

# Zen Heart Sangha

Issue 23

Winter 2013/Spring 2014 Newsletter

## Special Upcoming Events

### Guest Speakers:

- Apr. 14: Rev. Patty Pecoraro  
(Twining Vines)
- Apr. 28: Rev. Les Kaye  
(Kannon Do)
- Jun. 30: Wing Ng (ZHS)
- Jul. 14: Chris Wesselman  
(ZHS)
- Jul. 28: Hiromi Kurahashi  
(ZHS)

### Ceremonies:

- Jun. 23: Bodhisattva (Full Moon) Ceremony

### Dharma School:

- May 10: Qigong with Wing and Diane
- Jun. 14: Bodywork with Hau
- Jul. 12: Sushi with Izumi and Geetha
- Aug. 9: Cooking with Giulia
- Sep. 13: Mandalas with Jill
- Oct. 11: Sewing with Sue

### New Class Offering:

- The Brahmaviharas: Study and discussion with Rev. Jill Kaplan

### Retreats:

- Apr. 11–13: Buddha's Birthday Retreat at Vajrapani
- May 17: Half-day retreat
- Oct. 24–26: Fall Retreat at Vajrapani
- Dec. 1–6: Rohatsu Retreat

### Sangha (Board) Meeting:

- Jun. 19: Marya's house

## What Is the Most Important Thing? Reflections on Jukai

A student once asked Suzuki Roshi, "What is the most important thing?" He replied, "To find out what is the most important thing." It seems like such a simple answer, but both the student and Roshi knew that this 'finding out' takes a lifetime of practice. Their exchange was based on a much older koan: *A monk once asked Wu-men, "What is the most important thing?" Wu-men replied, "An appropriate response."*

What is an appropriate response? Nothing more than responding *completely* right here, right now. Both Wu-men and Suzuki Roshi are pointing to the fundamental point of practice: authentic action based on rigorous self-knowledge. Only when we know ourselves intimately can we respond appropriately without hesitation or regret. If we do not know ourselves, we will be lost in the three poisons of suffering—thirsting desire, aversion, and delusion—forever fooling ourselves and creating confusion and unhappiness in our lives.

How do we get to know ourselves intimately? Receiving *jukai* (lay ordination)—taking refuge in the three treasures—is an important step in that direction. The heart of the Buddha's way has always been through meditation and mindfulness. Practicing both diligently, we can train our minds and soften our hearts, developing a readiness and flexibility that Suzuki Roshi referred to as 'beginner's mind'. However, even the Buddha understood that this is not enough—while it might eventually help us discover 'the most important thing', we can only truly manifest this understanding in relationship to others. For this reason, the Buddha created sangha, the community in which practitioners take refuge guided by the Ten Bodhisattva precepts.

Recently, three members of our community received *jukai*. In the ceremony, they vowed to be guided by and uphold the Sixteen Precepts which collectively advise us to 'cause no harm'. To prepare for this public ceremony, each had to sew a *rakasu*, a small version of the larger *okesa* (robe) that the Buddha and his disciples first wore 2,500 years ago. With each stitch, the aspirant recites '*namu kie butsu*' which means, "I take refuge in the Buddha". The entire ceremony is really about taking refuge—in the Buddha as teacher, in the Dharma as the teaching, and in the Sangha as the community supporting our practice. The dharma teachings of meditation, mindfulness, and study help us to 'find out what is the most important thing', but our teachers and dharma friends help us to know ourselves intimately...can an appropriate response be far behind?

*In gassho, Misha Shungen*

# Zen Heart Sangha 2014-15

## Head Teacher:

Misha Shungen Merrill

## Practice Leaders:

Tanto (Assistant Teacher):

Jill Kakushin Kaplan

Ino: Diane Comey

Work Leader: Chris Wesselman

Assistant Work Leader:

Hiromi Kurahashi

Sewing Teacher: Jill Kaplan

## Board Officers:

President: Camille Spar

Treasurer: Lidia Luna

Secretary: Marya Shahinian

## Board Members:

G. J. Scove

Lauralyn Curry-Leech

Julia Bekker

Hau Thi Long

## Stewards:

Outreach: Bill Clopton

Dharma School: Stephanie Zeller

Newsletter: Anna Doherty

Setup: Julia Bekker-Dulmage

Website: Chris Doherty

Audio Recording (temporary): Jill Kaplan & Chris Wesselman

## Committees:

Membership:

Misha Merrill (teacher),

Lauralyn Curry-Leech

(board member), Kelly Perri (member-at-large)

Council of Harmony:

Nancy Leech, Kate Haimson, Chris Doherty

## Gassho

Gassho is the Zen way of saying 'thank you' by putting our hands together and bowing. We would especially like to thank Camille and Lidia for their work on the budget, Jill for her boundless support as Sewing Teacher, Trupti Glaubman for her many years of service as our Website and Recording Steward, and all stewards, committee members, and board members for contributions large and small. Finally, thanks to the entire sangha—your bows and kind words are a gift to us all.



The lay ordination of Chris, Wing and Hiromi was a lovely event. It is always a significant moment when someone decides to live their life by the precepts. Not that these dedicated students didn't live by the precepts before, but making a public statement of their intention is a step beyond just resolving to do so on their own.

And that is why I was happy to be there: To offer my support to Chris, Wing, and Hiromi in their intention and to let them know that they are not alone in their resolve to follow—and struggle with—these precepts. They are not easy to keep, but these three children of Buddha now have many sisters and brothers who will lend a helping hand when requested.

We save all beings by living by the precepts. It always starts with ourselves, but the wholesome effects ripple through the entire universe.

Again, congratulations to Chris, Wing, and Hiromi, to Misha and the whole sangha, and to all beings. People committing to the precepts is what this world needs.

—Rev. Junfu Cornelia Shonkwiler



Photos by Sue Polk, 2014

## *Monthly Schedule*

### **Monday evenings\***

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Service	7:40
Lecture*	7:50
Final Bows	8:45
End Evening	9:00

\* except 1<sup>st</sup> Mondays

### **1<sup>st</sup> Monday retreat**

Welcome/Instruction	6:30 pm
Zazen	7:00
Kinhin	7:40
Zazen	8:00
Three Bows	8:40
End Evening	8:45

### **1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturdays**

Zazen	5:50 am
Kinhin	6:20
Zazen	6:30
Service	7:00
Community breakfast	7:20
Soji (Cleanup)	8:00
Zazen	8:40
Study/Tea	9:15
End program	10:15

Zazen – sitting meditation

Kinhin – walking meditation



I was touched, moved, and inspired by the lay ordination ceremony for Hiromi, Wing, and Chris W. Their commitment to the precepts and our sangha reminded me of how grateful I am to be a member of such an extraordinary group of bodhisattvas.

by Linda Mantel

Photos by Sue Polk, 2014



## *The Party*

Hearty Greetings!  
Special seating.  
Friendly meetings,  
Scrumptuous eating!

## *Jukai*

The sunny space  
Was lit with joy,  
While moonlight shown  
From every face.

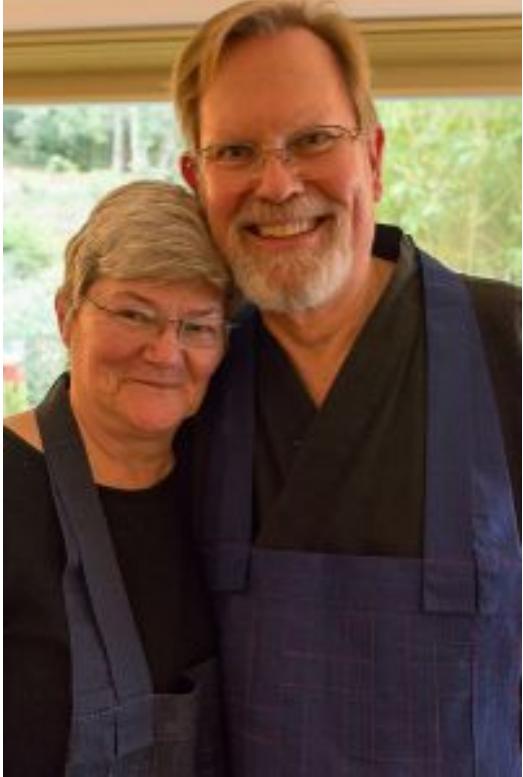
## *Gratitude*

Zen Heart beats  
Expanding, including,  
celebrating  
Boundless sangha.

*Reflections on Chris W., Wing,  
and Hiromi's jukai*  
by Jimmyle Listenbee



Photos by Sue Polk, 2014



### *In Early Spring*

Plum blossoms drift  
down to our altar.  
Leaves faithfully emerge,  
thinking they are still  
connected  
to our tree.

Alas, only  
for temporary pleasure.

What feelings will I have  
when it's time to compost  
this beautiful branch?

Apologies,  
or deep bows  
of gratitude?

by Chris Wesselman

### *Taking Refuge*

Twenty years ago I was lay-ordained by Shojun Mel Weitsman at the Berkeley zendo.

A lot was going on for me at the time, and at times I was overwhelmed with helplessness. A war was raging in the Balkans, triggering old memories for my Eastern European husband, I was raising a three year old and a fourteen year old step-daughter, and working—the whole nine yards.

I really felt the need to take refuge however I could! I had been sitting for many years, but hadn't even known there was such a thing as lay ordination. I was very glad to step into this ceremony.

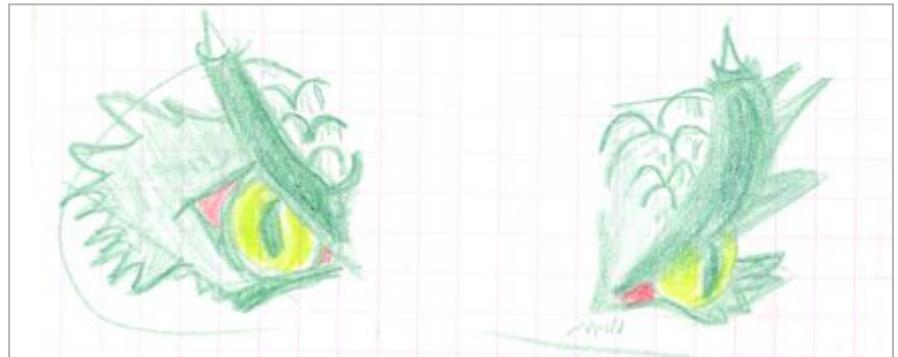
I was part of a cohort of seven, led in sewing by Lin Zenki, an excellent and precise teacher.

The ordination ceremony was just before the June sesshin, at the end of the spring practice period.

The Berkeley zendo is a city zendo, and there were many people in attendance. I felt as if the rows of bald-headed monks stretched back in time, and that I was joining a mysterious tradition.

Mel's Dharma name is Hakuryu, which means "white dragon". I did catch a glimpse of a dragon presence hovering near the zendo ceiling in the early morning of our lay ordination. I've hoped to see that dragon again ever since!

by Kathleen Dickey



Dragon eyes, by Kathleen Dickey



Photo by Sue Polk, 2014



I received Jukai in February from Misha Shungen sensei. The sewing teacher is Jill-san.

As the ceremony approached, I was asked if I was excited about it. More than feeling excited, I was wondering if I deserved it or not, due to my difficulty in following the precepts. I looked back at the time when I decided to sew the rakusu.

I decided to do it because I decided to make my practice official under Misha Shungen sensei. I did not think about what it meant to receive Jukai then, and am not sure even now what the meaning is. If the point of Jukai is to keep the precepts, I am the least qualified to receive Jukai regardless of having finished sewing the rakusu. Nonetheless, I just decided to jump in, ready or not.

After I received Jukai, thanks to Misha Shungen sensei, Jill-san, and sangha members, wearing the rakusu reminds me of the precepts more often and more seriously, and helps me see my resistance to following them and my temptation to give in my own convenience.

*With deepest gratitude to Misha Shungen sensei, Jill-san, and all sangha members.*

-Hiromi Kurahashi

### **Life is Zen!**

I spent my whole life staying away from religions until I stepped into a gym that was set up as a zendo one day. It felt like home! The rest is history.

A line is made up with many connecting points. If you look close enough, you can see gaps between the points. Our life is similar. The curvature of my life happened to zigzag a lot, with big gaps between points. Zen smooths out the curvature and fills in the gaps.

### **Jukai!**

I had no expectation anything would or should change going into the ceremony. It was on a beautiful Spring-like day, with a roomful of friends and family. Lots of bowing, lots of vows and precepts read and repeated, lots of well-wishers and wishes afterward. I was carried along with or by the ceremony.

Yet, I felt alone! Alone with my own thought/no thought. I was in a trance, just like during one of my deeper zazen or Ch'i Kung (Qigong) meditation experiences. I am totally there, yet I am not! The chi was very strong in the zendo that day.

### **Zen is Life!**

I slept well (like a log) the night after Jukai. I felt totally at ease the next morning. It's almost like a lot of burdens just dropped off my shoulders or from my heart. Now I can go forward with a clean slate. Jukai is not an end but a new beginning!

by Wing Ng



**Steve Stucky, former Abbott of Zen Center, stepping down shortly before his passing on New Year's Eve.**  
He often quoted from Dogen: "To what can I liken this world? Moonlight, reflected in dewdrops, shaken from a crane's bill." Photo and quotation from Kathleen Dicky.



A joy to witness and a gift to us all.

-Camille Spar





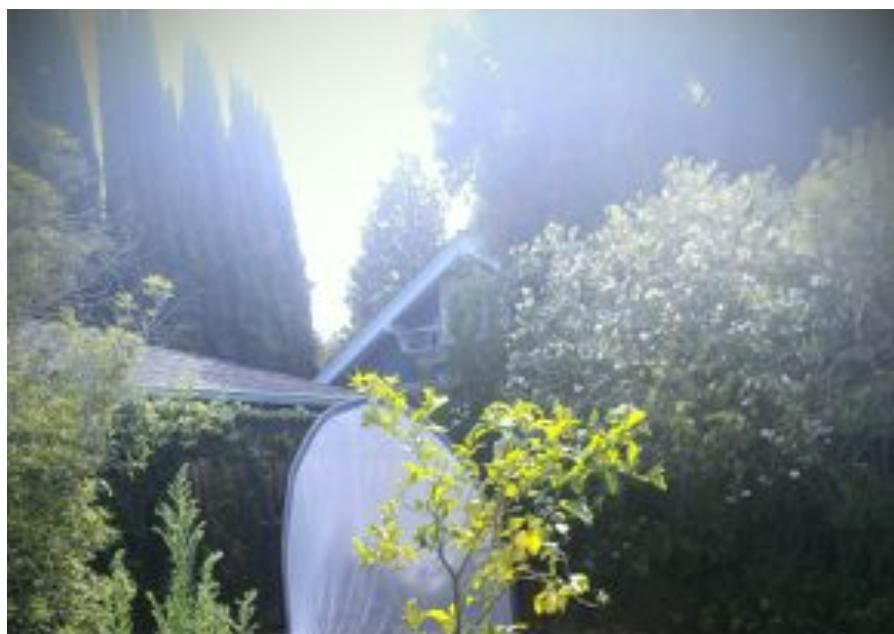
When I entered the home zendo and saw the room so filled with so many Sangha members, friends, and family of initiates, I was filled with their warm anticipation of the ceremony.

Wing chose to invite his two nieces and nephew. Their experience of Buddhism (from his sisters) is a mix of ancestor worship and Buddhism, so this ceremony had some of the flavor of what his family has practiced in China.

Where I was sitting I couldn't see Wing but I could watch the faces of his family. They were so attentive and showed so much caring and support for their Uncle Wing. Wow, I thought, this is what being most intimate is about. I'm sure this will stay in our hearts for a long time.  
by Diane Comey



Photos by Sue Polk, 2014



## Dharma School

August 2013: For cooking with Giulia (right column), the kids made and enjoyed a delicious cake.

September 2013: Learning to play zen instruments with Misha and Kate (left column)



Photos by Stephanie Zeller, 2014

## Sangha Asides...

### Return to Todai-ji

by Stephen Heiryu Kishin,  
December 2013

This year (2013) Harumi and I returned to the origin of our Zen practice—Todai-ji Temple in Nara, Japan, near Kyoto. We first visited Todai-ji Temple and its famous Daibutsu, the Birushana Buddha (also called Buddha Vairocana), an enormous 12th century bronze statue of the Buddha, back in 2003. It was part of a tour Harumi's brother Masao had arranged for us to visit the classic former capital city of Kyoto. We traveled by Shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto, which was also a first for me, and then by cab to Nara.

Todai-ji is found within a large deer park, established by temple monks more than eight hundred years ago. As you can see, today the deer own the place—they have no enemies at Todai-ji. Quite tame, they will feed from your hand. Unlike U.S. deer, the Japanese variety are rather small, with reddish fur spotted with white.

Inside the temple the statute of the Buddha is stunning. (*cont'd*)



Photos by Stephen Boreman, 2013

*(Sanga Asides, continued)*

Penetrating might be a better word...or simply beyond expression. In its presence, one wishes to never leave.

Constructed in 752 C.E., the statue was reconstructed in 1185. The temple building is reputedly the largest wooden structure in the world, and today is only two thirds of its original size, following a fire and repair in 1692. It is 57 meters wide, 50 meters deep, and 48 meters tall—Buddha's head alone is 5.3 meters high (about 16 feet). According to Todai-ji records, 50,000 carpenters, 370,000 metal workers, and more than 2 million laborers worked on its construction and furnishings. The enormous expenses brought the nation to the brink of bankruptcy.

I am grateful for the opportunity to return to Todai-ji and will try to return again in another ten years. And ten after that. And, if I am able, ten after that. I cannot explain why. It is simply necessary.



Photos by Stephen Boreman, 2013

