenal world, considered to be essentially identical with nirvana



ANTHONY LUTZ - BARRY KERZIN

MEDITATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

AS MANY OF OUR members know, researchers at the University of Wisconsin have been studying the brains of meditators for many years, most famously having wired up the Dalai Lama. Rick Smith, the group leader of the Madison Zen Center, is actively recruiting participants for an upcoming research study:

Dr. Giulio Tononi at the University of Wisconsin Department of Psychiatry is investigating the normal patterns of brain activity during various states of consciousness—including sleep and waking—and investigating how these patterns change in people who engage in regular meditation practice. The study uses electroencephalography (EEG) to measure your brain's normal electrical activity while you are awake and asleep.

To be eligible for this study you must:
—Currently meditate on a regular basis
—Have 10+ years of meditation experience
—Be between 18 and 75 years old
—Have no serious medical problems
—Not be pregnant

This study will be conducted over a seven-day period. You will be paid \$100 for each day that you participate. Some participants will be offered the opportunity to participate in additional, optional, study visits.

There is no cost for study procedures. Transportation can be arranged if necessary. If you are interested, please contact Richard Smith at smithr1@wisc.edu.

► Highland Park Reservoir in winter (2018)
PHOTOGRAPH BY SUSANNA ROSE

DO I HAVE TO CHANGE my lifestyle to practice Zen? Should I stop reading the news? Seeing movies? Having drinks with friends?

EVERYTHING depends on what you want from Zen practice. If you want to use sitting just to relax and be more even-tempered and mindful, you don't really need to change anything about your lifestyle. Just stir in some daily sitting. And in doing that, you may find that your lifestyle begins to change on its own. If you're always hungry for news, you might find your appetite for it diminishing. Same with movies and other screen entertainment, or shopping or coffee or novels or food or smoking pot.

It's advisable to not try too forcibly to cut out your more innocent attachments—that is, those that don't cause harm to others. Roshi Kapleau's advice about vegetarianism could be applied to many other

attachments: "Rather than giving up meat, let meat give you up." If you're sitting every day—and the more the better—some of your sticky habits will tend to slough off on their own (helped along by a sensible effort at self-restraint). As for alcohol, infrequent, light social drinking can be innocent enough for people who know they have no drinking problem and who aren't going to be driving. But there's always some risk with alcohol because of its disinhibiting effect.

Now, if you are more keen to use practice to settle vexing questions and reach awakening, you'll want to bring greater simplicity to your life. That starts with doing more *zazen* (simplifying the mind), which in turn will prompt you to work harder on obstructive habits and entanglements that complicate your life. —ROSHI BODHIN KJOLHEDE



ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME...

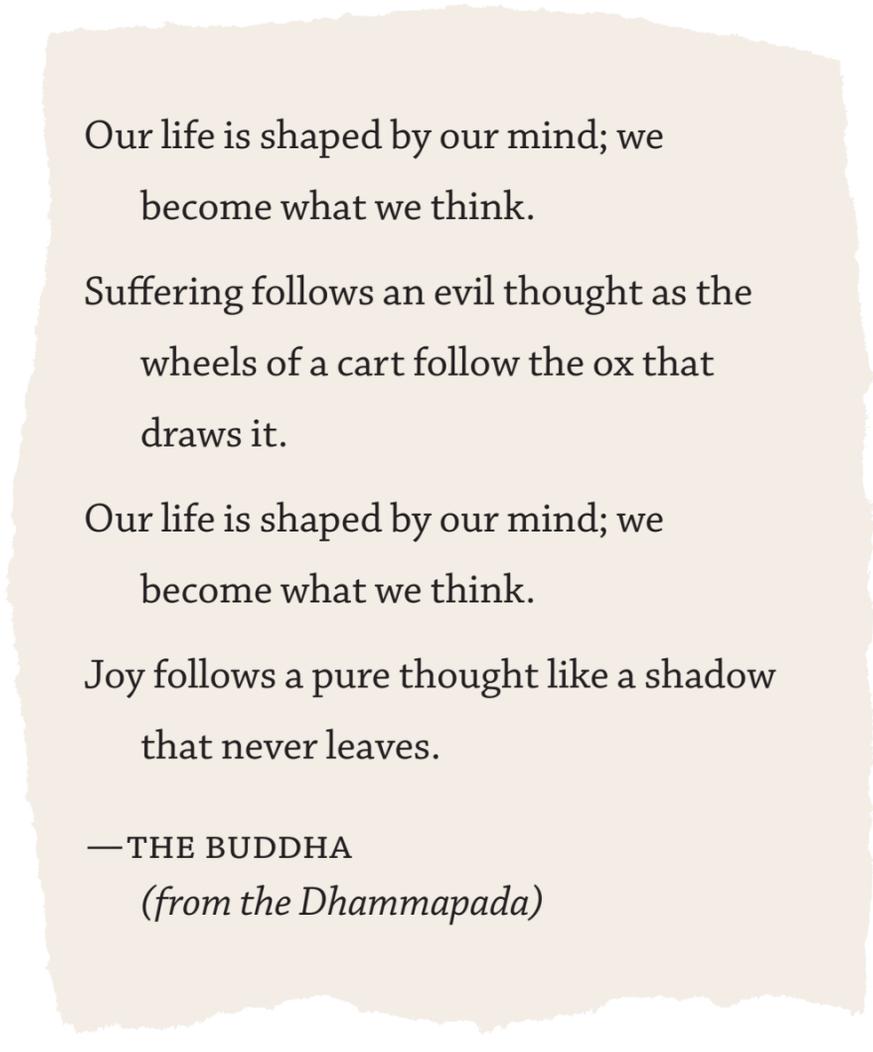
...FOR YOU TO email your teacher? We have been told that Zen deals primarily with the “root” of the matter: without a well-established basis in practice and in awakening mind, why bother with the “limbs and leaves” of techniques, refined practices, philosophy, and cosmology, right? Nonetheless, helpful pointers for practice can be found through exploring the approach to Dharma taken for centuries in Tibetan (Vajrayana, or Tantric) Buddhist streams.

A beginning practitioner in that tradition is often asked to study, reflect, and meditate on four basic truths—including the inevitability of death, the profound and indelible force of karma, and the inescapability (in samsara) of suffering. The first of those foundational truths, though, is appreciating how rare—and how precious—it is to be born human. True enough. Big deal. Bigger than winning the lottery, bigger than being born as a long-lived god.

But if getting a human body with all the working parts and some leisure time to practice is a big deal, then actually having a formal relationship with a qualified teacher of the Mahayana is a super-big deal... really big. Even among the six billion alive on the planet now, how many have a teacher... a real teacher of the precious Dharma? How many in the history of humanity? How many will in the future?

If you're reading this, there's a fair chance you yourself have a formal relationship with a teacher... probably with our abbot at the RZC. There's also a fair chance that, like me, you don't live in the Rochester area. It's also possible that, like me for years, you haven't been staying in regular contact with your teacher. This is truly regrettable. I know, because I truly regret the many years of my life with two great teachers in which I didn't communicate with either one. I just took it all for granted.

I got busy with work, with raising a family, and with a hundred other distractions. I sometimes wasn't sitting a whole lot, and felt guilty about that. The thought of talking with my teacher, and perhaps being encouraged to get more serious about my life, was a daunting one. So I just hid my head in the sand, went



Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.

Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the ox that draws it.

Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.

Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves.

—THE BUDDHA
(from the Dhammapada)

about my business, and ignored what was probably the most important relationship in my life.

I once heard Roshi Kapleau say something like, “One advantage to living a long time is there is a better chance you might stumble across some wisdom.” Now being close to 70, with close to 50 years as a member of the RZC, I've got a nugget of something like wisdom to share: “Please call your teacher. It won't hurt you, and it will certainly be appreciated by him.”

I would suggest, every few months anyway, that you send your teacher a little handwritten note, or a brief email. Tell him (or her) a little about what's going on in your life, maybe comment on how you think your practice is (or is not) coming along. If you feel like it, ask for a ten-minute telephone appointment. It's

like sesshin, where we're encouraged to go to dokusan from time to time even if we don't have a question, because “even if you don't have something to say to the teacher, he may have something to say to you.”

If we put ourselves in our teacher's chair, we might consider how it feels to have devoted all of one's energy, all of one's aspirations, and all of one's life, to helping struggling fellow humans who found their way to being his student—only, sometimes, to have those same precious students “go dark,” disappearing for months or years at a time. This relationship is one of mutual responsibility, mutual dependence. For a long time, I wasn't holding up my end of this teacher-student bargain, but I resolve not to fall short in this way again. —LARRY MCSPADEN

THE LANGUAGE OF DEPRESSION

COMMENTS BY the co-author of a study published in *Clinical Psychological Science* (January 5, 2018). The researchers used a computerized text analysis method to review the language used in 64 online mental health forums with 6,400 members:

Language can be separated into two components: CONTENT and STYLE. The CONTENT relates to *what* we express—that is, the meaning or subject matter of statements. It will surprise no one to learn that those with symptoms of depression use an excessive amount of words conveying negative emotions, specifically negative adjectives and adverbs—such as “lonely,” “sad,” or “miserable.”

More interesting is the use of pronouns. Those with symptoms of depression use significantly more first person singular pronouns—such as “me,” “myself,” and “I”—and significantly fewer second and third person pronouns—such as “they,” “them,” or “she.” This pattern of pronoun use suggests people with depression are more focused on themselves, and less connected with others. Researchers have reported that pronouns are actually more reliable in identifying depression than negative emotion words.

We know that rumination (dwelling on personal problems) and social isolation are common features of depression. However, we don't know whether these findings reflect differences in attention or thinking style. Does depression cause people to focus on themselves, or do people who focus on themselves get symptoms of depression?

The STYLE of language relates to *how* we express ourselves, rather than the content we express. Our lab recently conducted a big data text analysis of 64 different online mental health forums, examining over 6,400 members. “Absolutist words”—which convey absolute magnitudes or probabilities, such as “always,” “nothing,” or “completely”—were found to be better markers for mental health forums than either pronouns or negative emotion words.

From the outset, we predicted that those with depression will have a more black-and-white view of the world, and

▶ Bodhidharma appeared in the Center's backyard sometime in the '80s. Then he disappeared. Does anyone know where he has gone?

that this would manifest in their STYLE of language. Compared to 19 different control forums (for example, Mumsnet and StudentRoom), the prevalence of absolutist words is approximately 50% greater in anxiety and depression forums, and approximately 80% greater for suicidal ideation forums.

Pronouns produced a similar distributional pattern as absolutist words across the forums, but the effect was smaller. By contrast, negative emotion words were paradoxically less prevalent in suicidal ideation forums than in anxiety and depression forums.

Our research also included recovery forums, where members who feel they have recovered from a depressive episode write positive and encouraging posts about their recovery. Here we found that

negative emotion words were used at comparable levels to control forums, while positive emotion words were elevated by approximately 70%. Nevertheless, the prevalence of absolutist words remained significantly greater than that of controls, but slightly lower than in anxiety and depression forums.

Crucially, those who have previously had depressive symptoms are more likely to have them again. Therefore, their greater tendency for absolutist thinking, even when there are currently no symptoms of depression, is a sign that it may play a role in causing depressive episodes. The same effect is seen in use of pronouns, but not for negative emotion words.—MUGHAMMED AL-MOSAIWI, PhD Candidate, University of Reading in *Quartz* (qz.com, February 2, 2018)





▲ Breakfast with Golden Raspberries,
by Dave Dorsey

SIT. SEE. PAINT. REPEAT.

ZEN BOW: How long have you been a member of the Rochester Zen Center?

DAVE DORSEY: I'm getting too old to remember the exact year I joined in the 90s. Actually, my first encounter with the Center was in college, when I was a student at the University of Rochester and came to my first workshop, run by Roshi Kapleau, in the early 70s. I began sitting then, and have been doing it off and on ever since. After I joined I spent some regular time in the morning at the center, but I've drifted into simply sitting at home. It's been quite a while since I've visited, but I'm proud to be a member. My one weekend sesshin at Chapin Mill as it was

INTERVIEW
WITH & ARTWORK
BY *Dave Dorsey*

still being built, I think, was the most effective time I've spent on a cushion.

ZB: Were you sitting before you joined, or did you learn to sit at the RZC?

DD: I didn't have any kind of meditation practice before that first workshop in the 70s.

ZB: What was your turning point? Why did you decide to take up Zen meditation?

DD: I came out of high school with a sense of burning philosophical doubt: a kind of tenacious questioning about meaning that seemed urgent but unanswerable. The nature of this doubt is hard to describe without muddling it up, but it was difficult and life-changing. After contending with this state of unrest for a couple years, as a freshman at the University of Rochester I finally got around to reading J.D. Salinger's Glass family stories, which introduced me to a variety of spiritual traditions: Vedanta, Zen, Russian Orthodox Christianity. His fiction offered me references to a variety of spiritual paths.

I was so impressed by Salinger that I made out a reading list of Salinger's favorite authors and read them, one after another, as if he had introduced me personally to each of the writers themselves and said, "You two should get to know each other." Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Proust, Henry James, Keats, Coleridge, and so on—some of whom I've been rereading lately after all this time. As a result, I spent the summer after my freshman year at U.R. reading all of Proust and most of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was crucial: my parents were Presbyterian and I still consider myself a Christian, but a few of his insights were very close to the paradoxes one faces in Zen practice when trying to break through how the mind entraps itself without realizing it. In addition, I made a list of references to spiritual disciplines and other writers mentioned in *Franny and Zooey*: Ramakrishna, Meister Eckhart, the Upanishads, the haiku translations of R.H. Blyth and D.T. Suzuki. That last name was the door to my interest in Zen. One thing led to another. In the middle of all this self-directed study, I was delighted to discover a new organization devoted to Buddhist meditation here where I lived. I signed up at Arnold Park and that's what got me started.

ZB: Tell us a little about your career trajectory, and when/why you started to paint?

DD: I began painting as an outgrowth of playing a Fender guitar in a couple of garage bands in high school. I wanted some large posters of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton to put on my bedroom wall, but didn't know where to find them—this was long before the Internet. During a brief illness, out of boredom, I found a starter set of oil paints my father had used once to make little Cubist-type scenes on Masonite he hung on our walls. I used them to copy the portrait of Mike Bloomfield by Norman Rockwell on the cover of "The Live Adventures of Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper." I still have that oil painting on paper—I discovered it a few weeks ago in the basement.

I went from that to a 4' x 4' copy of the cover of *Band of Gypsies* which I bolted to my wall—it was painted on soft thick fiberboard. When I discovered an *Art News Annual* with a long feature about Van Gogh, my interest in painting began to take the place of my desire to play the guitar. And I've painted ever since, even while making a living as a writer. I chose to study literature and writing rather than painting because I didn't entirely trust what was happening in the art world at the time and still feel wary about much of what goes on there—I wanted to keep my distance from it and yet still be an artist.

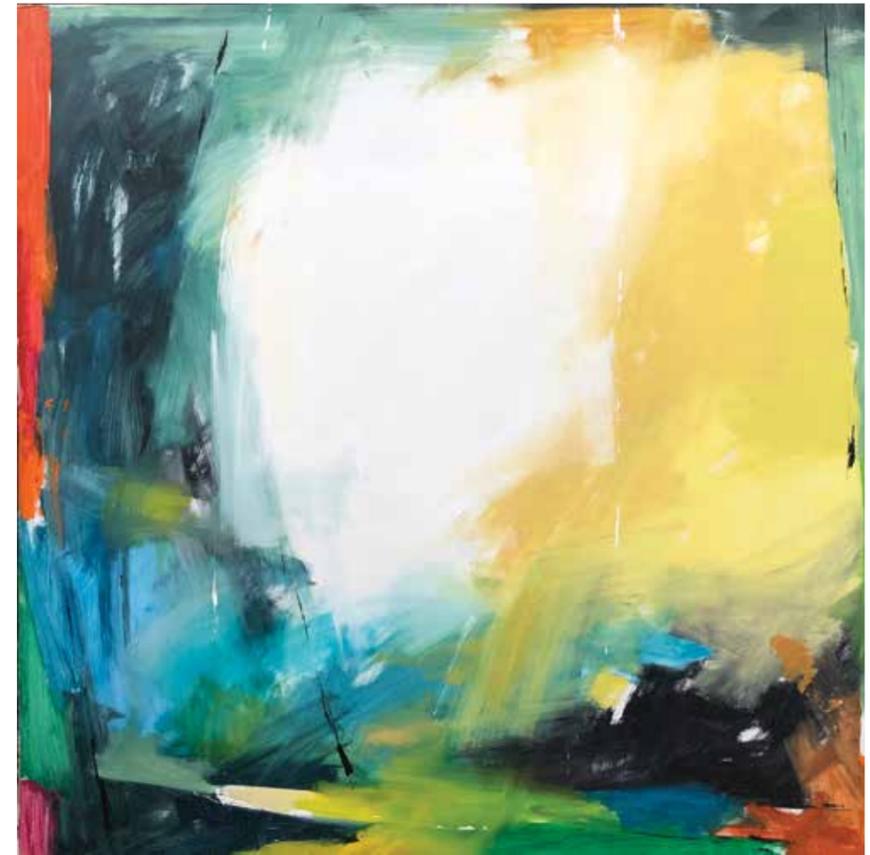
ZB: How do you think your Zen practice informs/interacts with/inspires your painting?

DD: I'm still a beginner at Zen, and I often feel that way as a painter when I stretch a new canvas. When I sit, I count my breaths. Even after decades of doing this, I mostly can't do it consistently even over short periods of time. I have to keep coming back to the counting after losing track, as most people do. Occasionally (usually in my sitting with other RZC members) my mind has become entirely quiet, but this requires sustained effort. I know all of this is just the doorstep to serious Zen practice, which is why I consider myself a beginner. Yet I think even this kind of effort is central to my painting in a couple ways.

It was easier to talk about a connection to Zen back when I was doing abstract expressionist work, where the improvisational nature of the brushwork had much more in common with Japanese and Chinese painting inspired by Buddhist traditions. But what most painting, including my own, has in common with sitting is the need for sustained attention to



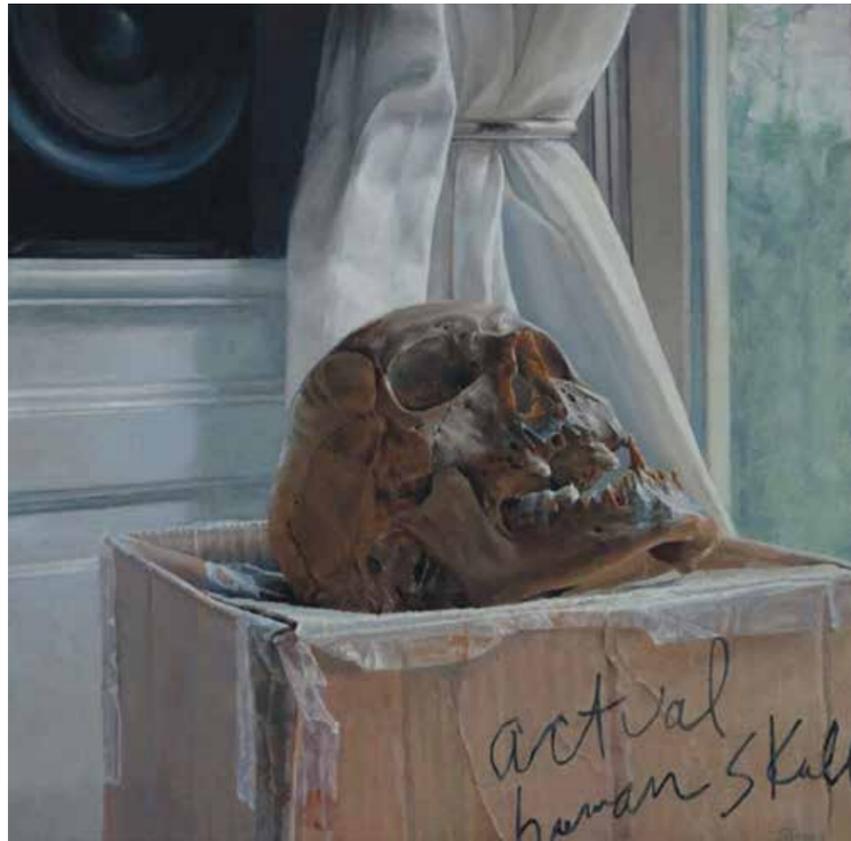
DAVE DORSEY is an author and painter who lives in Pittsford, NY. He worked in newspapers in the 1980s, then became a freelance author and painter early in the 90s. He has exhibited nationally and internationally at galleries and universities, and writes about art at www.thedorseypost.com.



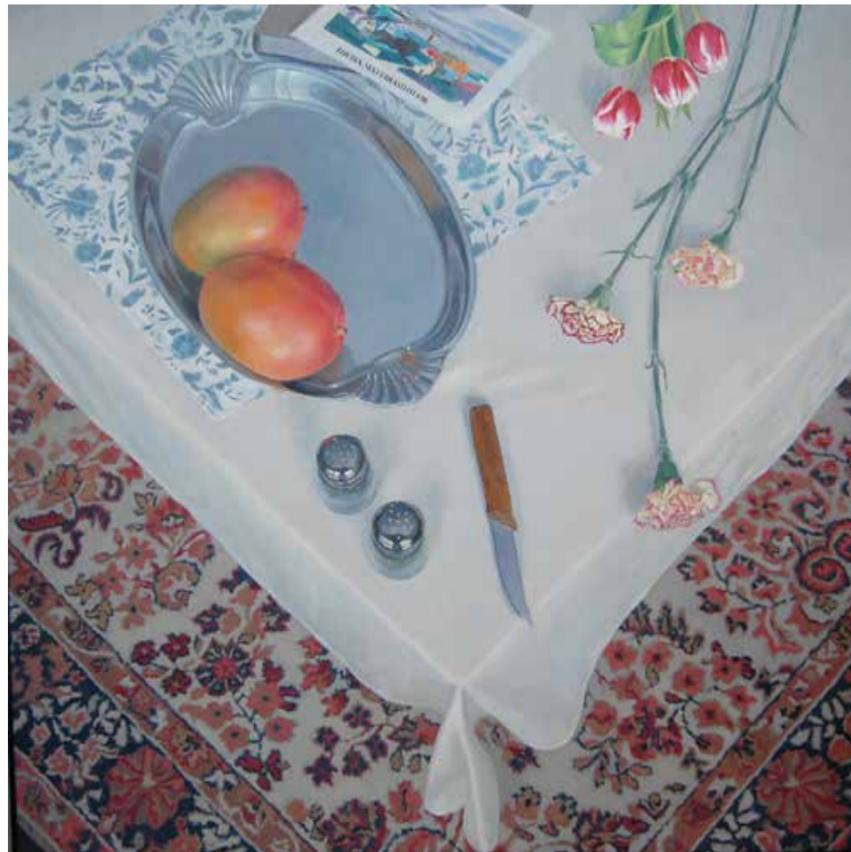
► Storm and Sun



◀ Breaking Free, Cutting Loose



► Skull Unearthed



◀ Mangoes and Matthíasdóttir

the task at hand over long hours. Both require patience and an ability to ignore restlessness and distractions. And both not only require, but are entirely about, paying attention: it's the central discipline of a representational painter and it's also the primary effect of the finished painting on the viewer. The point is to see what's there with fresh eyes. Both painting and sitting require a willingness to stay in one place for hours in ways that often feel unpleasantly constraining for the purpose of simply being intensely aware, period.

I paint mostly still lifes now, in various modes, and I think of it as a way of attending to the "is-ness" of the simplest, most commonplace things with care. It's a way of becoming aware of the simple fact of something's simply being there, disclosing itself to me in a certain way—the fact that something simply *is*—which gets so easily taken for granted and overlooked when daily human purposes come into play. It teaches me how difficult it is to actually see what's there: the actual tones that exist in front of me rather than the ones I think are there from what I think I know about the object or scene. Painting requires a trained mindfulness that also makes it possible for the act of painting to invest an image with qualities that I'm not even conscious of, qualities that somehow arise on their own, while I'm busy thinking about getting something technical accomplished on the canvas.

ZB: A few years ago you borrowed a human skull from the RZC [used for the human realm in Great Jukai] to use for a painting. That seems very Zen-like. Now you are painting hyper-realistic candy jars. Say what? Can you tell us about that transition?

DD: My methods are photo-realistic, but the jars are more painterly and not as precise as most hyper-realism these days. The skulls I've done are actually more exact than the candy paintings. The three skulls I painted were almost the antithesis of the subjects I usually pick. My primary interest has always been color, and this is a difficult passion when you are painting most of what's in the world accurately; most things aren't that colorful. The skulls were the least colorful objects I've ever painted and a genuine detour for me. They were done on a dare, more or less, but I loved doing them. An artist I know suggested I try a skull so I tried three of them: the RZC's human skull as

It's becoming
aware of
something's
simply
being there,
disclosing
itself to me
in a certain
way – the fact
that something
simply is –
which gets
overlooked.

well as baboon and cow skulls borrowed from an artist. I got to keep the cow skull.

Technically, in the Western painting tradition, they are "vanitas" paintings—time is short, use it well—but I loved them because of the complexity of light and shadow, the texture of the bone, all of the ways in which they could have passed for rock or driftwood. Painting a skull reminded me of painting a dahlia, actually, but it was even more challenging. Rendering the box that the RZC's skull was stored in was actually the biggest challenge. It was worn, so the ribs in the cardboard created ridges in the surface of the box, and the old packing tape had yellowed a bit, and the words "actual human skull" were written in large script across the face of the box, which made me laugh. (Try to ship something with that sort of notice on the side now.) It looked impossible, a complicated mélange of textures and colors and shapes. Much like the skull itself. I don't know how I painted that box so accurately, and I'm sure I couldn't do it again quite as well.

When I started the painting, I thought it would defeat me but I ended up doing things I didn't know that I could do. In a way, the box carried the same aura as the skull: old, battered, forgotten and pretty much discarded until I started paying attention to it for a bit. I surprised myself with that one.

The large candy jars, and jar paintings in general, I've been doing off and on for a decade, and they actually fulfill my core motivation to paint more effectively than anything else I do: they are a truce between representation and abstraction for me. The scale and the way the jars are brought up close to the viewer, so that they seem near the surface of the canvas, gives me a chance to make color the primary concern, within the geometric patterns formed by the contents of the jar. It's as close to "pure painting" as I've gotten and is one way I've responded to my love for color field painting in the '60s, even though a jar full of objects is also a still life of sorts.

ZB: What's next?

DD: A series of paintings involving candy of a different sort. Without jars.

ZB: What didn't I ask that I should have?

DD: I had a five-page essay with charts and graphs prepared in case you asked, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" Maybe next time. ///

Mumonkan number 14: Nansen kills the cat

► THE CASE

Once the monks of the Western and Eastern Halls were arguing about a cat. Nansen, holding up the cat, said, “You monks! If you can say a word of Zen, I will spare the cat. Otherwise I will kill it.” No one could answer, so Nansen cut the cat in two. That evening, when Joshu returned, Nansen told him of the incident. Joshu thereupon took off his sandal, put it on his head, and walked off. Nansen said, “If you had been there, the cat would have been saved!”

► THE COMMENTARY

Just say, what is the real meaning of Joshu’s putting his sandal on his head? If you can give a turning word on this point, you will see that Nansen’s action was not in vain. But if not, beware!

► THE VERSE

Had Joshu only been there,
he would have taken charge.
He would have snatched away the
sword,
and Nansen would have begged for
his life.



ANDREAS FRATECCE/WIKIMEDIA

THE TWO PROTAGONISTS OF THIS KOAN, Nansen and Joshu, are two of the great masters in Zen. Nansen was the teacher of Joshu (Chinese: Zhaozhou). Nansen (Chinese: Nanchuan) in turn was a disciple of the great Baso (Chinese: Mazu). Nansen’s dates are 748 to 835.

He had his head shaved at the age of nine, and at 30 took full ordination vows and devoted himself to Buddhist study for several years. Finally, he knocked on the door of Zen Master Baso and “forgot all that he had previously learned.”

At 47, in the year 795, Nansen built with his own hands a retreat hut on Mount Nansen, from which he took his name. One of his disciples was the governor of the province, and there’s an intriguing mondo between the two. After the governor had had dokusan with Nansen, Nansen said to him, “When you return to your office in the city, how will you rule the people?” The answer was, “I will use wisdom to govern them.” Nansen said, “In that case, every last one of them will suffer.”

What we see here is a sense of self-intentionality, which, on the face of it, seems to be a very fine thing: to endeavor to govern with wisdom, compassion. But once you talk about it, it’s already gone. You’re already assured that there won’t be any wisdom or compassion. You don’t need to set about to govern with wisdom or compassion if you just govern fully, put yourself wholly into any activity: nothing held back, without any notions of being wise or being this or being that. The action will be a true action. We all have this compassion and innate wisdom, this prajna wisdom, that will emerge once we remove the obstacles to its functioning.

Another anecdote: when Nansen was about to die the head monk asked him, “Your reverence, 100 years from now where will you be?” “I shall be a water buffalo at the foot of the hill,” said the master. “Would it be all right for me to follow you?” asked the head monk. “If you follow me, you must hold a stalk of grass in your mouth,” was Nansen’s reply. “I would be a water buffalo at the foot of the hill.”

Nansen believed it is through work that one finds real fulfillment. Not only work for oneself but work for others. Of course, work that is truly for oneself is for others. Nansen wants to be a water buffalo at the foot of the hill! Nothing spectacular.

Just to be an ordinary water buffalo and serve. That’s all a water buffalo does.

LET’S SAY SOMETHING briefly about Joshu, although it’s hard to be brief where Joshu is concerned. There are so many mondo about him. His dates are 778 to 897, which puts his age at death at about 120. There is a very famous mondo between Nansen and Joshu, which became a koan in the Mumonkan. Joshu asked, “What is the Way?” Nansen replies, “Ordinary mind is the Way.” Joshu asked, “Shall I try to seek after it?” “If you try to seek after it, you go away from it.” Joshu continued, “If I do not try for it, how can I know the Way?” The master replied, “The Way is not a matter of knowing or not-knowing. Knowing is illusion, not-knowing is blankness. If you attain to this Way of no-doubt, it is as boundless a vast space, so how can there be right or wrong in the Way?” At these words, Joshu was said to have had his first enlightenment. This was at the age of around 18.

“If you attain true comprehension of the Tao, the Way, your vision will be like infinite space, free of all limits and obstacles.” We begin to see what is meant in Zen about this freedom to move in any direction. All concepts, all notions of phenomena, will all go from the mind.

After Joshu’s full enlightenment, around the age of 58, he spent many years traveling to visit other Zen masters. It wasn’t until he was almost 80 that he opened up his own temple. One time somebody said to him, “A man of your age should try to find a place to settle down and teach.” Joshu pointedly asked, “Where is my abiding place?” And then this person said, “What? With so many years on your head you have not even come to know where your permanent home is?” Of course, this person was somebody who would have had training in Zen. To which Joshu says, “For 30 years I’ve roamed freely on horseback. Today for the first time I’ve been kicked by an ass.”



KOAN COMMENTARY BY
Roshi Philip Kapleau
(1912–2004) on the sixth day
of the seven-day sesshin,
May 1975

PAINTING BY
Shōkei

NOW, BACK TO our koan. This is one of the most famous in the Mumonkan, and some commentaries on it have voiced alarm by moralists about the killing of a cat. But if the koan is truly understood in its deepest sense, we transcend all moral and ethical considerations. When people hear that, they may ask, “Well, does this mean that Zen is above morality?” The answer is yes, it is—but morality is not below Zen. Zen transcends morality, but it doesn’t exclude it. Morality by itself is confining; it’s kind of a brace: a brace of right and wrong. And, of course, Zen wants to take us beyond that.

The koan begins, “Once the monks of the Eastern Hall and the Western Hall were arguing about a cat.” What may have happened was that Nansen (and Joshu) had gone to town, and as often happens when the Roshi’s away—well, “when the cat’s away, the mice will play.” And then in walks this cat. Although the koan doesn’t tell us what they were arguing about, it could’ve been, “Does a cat, too, have Buddha-nature?” And one group is saying it has, while the other says no, it hasn’t. And as this dispute is going on, Nansen comes upon the scene. We can only imagine how bad he feels to see the Zen monks not only idly arguing about the cat, but displaying no real understanding.

So he grabs the cat—probably with mixed emotions of disappointment in the monks and compassion for them—and he says, “You monks, if you can say a word of Zen I will spare the cat. Otherwise, I will kill it.” And he’s holding the cat by the neck and the cat is going “*Yeooowoyeeow*”...you can just see him there fiercely holding that cat. But nobody can answer. So suddenly he picks up a knife, and just *hhwhiiiiisssk!*—cuts the cat. Oh, yes.

Aghast, no one seems to understand what’s going on. The first vital point of the koan is, “What is a word of Zen?” Is there a word of Zen? We read that Zen is a transmission beyond words and letters. Please do not misunderstand: this does not mean that Zen is against words and letters. If it were, there would be no *Mumonkan*, no *Blue Cliff Record*, and all of the masters would have had to be silent. What Zen wants are live words.

Well, suppose you had been there? What would you have said? What would have been a live word?

IN THE EVENING, when Joshu comes back, Nansen puts the question to him. Now, needless to say Nansen knows Joshu’s capabilities, and he enacts this little play, this tableau, with him, and for more reasons than one. One, of course, is to let him know what had been going on that afternoon: how the monks failed to understand his teaching.

In Zen
it is said
that
the highest
truth is,
“I don’t know.”
Why
is that
the highest
truth?

And he says, “What would you have done had you been there?” Joshu doesn’t utter a word, but just takes off his sandal, puts it on his head, and walks out. Nansen says admiringly, “If you had been there, the cat would have been saved!” Now, how would Joshu have saved the cat?

We must also see that this cat is not just a cat. It was a cat up until the time that Nansen killed it. In killing it, he gave it life. Zen Master Dogen commented on this koan, “He didn’t cut the cat in two. He cut it in one.” Sometimes this is translated, “In cutting the cat, there was no cut.”

How did Nansen bring the cat to life? We might ask, if that cat is alive, where is it right now? That cat is not only a cat, it’s Isha the dog, it’s the red-bud tree flowering in the backyard. It’s Mu. When you have a live Mu, that dead cat becomes a live Mu. *Muuu! Muuu!* No different from *meow meow meow!* If it’s a dead Mu, it’s a dead cat.

Then in the evening, Joshu comes back. This koan can be seen as a drama: a drama in two acts. The first act is the killing of the cat. In the second act, when Joshu enters and then walks off, he is not only bringing the cat alive, as Nansen had done in his way. In that act of putting the shoe on his head he was bringing all those dead monks alive. And we also must see that Act I and Act II go together. What is necessary for that first act to acquire ultimate meaning is Joshu’s act. We could say it is like the drama of Jesus being betrayed by Judas. Without having been betrayed by Judas, Jesus never could have been resurrected. And the drama of Christ, as I understand it, is his death and resurrection: the two go together. Actually, you can think of this koan in those same terms: the great death and the great resurrection, or the great revival.

THE QUESTION THEN for you is, where is resurrection coming from? What is this great revival of Joshu’s? Why is he just putting a sandal on his head? Why does Nansen say admiringly, “If you had been there, the cat would have been saved!”

Every mondo—and especially this mondo—is really a Dharma duel. Nansen lays down the gauntlet and Joshu picks up the challenge immediately. And notice how adroitly Joshu dodges Nansen’s thrust, which was the same kind of thrust that he presented to the monks. But Joshu is too nimble: he sidesteps it. In what sense does he do so by putting his sandal on his head?

Consider for a moment what it means to put a sandal on your head. Sane people don’t do that. Ordinary people don’t. What then is Joshu indicating by this act?

In Zen it is said that the highest truth is beyond knowing. How so? Because our True Nature is free from all knowing and not-knowing. It surpasses all concepts of right and wrong, of this and that—“cat has the Buddha nature,” “cat doesn’t have the Buddha nature”... “dog has the Buddha nature,” “dog doesn’t have the Buddha nature”... “is the enlightened person subject to the law of cause and effect, or is he not?” In every one of these ideas we are obscuring the wholeness of our True Nature. Nansen with one stroke cuts out all of these delusions of the monks. Like a surgeon with a scalpel, he cuts out the cancer of this contentious mind.

And then we have Joshu, who heals the wound completely. We see here what a great monk he is. People without understanding may see all this as a kind of a silly play involving the unnecessary killing of a cat. R.H. Blythe, who was an anti-vivisectionist, carried on at length about Nansen and the killing of the cat. He said something like, “Nansen is a man who loved his teaching more than cats.” But that would be taking the text literally. To be sure, there was no actual, physical killing of the cat.

NOW WE COME to Mumon’s commentary. He says, “Just say, what is the real meaning of Joshu’s putting his sandal on his head? If you can give a turning word on this point, you will see that Nansen’s action was not in vain. But if not, beware!”

Just imagine, here is how one of the greatest masters of Zen, Joshu, proved himself as one. The whole meaning of Zen is demonstrated in this one simple act of taking a sandal and putting it onto your head. No wonder that when the first Catholic monks came to Japan in the 14th or 15th century and began encountering some of the Zen monks, they were utterly bewildered. No wonder they wrote back about how crazy and incomprehensible these monks were.

Those who are really practicing Zen and get beyond words and concepts can see the profound truth that emerges here. “If you can give a turning word on this point, you will see that Nansen’s action was not in vain. But if not, beware!” Turning words are words that open the mind. What would have been your words had you been there? What would you have said? Of course, you wouldn’t have to say anything, as we saw with Joshu. Yet there are words that could have worked. “But if not, beware.” In other words, if you do not grasp the meaning here, then your understanding is incomplete and you are vulnerable. If you do not see into this vital drama of the great death and the great revival, of the sword that slays and the

sword that revives, then you need to work harder, is what Mumon is saying.

THEN WE COME to Mumon’s verse: “Had Joshu only been there, he would have taken charge. He would have snatched away the sword, and Nansen would have begged for his life.”

Of course, this is high praise for Joshu. We saw what Joshu did, and there are other things that could’ve been done. But he would have seized the initiative; he would not have sat on his hands the way the monks did. “And Nansen would’ve begged for his life.” What does that mean?

Nansen already was a highly developed master. Would he have gotten down on his knees and begged Joshu, “Please don’t turn your knife on me”? Obviously, no. It means that Nansen would have been put on the defensive, forced to make another thrust. They say in dueling that the first clear thrust is the most important. This establishes the initiative. For Joshu to have parried that first thrust would have compelled Nansen to affirm his Zen. To present our True Nature in all of our actions is part of Zen training.

There are other interpretations of this. Here’s a simple one: had Joshu been there, the whole drama would’ve taken a different turn. Undoubtedly it would have.

THIS KOAN GOES to the heart of sesshin, about staying wholeheartedly engaged in the Mu-ing and the questioning. Whether you have seen into Mu or not, this is the affirmation of your True Nature. And from grasping the koan comes the ability to demonstrate the koan. If we are not fully absorbed in the koan, we are not fully absorbed in whatever we are doing. You must be absolutely one with Mu. When there isn’t room for so much as a hair between you and Mu, or counting or following the breath, or *shikantaza*, if you’re absolutely one with the sitting, without a thought in your head—and yet you are not asleep, or daydreaming—this is the affirmation of the fundamental Buddha mind.

It is that state that sparks sudden perception. The perception may be shallow; it may be deep. It takes place suddenly: one is doing something, or an unexpected noise is heard, or there is some kind of incursion on the part of the teacher, verbally or physically, and suddenly there is a turning of the mind. But that movement cannot take place until the clinging mind, the mind of self-concern, has been exhausted. When it has been released and there is this Mu-samadhi, then there can come true awakening. ///





SEARCHING FOR SOLIDARITY

*When
technology
helps
more than it
hurts*

IMAGINE YOU'RE VISITING A NEW PLACE TO meditate. It's a windswept winter evening and you're in an unfamiliar town. You've found your way there, let yourself in at the appointed time, and you're greeted with silence and

emptiness. Nervously, you poke around in the dim lighting and stumble over a cushion: apparently you're already in the meditation hall. You find a spot, arrange your body and relax into your practice as best you can, sharply aware of the vulnerability of your body and of the cavernous, dark space yawning around it. You wonder why you're the only one here, but after a while it's not that big of a deal. It's only later, when a clear bell sounds from an obscure corner, that you realize you weren't ever alone, and that there was someone there supporting and looking out for you all along.

This is something I've experienced recently: a discovery of distant bodhisattvas I didn't even know I needed. I've overheard people within the Sangha, usually older practitioners, express their concerns about social media, but I use Facebook. I recently started using Instagram, too. Believe it or not, both of them have tangibly helped me during a strange and transitional time in my life. This is the true story of how that happened.

CURRENTLY, THE LOCAL Zen Center Sangha is a small and fairly homogeneous community. Most nonresident practitioners I've met are straight, white, cis, older, highly educated, married or partnered, and middle- or upper-middle-class. These

are observations, not criticisms; they simply skew the demographics a certain way. As for me, I'm white, educated, in a committed relationship, and the occasional beneficiary of generational wealth, and am undeniably privileged by those aspects of my experience. I'm also bisexual (that is, gender doesn't figure on the list of qualities I find necessary in a partner), female-looking, indebted by higher education, poor, and a person living with chronic pain. And lately, as I acknowledge that my inner sense of gender doesn't necessarily align with the gender I was assigned at birth, I increasingly suspect my gender is not female but nonbinary. Some days I feel euphoric and accepting about this new-but-not-new discovery. On others I feel fearful or lonely, or deal with a lot of internal criticism and doubt. In general, a lot of things are starting to fall into place, or maybe old ideas are starting to fall away. It's a confusing, intriguing process.

ZEN PRACTICE, which I firmly believe helped unearth these feelings in the first place, has been a toehold for me in this gender-exploration process, in that uncertainty and self-doubt are both more familiar to me than they otherwise might be. This, in turn, means that the emotional challenges this process brings with it are less credible, and ultimately easier to ride out.

Sesshin, in particular, with its unique potential to allow us to get away from habitual thought patterns and assumptions, has quietly helped this question of gender surface for me. The feelings have been there for decades in one form or another, but it takes at least a subtle shift in perspective to bring them into focus as something authentic and worthy of investigation. It turns out that questioning my gender is not that different from questioning a koan and listening inward for a response. What is my gender? Who am I? What is Mu?

Sesshin is also, crucially for me, an environment in which virtually all gender-based norms are irrelevant, and where the formal dress code is unisex by default. This is unspeakably freeing for someone with body and gender shame and dysphoria and a history experiencing harassment and unwanted objectification. As a person raised female, the absence of mirrors and eye contact and the focus on effort and activity are often particularly helpful for reducing the painful self-consciousness associated with others' assessment of my appearance and my perceived femininity. Sesshin is one of the only times in my life I've had the privilege of just existing as a person.

OUR SANGHA HAS a handful of fellow LGBTQIA+ members, including a trailblazing trans presence, but scheduling time together is a challenge, and broaching this gender topic requires courage, headspace, and privacy I don't always have. So, besides my very patient partner and my therapist, where could I most efficiently turn to connect with others who had some experience with questioning their gender?

The answer was social media. For all its bad press, it can also be a place of great openness and solidarity. A queer storytelling podcast I listen to, Nancy, ran an episode months ago about the difficulty of finding a group of queer adult friends, which they called gaggles. Springboarding off this episode, the podcast's creators founded private Facebook gaggles for interested listeners, to help address the epidemic of isolation and loneliness. Some gaggles are geographically-based, while others center around shared identity (and, therefore, some degree of shared experience). I'd joined the general group a while back, plus another for queer people who are assumed straight due to their current relationship and/or gender expression. (Bi erasure and biphobia are real phenomena and contribute to high rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse among bi people.) Then, a couple months ago, after a couple of sesshins in

"Is what
I'm heeding
just a
coward's call

Or a
simple wish
to come
home?"

— CN LESTER, "COME HOME"

quick succession, something intuitive started to coalesce. I applied to join the gaggle for nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, two-spirit, and other people whose gender identity—the way a person's gender feels within—isn't reflected in the rigid, polarized binary of "male" and "female."

The first time I posted in the nonbinary gaggle, I did my best to be vulnerable, despite the imposter syndrome gnawing away at my courage from the inside. The group is fairly small, a hundred-some people, but thanks to the magic of social media, sprinkled all over the map. That unexpected bell rang from a quiet corner: several strangers I may never meet in person took time out of their busy lives to read what I'd written and to offer touching words of support, book recommendations, podcasts, and most of all, acceptance. Multiple people described how confusing and process-oriented gender exploration has been for them, and that it can take years to work on. (Sound familiar?) One commenter, who lives in the UK, took a picture of a button they were wearing on their jacket that day and declared they were wearing it for the both of us. It read: YOU ARE VALID, acknowledging that my process is deserving of respect. This precious, tailored, and timely solidarity and support from a distance simply wouldn't be possible in the same way without social media as its vector.

I read those messages, improbable missives like cross-country paper planes, on my phone in the car in the parking lot and went on with my day. As I pushed a shopping cart around Wegmans and loaded it up with the mundane supplies of life, I noticed an unselfconscious comfort in my existence—even joy—of a kind and degree I hadn't felt in decades, maybe longer. This is what the trans community calls "gender euphoria." I noticed I was smiling warmly at everyone I passed, brimming over with a sense of shared kinship. I'm certain that I only experienced this deep, healing sense of wonder and awe on that unassuming Tuesday morning thanks to these kind strangers on social media, who may or may not be Buddhist, but who form a different kind of Sangha, and who are willing to employ skillful means of their own. My gratitude for them runs deep.

EVEN BIG CHANGE can be slow day-to-day, like daily sitting or the doldrums of sesshin. As time passes, I'm educating myself with the help of nonbinary and trans musicians, creators, authors, YouTubers, and cultural figures. Trans Like Me, written by nonbinary musician and academic CN Lester, is a book I can't recommend highly enough

to everyone, cis and trans alike, to learn about what it means to be trans today. ContraPoints, my favorite YouTube channel, is run by Natalie Wynn, a trans woman with lots to say about gender and other hot-button topics in her deliberately boundary-pushing but philosophically incisive (and, to me, very funny) video-essays.

Instagram provides another intergenerational venue in which to follow trans public figures whose activism, messages, and creativity hearten and encourage me. Even sharing content like the humble selfie can bridge the faults of isolation tracing our fractured society. Social media posts by people belonging to marginalized groups can be memorials not necessarily to vanity but to perseverance, sending a message to the rest of the community who are out there, looking for connection, trying valiantly to endure: you're not the only one going through this. We're still here. We're in this together, so please don't give up.

We may be more than our mere demographics and our physical bodies, but they're still the lens through which we experience human existence, and sometimes we need help to remember that we're already valid just as we are, that this very body, whether trans or cis, brown or black or white, large or small, abled or disabled, is the body of Buddha. In the right mindset and with skillful, compassionate use, social media—for all its hyper-capitalist flaws, political complicity, fake news, false promises, and data breaches—can still be a tool for good. I'm just grateful I was able to experience it.

IN WRITING THIS essay, I was asked: What would it take for the Center to be as warm and welcoming a place for LGBTQIA+ people as the Facebook group I discovered? Self-selected online communities of outsiders (“chosen family”) are different forums for interaction than brick-and-mortar ones governed by dominant social structures, but in the interest of furthering the cause of inclusivity, I'll try to answer it here, from my limited perspective.

First, we could all do more to notice, welcome, and see newcomers of all stripes as valid as they already are, as people with their own stories to discover and tell, and their own reasons for walking through that door. Encourage newcomers to come back, to go to private instruction and dokusan, and to stay for tea and brunch. Listen attentively and ask questions. This is tremendously validating.

Next, we can continue to educate ourselves. This is a process, but the fact that we all learned to sit in the first place indicates our commitment

toward deeper understanding. Learn about the role of trans women of color in the Stonewall Riots, and what “two-spirit” means. Read the eloquent *Trans Like Me* and the graphic mini-novel *A Quick & Easy Guide To They/Them Pronouns*. Google “Genderbread Person.” Learn about LGBTQIA+ Zen figures: start with angel Kyodo Williams, Zenju Earthlyn Manuel, and Issan Dorsey.

Third, we can learn new terminology and opt for gender-inclusivity. If a term is confusing, search for it online or ask someone what it means. Use gender-neutral language in communications and speech: favor third-person singular “they” when a person's gender is unknown or when requested. Think of it as a mindfulness exercise, if that helps.

Finally, we can recognize that LGBTQIA+ people are all unique. Being queer—in my case, being both bisexual and likely nonbinary—is an important part of what makes me “me” and it's very painful to have that erased; at the same time, it's only one of many facets of who I am. Find out what makes people relatable as human beings, even while acknowledging, advocating for, and respecting diverse identity and the lived experience that brings.

The Zen Center, especially at the institutional level, has already made some steps toward inclusivity in an era when the US presidential administration is trying to define trans people out of existence. Our meditation practice is free of moralistic doctrine around queerness, which will surely continue to attract LGBTQIA+ practitioners. Zen Center members are already used to the idea of name changes. The many genderless bathrooms at both Arnold Park and Chapin Mill are wonderful oases in the hostile desert of gendered (and often violently gender-policed) bathrooms. The fact that gender doesn't preclude ordination as a priest or teacher in our lineage affirms the validity of all practitioners. Rainbow Sangha, our nascent group for LGBTQIA+ Sangha members, has been met only with encouragement and support from Center staff. Having a spiritual practice which doesn't brand me broken, dangerous, or fringe due to my queerness is one of many things that keep me coming back to the mat and to sesshin.

We're all still finding our way, and hopefully nobody reading this expects instant results from themselves or anyone else. All efforts to question our assumptions and unconscious biases, including but not limited to those about gender and queerness, enable us to better move through the marketplace of the world with helping hands. For our Sangha, I can envision no nobler goal. ///



IN 1993, ROSHI Bodhin Kjolhede attended a conference of two dozen Western Buddhist teachers hosted by the Dalai Lama in his Dharamsala, India, residence. For five days of the conference the Dalai Lama found time to participate in the group discussions on the state of Buddhism in the Americas and Europe. This photo shows Roshi Kjolhede on the left, leaning in to raise a question. In the center of the photo, outlined by the black background, are Jack Kornfield, Stephen Batchelor, and Surya Das.

So what was the issue Roshi Kjolhede was

presenting so intently? Regrettably, 25 years later the problem still arises: Buddhist teachers who get sexually involved with their students. The Dalai Lama responded that because such behavior causes harm, it is wrong.

Roshi continued, “These teachers sometimes justify their misconduct by calling it ‘crazy wisdom.’” The Dalai Lama insisted that “crazy wisdom” is based on a state of realization that is rare: “We say in Tibet that if you can drink your own urine and eat your own excrement as easily as drinking tea and eating bread, then

you have realized the realm of non-differentiation sufficiently to do such things and legitimately call it crazy wisdom. Otherwise you're misusing the term. I know of only two people that have reached that state, and they are both living in caves here in the Himalayas.” The Dalai Lama then smiled sheepishly: “Me? I'm still...” and he mimed crawling with his fingers up a mountain.

Another participant then asked what should be done about these teachers. The Dalai Lama flatly retorted, “Publish their names!”



ANGELA HÄKKILÄ (she/her or they/them) is a writer who lives in Rochester and has been a member of the Rochester and Madison Zen Centers since 2014.



Sightings

FURTHER REMARKS

A YOGIC CORRECTION ¶ On the photo with Ruth Sandberg (*Zen Bow*, Autumn 2018, page 13): It is not a yoga pressure point. It is partial *sanmukhi* mudra (withdrawal of sensory organs). In full *sanmukhi*, eyes are also covered by fingers. It is usually associated with *Bhramari pranayama* (humming/bumblebee sound on the exhalation), which has a beneficial effect on the pituitary gland (could be an anti-depressor!) by vibrating/resonating in the sphenoid bone.

Yogi of service:
FRANÇOIS RAOULT
Rochester

IN PRINT

THE BOOK: THE NEW VEGETARIAN COOKING FOR EVERYONE

BY DEBORAH MADISON ¶ *What it's about:* Self-explanatory! According to an online blurb, "A fully revised and expanded edition of the most comprehensive vegetarian cookbook ever published, from America's leading authority on vegetarian cooking."

Why it's worthy: I use different cookbooks for different things. I like this one for everyday meals: simple dishes, friendly recipes that you can play with. If you don't have a certain ingredient, you can substitute something and don't feel like you're missing too much.



Also, it uses simple seasonings: mainly salt and pepper. Now, when we're

having a special meal, I will look to Yotam Ottolenghi's cookbooks (*Plenty, Plenty More, Jerusalem*). He is notorious for long lists of ingredients, so I was happy to get *Simple*, his latest cookbook, which has a lot of recipes with fewer ingredients. Today we're serving an avocado-fava bean mash, which is his take on guacamole, and it has just four main ingredients. —DENÉ GRANGER, *Head Cook at Rochester Zen Center*

ON SCREEN

THE MOVIE: THE SEVEN SAMURAI (SHICHININ NO SAMURAI)

DIRECTED BY AKIRO KURASAWA (1954) ¶ *What it's about:* In sixteenth-century Japan, residents of an idyllic village discover that bandits will attack as soon as the barley crop is ripe. This thrilling, unforgettable movie of 200 minutes, directed by the great Akiro Kurosawa, takes its time as villagers recruit each samurai in a city far away. By the time the invasion begins, we know all seven samurai (and some of the locals), and we wait with existential dread for the oncoming battle knowing that not all of our heroes will survive. And what a battle! It plays out for several days, an astonishing and grueling clash that lasts more than half an hour on screen and culminates with six full minutes of fighting in a sea of mud.

Why it's worthy: I could write about the thrilling battle scenes or the unforgettable characters, but I'll tell you about just one scene: the burning mill house. Outside the

main village, a handful of stubborn villagers have refused to leave their homes. A mill house burns and we can hear the helpless cries of its residents as they perish, or escape only to be slaughtered by the bandit's arrows. Undeterred by the danger, the irrepressible samurai, Kikuchiyo (Toshiro Mifune in a role full of off-the-wall comical



antics and wild fury), leaps over the barricade and runs up the river hoping to save a mother and child. In a panic, Kambei, the wise strategist and leader, also runs out hoping to avert disaster. Once they meet the mother and child however, it's too late: the mother gives her child to Kikuchiyo, then passes out and dies in Kambei's arm. Still in danger from the bandits, Kambei begins the return, the burned mother hoisted over his shoulders.

Meanwhile, Kikuchiyo just stands there in a sort of anguished, catatonic state, looking at the crying child. He desperately grasps the child against his chest and crouches down into the water. As the mill house burns in the background with the mill wheel in flames, still turning, Kikuchiyo in a howl of agony screams: "This baby... it's me... It's what happened to me!" and buries his face in the child. The camera then cuts to the samsaric,

burning wheel. Kurosawa did not shy away from using Buddhist images. And this is the shot that gets me every time. —TRUEMAN TAYLOR

SEEING THROUGH RACISM

SACRED CONVERSATIONS

ON RACE + ACTION WORKSHOP

¶ This October, a group of RZC sangha members from the Seeing Through Racism group, along with practitioners from Blooming Lilac Sangha, took part in Sacred Conversations on Race + Action, a two-part workshop. The workshop series, offered by local organization Roc/ACTS (Rochester Alliance of Communities Transforming Society), pairs demographically different religious, secular, and neighborhood congregations to begin the complex but necessary work of acknowledging and addressing racism in ourselves and in others.

October's iteration of these workshops paired the predominantly white Zen practitioners with an equal number of representatives from the local chapter of SEIU-1199, a health care workers' union, who are predominantly people of color. Over two consecutive Saturday mornings, participants worked to begin a humanizing dialogue between Zen practitioners and union members and educate white participants, in particular, about the reality of people of colors' lived experiences with racism in Rochester and beyond. One session was hosted at the SEIU-1199 union hall, and the other was hosted in the Community Room at Ar-

▷ SIGHTINGS

nold Park. Highlights included a privilege walk, a riveting presentation on the history of redlining in Rochester and nearby suburbs, and a variety of group exercises, short reading assignments, and discussions designed to break down taboos around the discussion of race and racism.

A central goal of the workshops is to not merely inform white participants, but to help them commit to making changes in their own lives to actively address racism within themselves and their communities. From a Zen perspective, this is equivalent to taking our practice off the mat. This racism-related work is especially meaningful as a way to acknowledge and affirm the equal worth and interconnectedness of all beings, and as a way to avert further race-related suffering, which is so widespread in our local and global communities.

Participants in the October 2018 workshop say:

"Accepting myself as a white person who has blind spots and is going to go down detours is so freeing. I have a roadmap. I have tools."

"I learned... that when treading on really unfamiliar territory, it is important to those who are expressing their painful feelings and experiences to be acknowledged, not by respectful silence, but by responding in some way, however inadequate or ignorant the response may be. Similarly, not to stay silent when obvious or even subtle bias is expressed... Shane's talk on housing segregation was a mind blower and something to get involved with in any way we can, since it is a root cause of equality problems in education, justice and opportunity."

"Why did I go? I went to the workshops to confront myself, to try to understand how wide-

spread racism is, individually as well as our country's burden and heritage."

Interest in more of these workshops among the RZC Sangha is significant enough that we'll likely be scheduling another two-part workshop series. The workshops are free of charge for participants, but group size for each congregation is limited, so if you're interested in reserving a spot or staying informed about these plans, please email Martha Howden (marthamhowden@gmail.com) or James Thompson (jimbojimbolaya@gmail.com) to be added to the Seeing Through Racism mailing list. —ANGELA HÄKKILÄ

SANGHA ENGAGEMENT

YOUTH AND FAMILY TASK FORCE

¶ Have you noticed the lively voices and antics of children at Arnold Park and Chapin Mill? The number of families with children at the Rochester Zen Center is increasing. Currently, activities specifically for children are provided at some Sunday sittings, and there have been a number of weekends for

▼ The exercise room at Chapin Mill gets a true workout with children, dogs, scooters, yoga mats, and parents. PHOTO BY LIZA SAVAGE-KATZ



families at Chapin Mill.

Some parents in the Sangha are asking for a more robust program. To more fully understand what parents want, a focus group with nine parents representing six families was held in September during a family weekend at Chapin Mill. Participants in the discussion spoke passionately about the benefits they, their children, and the Sangha might realize if a more structured program for children and parents were offered; the discussion generated many ideas and suggestions. These parents believe that a well-conceived program will provide the support they desire to strengthen their individual practices and will enable them and their children to participate more fully in the life of the Sangha.

The Trustees at their meeting in October appointed a task force to study how our current offerings might be enhanced or changed to better meet the needs of our families. The task force will evaluate what is currently available, review what the Center has done in the past, interview providers of similar programs both at other Zen organizations and at some local churches, and conduct research to glean ideas and identify best practices. It plans to report

back to the trustees with a set of recommendations by the end of February.

Members of the task force, which is being facilitated by Betsy Friedman, are Eryl Kubicka and Trueman Taylor from RZC staff, and parents Jennifer Byrnes, Rebecca Gilbert, Jennifer Petix, Sasha Pulleyn, and Scott Redding. —BETSY FRIEDMAN

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

HELLO PAIN UPDATE

¶ For the past year, members of the RZC have been leading a community wellness program for people suffering from chronic pain. The eight-week program has been conducted three times in the Center's community space; once at Gilda's Club, a national not-for-profit group that provides support to those living with cancer; and once at a city health clinic for the underserved and uninsured.

Word about the program has reached various healthcare groups in the community, and we have been asked to make presentations at Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield, the local hemophilia center, a cancer center, the Veterans Administration, and the Monroe County Medical Society. Pre- and post-testing of each class has shown a significant increase in participants' ability to manage their pain.

Comments from participants in the program have been overwhelmingly positive, as have those from referring physicians. Recently a primary care physician wrote, "Just wanted you to know that I saw my patient who finished your program. He said it was great. He wakes up every day and does a body scan; he has found it very helpful. We are in the process of weaning him off narcotics entirely.... Thanks for your help." —CHRIS PULLEYN

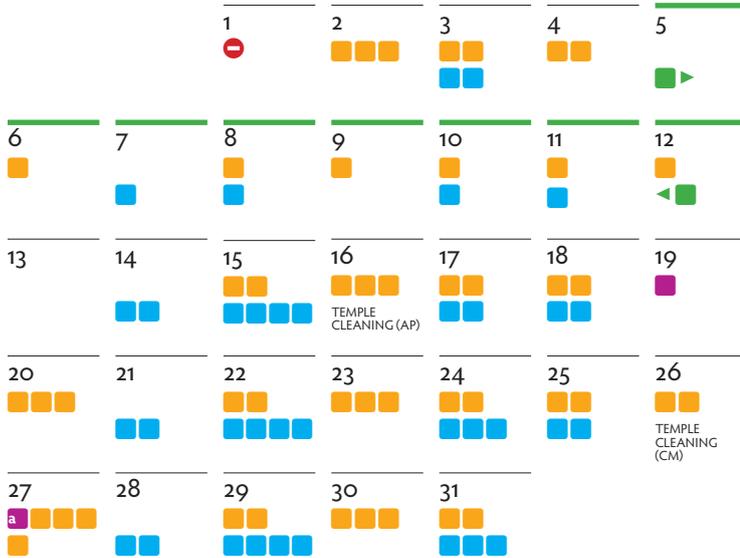


ROCHESTER ZEN CENTER
7 ARNOLD PARK
ROCHESTER, NY 14607

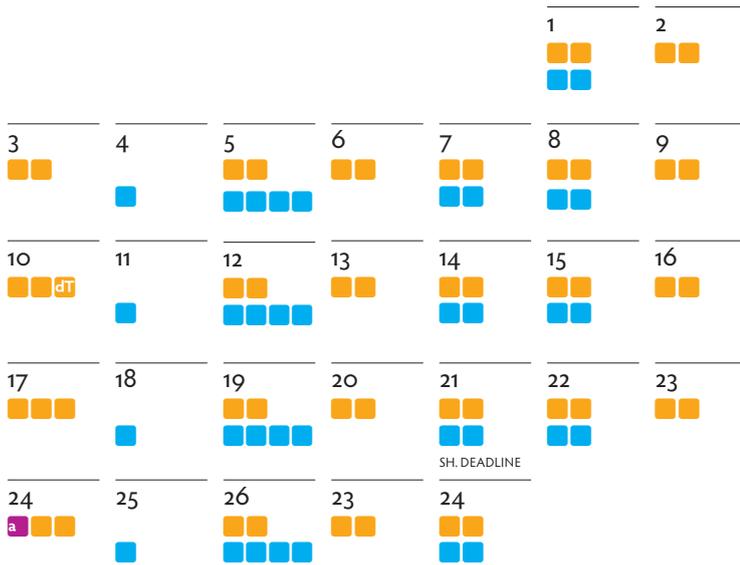
Address service requested

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 1925
ROCHESTER, NY

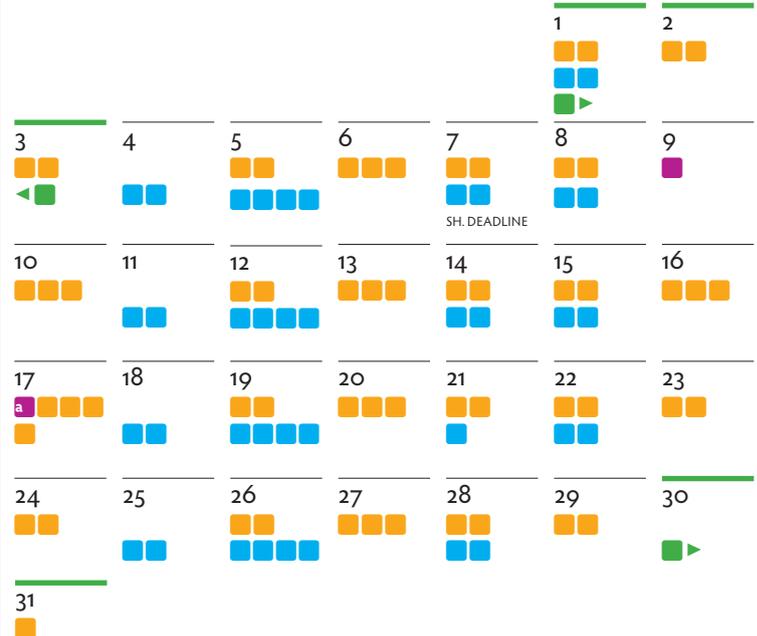
► JANUARY



► FEBRUARY



► MARCH



- **JANUARY 1**
CENTER CLOSED
- **JANUARY 5-12**
SEVEN-DAY ROHATSU SESSHIN with Roshi (Chapin Mill)
- **JANUARY 16**
TEMPLE CLEANING 9:45 AM-12:30 PM (Arnold Park)
- **JANUARY 19**
INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP (Arnold Park)
- **JANUARY 24**
TERM INTENSIVE opening ceremony 7-9 PM (Arnold Park)
- **JANUARY 26**
TEMPLE CLEANING 9:45 AM-12:30 PM (Chapin Mill)
- **JANUARY 27**
ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM-3 PM (Arnold Park)
- **JANUARY 27**
SANGHA MEETING, 10:30 AM (Arnold Park)
- **FEBRUARY 17**
SANGHA MEETING, 10:30 AM (Arnold Park)
- **FEBRUARY 21**
APPLICATION DEADLINE for March sesshin
- **FEBRUARY 24**
ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM-3 PM (Arnold Park)
- **FEBRUARY 24**
TERM INTENSIVE closing ceremony 7-9 PM (Arnold Park)
- **MARCH 1-3**
TWO-DAY SESSHIN with Trueman Taylor (Chapin Mill)
- **MARCH 7**
APPLICATION DEADLINE for April sesshin
- **MARCH 9**
INTRODUCTORY WORKSHOP (Arnold Park)
- **MARCH 17**
ALL-DAY SITTING, 6:15 AM-3 PM (Arnold Park)
- **MARCH 17**
SANGHA MEETING, 10:30 AM (Arnold Park)
- **MARCH 30-APRIL 6**
SEVEN-DAY SESSHIN with Roshi (Chapin Mill)

Schedule subject to change. For the latest updates, please see www.rzc.org/calendar/

- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| ■ A.M. EVENT | a ALL-DAY SITTING | dt DHARMA TALK | ■ TEISHO |
| ■ P.M. EVENT | ■ BEGINNERS NIGHT | ■ GROUP INSTRUCTION | ■ TERM INTENSIVE |
| ■ ALL-DAY EVENT | ■ CHANTING SERVICE | ■ PRIVATE INSTRUCT. | ■ WORKSHOP |
| ■ SESSHIN | ■ DOKUSAN | ■ SANGHA MEETING | Y YOUTH SUNDAY |
| ■ CENTER CLOSED | ■ SESSHIN | ■ FORMAL SITTING | |