Water Wheel

Being one with all Buddhas, I turn the water wheel of compassion.
—Gate of Sweet Nectar

Living the Life of a Bodhisattva

by Katherine Senshin Griffith

"Living the Life of a Bodhisattva" is our Fall Practice Period theme. A bodhisattva (Sanskrit: bodhi = awakening, sattva = being) embodies compassion and wisdom while working for the benefit of all beings. The bodhisattva ideal orients towards the whole and radically transforms spiritual motivation from "me" to "we." The question shifts from "How can I find peace?" to "How can my peace contribute to our peace?"

We all long to find a way to make things better, but as bodhisattvas, all our actions, no matter how small, become part of a vast, meaningful enterprise of universal healing. When everyone adds their personal Practice Period commitments to the greater endeavor, it's a recognition that we are not alone.

This reorientation is not just a philosophical idea but a practical, step-by-step path of training the heart and mind toward an active, compassionate commitment to the liberation of all beings. To deepen our exploration, we are working with Dogen Zenji's *Shōbōgenzō: The Bodhisattva's Four Methods of Guidance*. These teachings are rooted in early Buddhist texts, later expanding in Mahayana and Zen traditions. The earliest sources are in the *Pali Canon*. The Pali term sangaha means "inclusion, bringing together, holding together." The four exemplary embracing methods are Giving, Kind Speech, Beneficial Action, and Manifesting Sympathy.

Giving means non-greed and not coveting. Give yourself to yourself and others to others. Give valuables, time, a smile, or even a penny. Things given are beyond measure. In giving, mind transforms the gift and the gift transforms mind.

Kind speech is arousing the heart of compassion and offering words of loving care. It is the basis for reconciling enemies and making peace. When kind speech is offered, it gradually expands and transforms the world. His Holiness the Dali Lama says, "Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible."

Beneficial action is to help all beings by using skillful means. It is an act of oneness, benefiting self, others, friends and foes equally. Even beneficial action for the sake of grass, trees, wind, and water is spontaneous and unremitting.

Manifesting Sympathy is sometimes referred to as Cooperation or Identity Action. It means nondifference. What is 'self' and 'other' has no boundary but is dependent on time and condition. Don't treat ourselves or others as different. Simply face all beings with a gentle expression.

This fourth one is the one from which all the others flow. It has a range of descriptions. In the original Pali, it meant impartiality, being the same in happiness and suffering or consistency in the face of events. In Mahayana, it shifts to meaning consistency between words and deeds. With Dogen Zenji, it becomes sharing the same aim, action that emerges from seeing that each thing is not different from each other thing. This identity action can also be described as union with action taken for the common good, benefitting both those who act and those who receive the action. It implies cooperation, not being contrary, not to be different from yourself, nor from others. Manifesting Sympathy recognizes we are all in the same boat.

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ... *and more!*

3-4 Jukai and the Precepts *by Sensei Dharma-Joy*
5-6 Nenju and Hosan *by Sensei Mukei*
7-8 Surrending to Time *by J Cretella*
9 Where Does My Sangha Lie? *by Oetsu*
10-11 Fora Eko Courtois *by Sensei Gessho*
11 Thank Yous and Rites of Passage
12 Beach Retreat at El Matador State Beach

THE LIFE OF A BODHISATTVA *(Continued from page 1)*

In Dogen Zenji's *Zenki* ("Undivided Activity,") he says: *although not one, not different; although not different, not the same; although not the same, not many*. We may all be in the same boat, but we each are distinctive. It's important not to get lost in a wash of sameness nor in divisive separations. Stay alive to finding the balance.

In the *Four Methods*, it states: *Guanzi says, "The ocean does not refuse water; therefore it is able to achieve vastness. Mountains do not refuse earth; therefore they are able to become tall. Wise rulers do not weary of people, therefore they form a large nation."*

The *Guanzi* is an anonymous foundational Chinese political and philosophical text, compiled in the early Han dynasty. Similarly, we might say "The Constitution says that all men are created equal." Throughout history and nations, we humans have these aspirations, but they don't come easy, so we set up guiding texts.

This quote is on our Sangha House mural.

In the *Four Methods*, it continues:

We should know in ourselves that because the ocean does not refuse to be the ocean, it can be the ocean and achieve greatness. Because mountains do not refuse to be mountains, they can be mountains and reach great heights. Because wise rulers do not weary of their people they attract many people.

My phrase for this Manifesting Sympathy is No Subject – No Object. Just this. I like to call it the Great Alignment, living in accordance with the True Nature of all phenomena, reality exactly as it exists, free from mental projections, judgments, or dualistic thinking (i.e. self vs. other.)

How can we integrate these embracing actions into our daily lives? Easier said than done. Dogen Zenji tells us, *Relations between self and others vary infinitely depending on time and condition.* I often say a bodhisattva doesn't need things to be a certain way to do our job. In all conditions there is an opportunity to serve. What is before you right now? How can you beneficially contribute? Even sitting still in silence, can you align your heart/mind with all the other good that is manifesting?

As we commit to the bodhisattva life, what is most important is our intention to act for the benefit of all. Whether it is giving, kind speech or other forms of beneficial action, we should realize the true nature of giver, receiver and gift. Who is serving whom? When we truly realize this, a great joy arises.

Bodhisattvas are not just aspirational archetypes. They might be the cashier, nurse, teacher, or plumber who operate with just a little more kind-heartedness. I recently asked for water and got it along with a cool damp cloth. When my uncle was senile, it didn't keep him from asking if my niece's son wanted a cookie. His mind might have faded but not his bodhisattva heart.

Sometimes bodhisattvas do sparkle in radiant light, like the recently departed Dolly Parton. So many were affected by her life and death. She exemplified being so herself, so particularly Dolly, yet she embraced all people. She broke open the boundaries of what it was to be a crossover artist. Perhaps another term for Manifesting Sympathy could be All Embracing Beyond Crossover Bodhisattva.

Growing up poor, Dolly heard and felt our joys and sorrows and turned them into a cavalcade of beloved songs and stories. Her charitable impact is as enduring as her music, demonstrating a profound dedication to literacy, education, community support and healthcare, including donating millions to develop a COVID-19 vaccine and support pediatric infectious disease research. With Kanzeon spirit, she responded to natural disasters with immediate and long-term aid. She launched the Imagination Library in honor of her father, who couldn't read, to foster early literacy, distributing over 300 million books worldwide.

With kindness and humor, she showed the power and effect of a life not only fully lived but fully manifested with beneficial intent. We may be no Dolly, but as she herself said, "Find out who you are and do it on purpose." Like the completely realized ocean and mountains, we all can have a great reaching affect. As Dolly also said: "I'm not going to limit myself just because people won't accept the fact that I can do something else" and "You'll never do a whole lot unless you're brave enough to try." What are your particular gifts to offer the world?

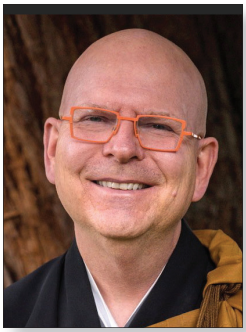
At the end of his text, Dogen Zenji says, "Each of these four methods of guidance includes all four. Thus, there are sixteen methods of guiding sentient beings." These resulting intersections are endlessly rich. If you feel lost, you can turn to these guides and ask yourself: Am I giving all I can? Is it what is needed? Are my words and actions kind and beneficial? If I weary of people, have I forgotten my True Self?

By seeing who we really are, we bodhisattvas can engage in cooperation with joy and compassion, no matter what the circumstance. Committing to the life of a bodhisattva is endless, so we vow *Unsurpassable Buddha Way / I vow to embody it*. It can seem daunting but as bodhisattva Dolly says, "I never tried quitting, and I never quit trying."

Sensei Senshin is the ZCLA Head Teacher.

Jukai and the Precepts (part 2)

by Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert



In the jukai ceremony, we begin by invoking the presence of the Buddhas and ancestors to witness and bless the ceremony. In inviting in these spirits, or energies, we should always be expansive. My teacher always pushed us to think bigger, to take the most expansive view, and so it should be in our invitation: we are inviting in all of our ancestors, women and men, non-binary and genderfluid, known and unknown, named and nameless. This includes our Zen ancestors, our blood ancestors, the ancestors of the land on which we are standing – everyone, because all of them are part of our family, and we are a part of their family. So we are inviting these buddhas and ancestors in and asking them to witness and bless the ceremony, and thus to support us actualizing the vows that we are taking on to live an awakened life – awakened to this oneness. Whatever you may think at the time you take these vows, as we live our lives we realize how daunting this is in practice, so let's ask for as much support as we can get.

Carrie Ekyo Helgeson and Sensei Dharma-Joy

Having invited in our ancestors, we prepare the recipient by giving him/her/them a new name, their blood lineage chart, and their rakusu. First, the recipient receives a new name. The preceptor (kaishi) selects the name. Various considerations may go into the name, but it often has an element of aspiration, or of revelation – to help the recipient connect with some aspect of their life or to offer them a support. A Dharma name is a practice of discernment, both by the preceptor and the recipient.

The blood lineage chart, or kechimyaku, documents that the recipient is formally entering into the Buddha's family – it's the family genealogy. The kechimyaku reflects the ancestral lineage from Shakyamuni Buddha through his successors in India to Bodhidharma, from Bodhidharma through his successors in China to Dogen Zenji, from Dogen Zenji through his successors in Japan to Koun Taizan Maezumi Roshi, and through his successors in the United States to the jukai preceptor. For each successor, the name is written with a continuous red line (that is, life!) running through the name – not above it, not below it, but directly through it. The recipient writes every name through the preceptor's name, then the preceptor completes the chart by writing in the recipient's new dharma name. After that name, the red line, the blood line, swings back up the page, to Shakyamuni Buddha. Thus, we refer to it as the "unceasing blood lineage" of the Buddhas. From one rather mundane perspective, this reflects that this is a continuous lineage of practice across over 2,500 years, from Shakyamuni down to today.

But from a deeper perspective, we see that practice is unceasing, with no beginning and no end; our practice supports and actualizes the practice of these so-called ancestors just as much as their practice supports and actualizes our own practice right here, right now. Understanding (not in an intellectual way, but in a body-practice way) the oneness of life, the oneness of all things, we see that so-called past, present, and future are constructs, that life is thus and that this thus includes all times in this very moment. Being thus, we understand, as Maezumi Roshi said, that our zazen is the very zazen of the buddhas and ancestors. Can you have faith in that being so? In living our life in accord with the precepts, we are actualizing the vows of our ancestors. And someday, if we are fortunate and practice with great determination, our descendants will actualize our vows.

Next, we receive our rakusu, the "five-striped robe of the Buddhas." As with most Soto temples, our practice is that a jukai recipient ordinarily sew their own rakusu. For us, we create what is called a "peacemaker rakusu," which means that we gather fabric from friends and family, dye it, cut it and sew the rakusu from these pieces, creating a patchwork effect. Our rakusu also, if possible, should include a piece of pamsula, or discarded fabric – something found on the street, or menstrual cloths, or something along those lines. The point is to include the excluded, the devalued, the overlooked, what society rejects as "other" or "unworthy." Because in addition to all these donations from our friends and family, our rakusu should include the outsider. We include everything, because our life includes everything – nothing is excluded. Through the precepts, we are orienting to say "yes" to life,

(Continued on page 4)

JUKAI AND THE PRECEPTS *(Continued from page 3)*

and to commit to no longer saying "no." Whatever we say no to doesn't really go away, does it? Sweeping it under the rug, stuffing it down – how has that worked out for you?

When we receive jukai, we receive the "five-striped robe" or rakusu. When someone receives tokudo and ordains as a priest, they receive a "seven-striped robe" or okesa. (For high ceremonial occasions, there is also a nine-striped robe.) Do not think that the rakusu and the okesa are different, that one is higher and one is lower. Dogen Zenji emphasizes that all three of these are simply different forms of the one Buddha's robe, or kashaya. Dogen Zenji equally emphasizes that both monks and laypeople receive and wear these robes of the Buddha. Everyone who wears Buddha's robe is a member of Buddha's family. And, having received it, Dogen Zenji admonishes us: "The kashaya is a banner of the Buddha's disciple. When you have received a kashaya, wear it respectfully every day."

Receiving the rakusu, we chant the Verse of the Kesa. As Dogen Zenji recounts in Kesa-Kudoku, he first heard the Verse of the Kesa while he was practicing in China, when the monks sitting around him on the platform would hold up their kashayas, place them on their heads, and chant a verse quietly with palms together – the same verse that we chant today, 800 years later. It was Dogen Zenji's first encounter with this practice, and he says that his "sadness and joy brought endless tears" and that he made a vow, then and there, to "show the buddha ancestors' authentically transmitted dharma robes to those in my land." How marvelous that, just as the kechimyaku represents the ceaseless practice from Shakyamuni to today, in reciting the Verse of the Kesa we sit with Dogen Zenji in China, on that platform with his Sangha family, and chant together that we wear the Tathagatha-teaching, serving all beings.

Having received these family markers, before we receive the precepts, we move on to the practice of repentance, also called atonement. It is critical to understand that the precepts and atonement are like our right hand and our left hand, they are that intimate. The precepts are vows, setting our intention to live an awakened life. But, knowing that life is messy, and that we will not always live in alignment with them, we must become intimate and comfortable with the practice of atonement. Atonement is simply the recognition and acknowledgement that our actions, intentionally or unintentionally, will cause harm to ourselves or to others. Atonement is the practice of realigning ourselves, over and over, with our vows.

In the jukai ceremony, we chant the verse of atonement. Again, this verse is handed down to us directly from Dogen Zenji, although it originated earlier , at least in the Avatamsaka Sutra. In chanting this verse, we realign ourselves and atone for our harmful thoughts, words and deeds.

Next, we receive the water wisdom of the lineage.This is the most esoteric moment of the ceremony. While the conventional thinking is that the highlight of the ceremony is when the recipient receives their Dharma name and rakusu, from a spiritual perspective this is the most significant moment. In this ritual, the preceptor conveys the water wisdom of the lineage from him/her/themself to the recipient. In doing so, the preceptor is manifesting as Vairocana Buddha (for an explanation of Vairocana Buddha, see Sensei Mukei's essay elsewhere in this edition). This water wisdom is not only a purification but, more importantly, an activation of the innate Buddha-nature of the recipient.

Having been purified, and having received the water wisdom of the lineage, we are ready then to receive the precepts. First, we receive the Three Treasures– Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Three Treasures have three aspects: the One Body Three Treasures, the Realized Three Treasures, and the Maintained Three Treasures. The Maintained Three Treasures connects us to how the Three Treasures manifests today, right now. Thus, "Buddha" means our contemporary awakened teachers; "Dharma" is the teachings of these modern teachers; and "Sangha" is the community of practitioners.

The Realized Three Treasures references the historical origins of our school; thus, "Buddha" means Shakyamuni Buddha, "Dharma" refers to his teachings, and "Sangha" means the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen who followed him. Finally, the One Body Three Treasures are transcendent. The One Body Buddha is oneness, equality, emptiness; One Body Dharma is all phenomena – and all means all! It is the diversity of life. The One Body Sangha is the free functioning of this Oneness and Diversity together.

After the Three Treasures, we receive the Three Pure Precepts – don't do evil, do good, do good for others. These are also the basis for the Three Tenets – Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Action arising from this place of Not-Knowing and Bearing Witness. Finally, we receive the Ten Grave Precepts, which are an elaboration of the Three Treasures and these Three Pure Precepts.

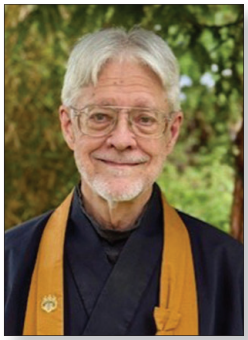
Having received the precepts, the recipient is acknowledged as a baby Buddha. While different temples do this differently, at ZCLA all of the people in attendance who have received the precepts circle the recipient three times, chanting and bowing in welcome. And then, cake! How wonderful.

Sensei Dharma-Joy is the Abbot and Head Priest at ZCLA.

Nenju and Hosan - The Closing Ceremony

The buildings and the soil protect the Dharma and give peace to all.
The Sangha in the ten directions will increase in fortune and wisdom.
For their sake, we sincerely vow to become one with …

by George Mukei Horner



At the end of each practice week, after the last period of zazen, when we have recited the Four Bodhisattva Vows and done our bows, the Jikido places their palms together, announces, "Prepare for Closing Ceremony!" and begins to slowly toll on the Jikido bell.

The Meditation Hall is prepared. The Chanter replaces the Zazen plaque hanging at the entrance with one that says Nenju. When everything's ready, the tolling ends. The Chanter does a deep standing bow in front of the Abbot, returns to the entrance and begins to recite, "I respectfully announce to everyone…"

The prologue calls us to be mindful of the transience of life, to not squander our actions, invokes the qualities of the Dharma and Sangha, and leads us to begin—

"For their sake, we sincerely vow to become one with…"

Pure Dharmakaya Vairochana Buddha
Complete Sambhogakaya Lochana Buddha
Myriad Nirmanakaya Shakyamuni Buddhas
Future Maitreya Buddha
All Buddhas throughout space and time
Mahayana Sutra, Lotus of the Wondrous Dharma
Great Wisdom Manjusri Bodhisattva
Great Action Samantabhadra Bodhisattva
Great Compassion Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva
Great Vow Jizo Bodhisattva
All Bodhisattva-Mahasattvas
Wisdom beyond Wisdom, Maha Prajna Paramita

The Chanter again bows deeply to the Abbot, then invites everyone to offer our own bows of gratitude for the week of practice just ended, to the Abbot and each other.

Finally, the Chanter turns the Nenju plaque over revealing the characters Ho San, and concludes the ceremony with a loud cry, "Hooosaaaaaaaaan…" that rises, falls, and trails away as the Jikido rings the bell three times. The Abbot steps forward, bows to Manjusri, then to the assembly who return the bow, and exits the hall. The assembly offer their own bows to Manjusri and to each other, and the ceremony is complete.

The Closing Ceremony thus consists of these two parts, Nenju and Hosan. Nenju is 念 NEN (remember) and 誦 JU (recite or chant). We are remembering and calling to mind the buddhas and bodhisattvas whose names we recite, the qualities of the human spirit they represent, and our intention to embody those qualities in our own lives.

Hosan is 放 HO (release) and 参 SAN (meeting). In a Japanese Zen monastery, declaring Hosan suspends the requirement to meet the teacher, whether in the teacher's private quarters or in a talk to the assembly, and announces that the next day relaxes the normally rigorous practice schedule to allow the monks to attend to personal needs.

At ZCLA, Hosan announces the end of our week of practice in the Zendo. The Hosan plaque then hangs at the entrance to the hall until the next time a Jikido enters to prepare the hall for zazen. It is the only plaque that stays up when the hall is not in use.

Ending the practice week with the Closing Ceremony thus recalls the way we recite the Four Bodhisattva Vows at the end of a meeting or the last zazen of a day. They both serve to realign us with our intention and practice.

But, when we recite "For their sake, we sincerely vow to become one with…," with what or whom are we vowing to become one, and what does "become one" mean?

To guide us, notice first that the list consists of (1) a buddha section, (2) a sutra, (3) a bodhisattva section, (4) prajna wisdom. In more detail:

In the Buddha section, the first three, Vairochana, Lochana, and Shakyamuni, are a group, and need to be understood together. They are followed by Maitreya, and All Buddhas. Next is the Lotus Sutra. The Bodhisattva section names Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Avalokitesvara, and Jizo, then All Bodhisattvas. Finally, there is Prajna Paramita.

It is a list of awakened qualities of the human spirit.

Trikaya. The first three names in the Buddha section are known as Trikaya, the "three (buddha) bodies." Each

(Continued on page 6)

NENJU AND HOSSEN *(Continued from page 5)*

one identifies a mode of awakened functioning and the buddha who is its personification. The notion of Trikaya was developed early in the history of Mahayana Buddhism, and is made challenging in part by the fact that different Mahayana traditions have developed it in their own ways. I'm not a scholar of the Mahayana and have only recently begun looking at the Trikaya. At least for now, I see it as their attempt at a metaphysics of awakening experiences and a mythic language for understanding them.

In Zen, awakening to the seamless wholeness of life has been described as "dropping off body and mind," or "seeing one's original face." One's normal, everyday experience of this-and-that, oneself-and-not-oneself goes quiet, leaving only a sense of clear perfectness, not-separateness, just-as-isness. This is Dharmakaya, the "Dharma Body" of a buddha, the ground-source of our being. In the Trikaya, this is called being the "Great Sun" Buddha, Vairochana.

As one's awakening experience of pure as-isness begins to soften, the sense of self-and-other returns with increasing awareness of the particularity of all the myriad aspects of reality within the not-separate-just-as-isness. This is Sambhogakaya, the "Enjoyment Body" of a buddha. To be like this is still called Vairochana, but functioning, differently, as Rochana or Lochana Buddha, aware at the same time of the perfect seamlessness of life and the perfect distinctiveness of its every aspect—including all the conditions that give rise to suffering, compassion, and joy. This is the place that makes bodhisattvas possible.

Finally, if on returning to full awareness of self-and-other one keeps the understandings gifted by the experience of Dharmakaya and Sambhogakaya, this is called Nirmanakaya, the "Realization Body" of a buddha. To be like this is called functioning as myriad Shakyamuni Buddhas. This is the place where awakening becomes real in the world through the visible manifestation of one who is now a buddha, teaching and acting spontaneously as a bodhisattva, as Shakyamuni Buddha did, to help others.

If this seems a lot to take in, Daichi Sokei, dharma grandson of Keizan Zenji, said simply, "The pure Dharmakaya is your nature; the perfect Sambhogakaya is your wisdom; the myriad Nirmanakayas are your activities."

Maitreya Buddha. In the sutras, the bodhisattva and future buddha, whose name means "Loving One," practices patience, meditation, and generosity, and offers intentional, directed lovingkindness to those who need it here and now, while waiting for worldly conditions to ripen and understanding to mature, both in our times and in ourselves.

All Buddhas. A buddha is one who is awake to being, in the deepest, most essential way, not separate from anything else in this life. To "become" a buddha is to realize who we already are. We include all buddhas so as not to leave anyone out.

The Lotus Sutra. It records the Buddha praising it as the King of the Sutras. It proclaims everyone, without exception, capable of buddhahood; that the Buddha is always here, teaching the truth of life; and that wherever there is need, bodhisattvas without number will spring forth from the very earth itself to help.

Manjushri Bodhisattva. The "Gentle, Noble One," personifies the non-dual wisdom of prajna paramita; depicted as young, to show that this wisdom is not acquired through long study, but is immanent, always available, in each one of us. He is the figure on the altar in every Zen Meditation Hall.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. "Universal Virtue," is wisdom functioning as Great Action, alive in activity that benefits others and enlightens the world to the web of interconnectedness that we are.

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. "The Hearer of the Sounds of the World," personifies Great Compassion, always ready to appear wherever there is need, seeing the situation clearly, responding with exactly what is needed.

Jizo Bodhisattva. "The Womb of the Earth," Jizo embodies the Great Vow to enter and bear witness to all realms of suffering, offering comfort and protection to those in distress or need, and never to turn away.

All Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are those who stay in the realm of self-and-other, offering assistance to anyone in need, awakening together to the truth of what we are.

Prajna Paramita. The non-dual wisdom that sees through to the essential nature of all phenomena, that all things are interdependent, without fixed, separate existence. It is what allows us to awaken.

These are awakened qualities of the human spirit. The Closing Ceremony is our intention and vow to embody them in our lives.

To learn more about the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Closing Ceremony, *Faces of Compassion, Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*, by Taigen Dan Leighton, is a wonderful guide.

Sensei Mukei served as Zendo Steward for 15 years.

Surrendering to Time

by J Cretella

Around 1:40 AM, my attention started to slip. My efforts at combating exhaustion—including a late-night double shot of espresso and caffeinated gum—were no use. My body started to shut down, lulled into brief, fleeting fits of slumber as the minutes dragged and drained whatever energy I had left. My consciousness disappeared for moments, then minutes, my body falling deeper and deeper into the soft cushions beneath me. Something on screen caught my attention; a jolt electrified my body and bolted me awake, only to repeat the cycle again a few minutes later. Drifting between sleep and awareness, I tried to hang on.

2:03 AM appeared, and I realized this was it. I watched a few more seconds, then snuck out through the darkness, dancing delicately around the bodies strewn throughout the room. Once outside, the blinding mass of street lamps illuminated the empty museum plaza. As I waited for my ride, I realized it—time—was still there, even after I left.

I first encountered that uneasy relationship with time on a cushion in 2023. When I first sat tangaryo—an unstructured day of sitting without scheduled breaks—I felt like a mess from the start. At that point in my practice, I hadn't sat for more than 35 minutes in a single session, and the six hours of sitting across the day worried me. I sat down strong-willed, but after what felt like an entire period had passed, my knees were already aching. I was desperate to get up, but afraid to find out how little time had actually passed. My mind raced throughout the morning, then through the lunch break, bouncing between thoughts and spinning up stories.

That same restlessness resurfaced at the museum. In July and August 2026, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) held an installation of Christian Marclay's The Clock, a 24-hour video art piece, culminating on its final weekend with a continuous 24-hour screening of the work. The Clock is not viewable outside of a museum screening and not available to stream—to see it, you have to deliberately seek it out.

I went to five different viewings of The Clock throughout August, as well as that last marathon viewing (along with ZCLA member Conrad Butsugen Romo), hoping to see as much of the film as possible.

The Clock is straightforward in concept: a stitched-together video collage of films and television focused on one topic—time. There's a clock or reference to time in almost every clip, with each minute made up of anywhere from one to dozens of clips. 12:15 PM in The Clock is also my 12:15 PM, as the film is synced to local time. There's no grand narrative holding together the clips—one might see scenes from hundreds of movies in an hour of viewing—but subtle themes surface. Across the morning, people sleep in late, drink coffee, eat, clock in for work, and start the day; later in the day, others clock out, arrive home, wind down, and go to sleep. People, more often than not, are preoccupied with what time it is or isn't.

Halfway through my first screening (where I watched from 5:12 PM to 7:15 PM), my attention drifted from the screen, my mind preoccupied with cataloging which films I recognized. The feeling of time dragged, and I started to fall asleep. After catching myself checking my phone for the time—wait, checking the time???—my awareness dramatically shifted, replaced by a heightened rush to see each second unfold. Settling into the lack of a grand narrative, I began to see each ticking second for what it was: this very moment. 6:46 PM? That's me. Where else and who else could it be?

Once I settled further, I started noticing that the cuts and edits holding the work together were more intentional than they had first appeared. A character from American Gigolo checks their watch, but then the film jumps to a watch on someone else's wrist in The Taking of Pelham One Two Three. A clock is declared wrong, adjusted by

(Continued on page 8)

SURRENDING TO TIME *(Continued from page 7)*

hand, and then a character in a different film confidently announces the time to a crowd.

Marclay and a team of artists spent years assembling the piece; the edits between clips are so smooth and natural that you begin to question your own memory of the original movie. Are you sure Orson Welles wasn't in Raging Bull? By the end of the month's exhibition, I had seen 1,067 minutes—almost 18 hours—of The Clock. Butsugen watched 23 hours total across several screenings, staying from 9 PM until 7 AM on the last day.

The Clock is not the only work that demands this type of temporal surrender. Over the last year, I've sought out other long-duration art that challenges the viewer to sit, unhurried, and simply yield to the experience.

PINNNG. The impact of the hammer's tip on the piano string hit with a rich, resonant expanse. In January, during a two-day marathon of Morton Feldman's music across Los Angeles, I spent four hours dissolving into his work at Koreatown's The Brick gallery. I listened to pieces like Patterns in a Chromatic Field, a 90-minute work featuring piano and cello sharing unrepeated, always-changing chords in a queasy conversation.

I found the first 20 minutes of the Feldman piece truly difficult, with no melody or pattern to hold onto. I noticed how much my body wanted to move in my seat. Then, suddenly, the subject/object barrier shattered. Instead of boredom, there was nothing between me—the listener—the performer, the written score, and the sound of each note on the piano and cello all existing together. These sounds struck with a shocking newness, and I heard more: no longer an F# after a D, no longer this measure matching the last, but now the exact ping of the hammer's tip on the piano string, rich and resonant, a world of texture and timbre unlike the last phrasing. I heard the bowing of the cello taut against the string, the cellist's finger sliding up the neck. The ideas of time, structure, melodies, and narratives were gone, replaced entirely by the raw, startling reality of the very next sound as it was played.

No one in Taiga checks their watch. By the time the lights came up at 2220 Arts and Archives in Historic Filipinotown—eight darkened hours spent in the Mongolian mountains—neither had I. The occasion, on May 21st, was a rare presentation of Ulrike Ottinger's 501-minute ethnographic documentary on the nomadic Darkhad people. Structured in three-hour blocks with brief breaks, the film immerses you in long, unedited scenes of séances, weddings, rituals, and slow camp-to-camp migrations. Without a traditional storyline, it relies entirely on the steady rhythm of shared communal life.

I'll admit the first hour was a struggle, as I adjusted to both the slow takes and the uncomfortable seat, which was not made for marathon viewing like this. But when a wedding sequence began about an hour and a half in, my awareness shifted. I was drawn into the quiet intimacy on-screen as the women spent ten minutes preparing a giant batch of süütei tsai (a salty milk tea)—boiling the milk, steeping, straining spices, and serving while attendees offered blessings and slices of fatback to the newlyweds. No longer shifting restlessly, I found my mouth watering at the sight of the tea (not so much the meat). By the time the first intermission arrived three hours in, I hadn't moved.

Back on the cushion during that afternoon sit in 2023, the mental and physical discomfort lingered. When was the bell going to finally ring? I realized I was full of resistance—my manic brain, tight back, sore knees. Every time I subtly shifted, wary of a monitor's eye, new pangs of pain rushed through my body. Had I ever felt that nerve tinge or that muscle spasm before? I decided that after fighting myself all day, it was finally safe to let these feelings go. I took another breath and felt the tension slowly dissipate. I relaxed for the first time all day. I was able to just be that moment, that breath, then the next one. Well, for a few seconds, at least. The bell rang shortly after. These days, it takes minutes, not a day, to settle.

Back home at 2:32 AM, after that last screening of The Clock, I crawled into bed, glancing again at the clock—albeit a different one than the thousands I had just seen. 2:32, then 2:33, now 2:34 AM—how many of them had I actually been there for?

J Cretella first came to ZCLA in 2023 and currently serves as a co-steward of the Tenzo Circle. They are an artist and writer and live in Koreatown with their partner and two cats.

Corner of Disorder

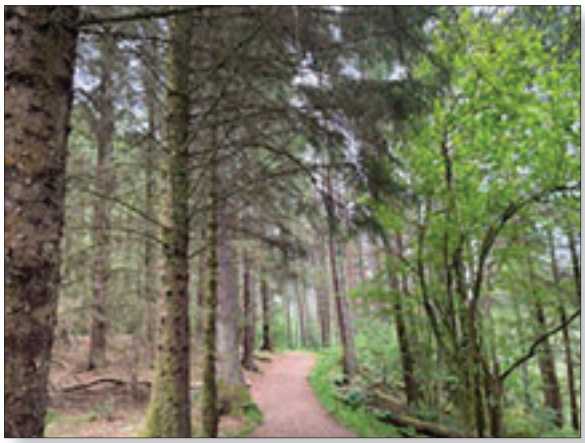
Working with Mu by Toby Keido Rider.

Where Does My Sangha Lie?

by Jessica Oetsu Page

I'll cut to the chase. My Sangha is the world in which we live, it is in the Dharma that teaches and consoles me, and the communities I am a part of. My Sangha is never anything but all the 10,000 things. In my experience there are times when each of these things has been heartfelt and wonderful, and other times distressing.

The destruction of our once pristine planet hurts, as the beauty of nature continues to inspire. The sounds of rushing streams, rivers and ocean waves call me home. I recently visited the highlands of Scotland for a walking tour. The woods, streams, fields, and long days (this was during the summer solstice) blew me away. I am so grateful to have had the experience. The walking tour is ideal for really feeling where you are.



Scotland woods.

Dharma teaches me to recognize what is right in front of me. Looking at a text, sutra or teaching poem, I often pause and take in the meaning as best I can and see how true it seems to me, how real it is to my life and experience. The Buddhist teachings from the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path to the teaching poems we chant and the writing of Master Dogen, all point me in new directions. Would I have gone that deep in my thought and understanding without these teachings? Certainly not. The Dharma calls to me. There is a feeling that of course I knew this, but it undoubtedly would not be with me as clearly as it is now.

Just the power of now. That's what I've learned. Totally now. That is Sangha - belonging - beyond thought. I am so grateful to the Dharma and I embrace it. Maybe Sangha is both to embrace and be embraced.

Buddhist communities have given me so much. Sesshin practice has brought me in sync with people, for a limited period of time, more closely than any other experience I have had. Not talking, just being with others while my heart swells and explodes. It feels so personal and mysterious. How well do I know these people? At the moment totally. But then later not so much.

I love that participating in Sangha gives me a chance to do something. At ZCLA, pre-pandemic, I helped with Sunday morning parking. I was also a tenzo assistant many times and tenzo too. I was honored to be the jikido during winter sesshin in 2019. I led a Saturday Day of Refection. I offered zazen instruction and co-stewarded the Zazen Instructor Circle. I led a one-day session on Zen and 12 Step Recovery. I was a part of the in person Sutra study group, pre-pandemic. Each time I served, I got directly involved with the members and visitors of ZCLA. I looked for opportunities to be involved. It was beautiful. People with people in person.

Now I live in Joshua Tree. Not nearly as many people here but I keep looking for ways to serve and stay connected. I continue to participate in the Sutra study group, now online. I sit with and sometimes lead the Mojave Zen sitting group in Yucca Valley, steward the ZCLA healing chant sign-up whenever a ZCLA member undergoes a medical procedure, and continue to see my ZCLA teachers in Zoom face-to-face interviews.

Sangha as human communities can be tricky and painful, especially when confusion arises because of what another person says. It is hurtful to feel misunderstood. When I see that I made a mistake, pain arises. But practicing with sangha helps me work with my feelings and thoughts, see things more clearly and let go.

During jukai, I vowed to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This vow keeps me returning to the effort to be with people. Be it ZCLA, 12 step fellowship, family and people I don't know well, I see Sangha.

Sangha also means harmony. I'm not sure what to think when the world today is being assaulted in the extreme by people. Harmony is beyond my understanding. I need the big, big picture to see the harmony these days. I'm reminded of the song From a Distance by Bette Midler. From a distance with no boundaries, maybe there is harmony.

Oetsu is a long-time ZCLA practioner, currently living in Joshua Tree, CA

Flora Eko Courtois:
Our Lay Woman Ancestor

by Lorraine Gessho Kumpf

At morning service, we chant the name of a female ancestor, Flora Eko Courtois, but you may not know much about her. Flora Courtois (b. 1916, d. Valentines Day, 2000) was a multi-talented and intriguing person, and also an important influence in the establishment and evolution of ZCLA. She is best known for her little book, *An Experience of Enlightenment*, published in 1970[1]. The book is an intimate description of her journey to experience lived reality, and to relate that experience to others.

From an early age, as Flora writes, she had vivid experiences of the reality around her, and a particularly empathic sensibility. As a teenager, she focused on a search for some primary reality. Thus, her well-known experience of enlightenment, or *kensho*, the central event of her book, occurred in a life that was already deeply engaged in exploring direct experience.

At the time of her enlightenment experience, she was a student at the University of Michigan; one day, while sitting quietly gazing at a desk, "not thinking of anything at all, in a moment too short to measure, the universe changed on its axis."[2] The desk appeared with a new clarity, and simultaneously, all her questions and doubts about reality disappeared. She felt wholly released. Subsequently, over about two years, "there took place a ripening, a deepening and unfolding of this experience which filled me with wonder and gratitude at every moment." […] "I had plunged into a numinous opening which had obliterated all distinctions, including within and without. A Presence had absorbed the universe, including myself, and to this I surrendered in absolute confidence." (This must have occurred in 1939/1940; no date is mentioned in any of the records I found.) Flora goes on to describe her physical changes after kensho: changes in her breathing, her relaxation, and particularly in her sense of vision. She expresses in depth the mystical quality of her experience.

For many months, Flora lived in "joyful naturalness." Throughout, she had no connection to Buddhism or to a concept of 'enlightenment.' Years passed, she finished college, married, had a job, and eventually went to graduate school in psychology. But through these years she became increasingly depressed and in despair over the fact that she was unable to communicate her experience. "Over a period of several years […] I lived with a profound sense of abandonment, in the 'dark night of the soul.' I felt I had failed at the deepest level, to live every day in awareness."

There is an essential teaching from Flora's life after kensho. Despite her extraordinary spiritual experiences, she continued to suffer, to indulge in negativity, to live in separation. Overtly successful, her inner life was severely troubled and unfulfilled. Over two decades had passed since her enlightenment experience. What had happened? She began to sit in quiet concentration, something that she had not done since her youth.

Flora found a way "to return home" through Zen practice. In 1966, she learned of Maezumi Sensei and started to sit with his group on Serrano Avenue in Koreatown. In 1968, Hakuun Yasutani Roshi came to Los Angeles. One of Maezumi's teachers, Yasutani is noted for having incorporated both Rinzai and Soto Zen traditions in his teachings. Flora met with him, described her experience, and he verified her kensho. He later wrote a foreward to her book; here is an excerpt: "Although utterly unaware of Buddhism or Zen, Flora Courtois attained enlightenment by herself. […] This is called "having no teacher, enlightenment by oneself alone," which is the SAME SORT OF SATORI THAT SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA ATTAINED when he saw the dawn star…" Flora's meeting with Yasutani Roshi and his published support of her were important in making her kensho experience known to the world.

The story of that kensho, along with Yasutani's support, is mostly why Flora is recognized and remembered.

(Continued on page 11)

[1] *The first edition of An Experience of Enlightenment, and the one used here, was published in 1970 in Tokyo, Japan by Shunju-sha, in English and in Japanese. There are at least two later editions; the most popular one in the US was published in 1986 by the Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill. That edition adds a Preface by Huston Smith and an Afterward by Flora Courtois.*

[2] *All of the quoted words are from Flora's text.*

FLORA EKO COURTOIS *(Continued from page 10)*

Perhaps readers take in her experience as 'what kensho means' and 'how kensho should look!' This is an unfortunate misunderstanding of her message; it misses her main point--that her enlightenment experience was only a beginning. Long after it she suffered greatly, and this turned her to practice, to integrate her experience with everyday life. Indeed, all of our great teachers have continued to practice, have suffered and worked to nurture the intimacy of each moment.

She began to sit in quiet concentration, something that she had not done since her youth.

Have you ever wondered about an insight you've had? Did it become a focus of analysis? Did you try to 'get back there?' It is indeed tricky to talk about kensho, enlightenment, or any insight without reinforcing a concept of it—an entity rather than direct experience. Our practice emphasizes the significance of a teacher's guidance.

I have encountered some teachings (writings and podcasts) which have used *An Experience of Enlightenment* as a text in talking about what kensho is, though I personally don't see that as its best use. To me Flora's book is a testimony to the need to keep going, to keep practicing. The book gives insight into the spiritual search of an extraordinary individual who is especially gifted in expressing the nature and feel of her search. In her conclusion, Flora simply vows to continue practicing momentary awareness. In the following years, one focus of her practice was service to the Zen Center of Los Angeles.

Sensei Gessho is a longtime member of ZCLA who knew Flora since 1978 and interviewed her extensively in 1999. She plans to write about Flora's service to ZCLA as a Founding Member.

Sangha Rites of Passage

Jukai

Carrie Ekyo Helgeson
From Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert, Preceptor
August 2, 2026

The Water Wheel is published quarterly by the Zen Center of Los Angeles,
Buddha Essence Temple • Great Dragon Mountain
923 S. Normandie Ave., L.A., CA 90006
info@zcla.org • www.zcla.org • 213-387-2351
Editor: *Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith;* Production Artist: *Tom Yudo Burger;* Proofreaders: *Sensei Gessho and DH Earth-Mirror.*

A Heartfelt Thank You!

To our Sesshin, lunch, snack and breakfast tenzos and assistants: **Ben Genkai Ehrlich**, **Diane True-Joy Fazio**, **Dylan Lake**, **J Cretella**, **Matt Carney**, **Mats Hensho Borges**, **Justin Miller**, **Hokyu Aronson**, **Karina Myoki Betlran-Hernandez**, **Kathy Myoan Solomon**, **Nancy Teiju Marquez**, **Reeb Kaizen Venners**, **Roberta Myodo Brehm**, **Ryan Rockmore**, **Sacha Joshin Greenfield**, and **Preceptor Betty Jiei Cole**; and a special thanks to the **Joyful Mind Sangha**;

To our Day of Reflection leaders: **Chris Genzan Hackman**, **Jack DaiShinKon Kuykendall** and **Hokyu**;

To **Senseis Katherine Senshin Griffith**, **Darla Myoho Fjeld**, **George Mukei Horner**, **Nem Etsugen Bajra**, **Lorraine Gessho Kumpf**; **Roshi Kipp Ryodo Hawley**; and **Dharma-Holders Bill Earth-Mirror Corcoran** and **Bill Tetsui Press** for their Dharma talks;

To our leaders: **Senseis Senshin** and **Myoho** (Summer Sesshin); **Sensei Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert** (Relative and Absolute Summer Intensive) **Gessho** (Tangaryo); and **Roshi Ryodo** (Beginner's Mind Sesshin);

To **John Kyogen Rosania** (Dharma Chat), **Sensei Dharma-Joy** (Public Face-to-Face), **Harinam Jagosz** (Personal Practice Talk); **Glenn Gikai Davis** (Thursday night Mu); **Sensei Senshin** (Practice Period Circle);

To **Dharma-Holder Earth-Mirror** and **Preceptor Peggy Faith-Moon Gallaher** for leading the Precepts Class Series;

To **Hokyu** for stewarding the August Beach Retreat, Zen-shuji Tea Ceremony outing, and Qi Gong classes;

To our 3rd quarter Intro to Zen Meditation Instructors: **Chris Daian Fields** and **Jenny Jusen Bright** (co-stewards), **Diane Enju Katz**, **Dylan Banto Neal**; **Frank Genku Martinez**, **Genkai**, **Hokyu**, **Kaizen**, **True-Joy** and **Tetsui**;

To **Senseis Etsugen**, **Gessho**, **Myoho**, **Senshin**; **Dharma-Holders Earth-Mirror** and **Bill Tetsui Press, Preceptors Jiei** and **Faith-Moon** for leading the Exploring Your Zen Practice classes;

To **Sensei Senshin**, **Conrad Butsugen Romo**, **Gikai**, **Enju**, **Japhy Phoenix-Moon Grant**, **Preceptor Jiei**, **Joshin**, **Kaizen**, **Rey Barceló**, and **True-Joy** for participating in the series of Cross Cultural Dialogues;

To our 3rd quarter Jikidos: **Genkai**, **Phoenix-Moon**, **Hokyu**, **Rey Barcelo**, **Carrie Ekyo Helgeson**, **Joshin**, **Butsugen**, **Mike Radice**, **Aaron Mason**, and **Kyle Dion**;

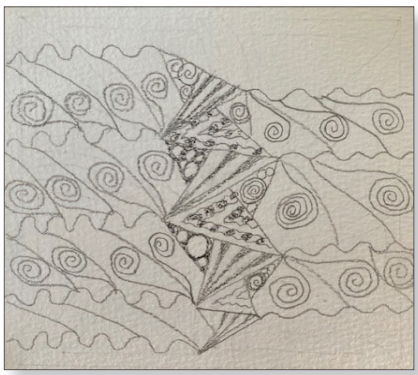
To our 3rd quarter Day Managers: **Keido**, **Phoenix-Moon**, **Henshō**, **Jūsen**, **Corey Ryujin McIntyre**, **Kaizen**, and **Daian**;

To our 3rd quarter Head Monitors: **Sensei Mukei**, **Banto**, **Jūsen**, **Ryujin**, **Kaizen**, **Joshin**, **DH Earth-Mirror**, and **Gikai** ■

Beach Retreat at El Matador State Beach

On August 31, a dozen ZCLA members turned out for a lovely, refreshing morning by the sea. We sat, stretched, snacked, splashed, sauntered, sunbathed, and scribbled, and then said goodbye to El Matador, at least for now! Before we left, Hokyu Aronson, who stewarded the day, offered the group two prompts by reading from Master Dogen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra* and from Dolly Parton's song, "Calm the Water." In the spirit of the ancient Japanese practice of composing interlocking verses, he then asked everyone to respond to those two sources and to their experience of the day at the beach. Drawings were also encouraged. Here is what was shared:

(From left to right) Anna Josenhans, Reeb Kaizen Venners, Roberta Myodo Brehm, Sensei Katherine Senshin Griffith, Hokyu Aronson, Nancy Teiju Marquez, Wesley Blakewell, Rey Barceló, J Cretella, John Weymeyer, and Lukas Wagner.



Beach drawing by Nancy Teiju Marquez.

Wesley Bakewell
There are so many
Sand crabs in the sand here each
Crashed on and crashed on
Ev-Rey one has some kind of
Schedule to keep (na ma ste)

John Weymeyer
here there is stillness
serenity between waves
peace quiet movement
sand bugs and seagulls walking
the sun shining dawn till dusk

Beach drawing by Roberta Myodo Brehm.

Hokyu Aronson
Caverns at sunrise, empty.
Ready to receive sages
Or foam lined waves.
Not distinguishing,
Without concern over which came first
The pilgrim or the flood.

Anna Josenhans
Ocean water nears
Its boundary creeps closer
Watch with open heart

Water surrounds us fully
It's in our biology

Beach drawing by J Cretella.

Rey Barceló
if you're going to the
beach traffic can be
start and stop
that said, once
you're there in
between the crash
of waves everything
is still

Reeb Kaizen Venners
towers emerging from water
cresting in silence
tipping over forever.
silence; quiets down down
emerges wilder

Sensei Senshin
Water's many-colored coat
Lit bright by Prajna mama
Tide never still
Ancestors sewn in every wave
Great Tidings to All.

Aaron Mason
long time Los Angeles resident first time Malibu transient
as the waves recede the silence washes over us seeking serenity
at the shoreline