

# RING OF BONE ZENDO

FALL 2018

WWW.RINGOFBONEZENDO.ORG

P.O. BOX 510 NORTH SAN JUAN, CA 95960

## CHILDREN AT PLAY IN A BURNING HOUSE

It was a metaphor originally. *Lotus Sutra*, chapter three. A wealthy old man living with his many sons (and presumably many daughters, too) in a vast compound. Counting his retainers, he sheltered perhaps as many as five hundred people there, within a wall that had just one narrow gate. The building was old, too, and when fire suddenly broke out, it burned hot and fast.

The old man immediately saw the danger and the need to escape, but the children, caught up in their games, didn't notice anything. He thought first of carrying them out, but with so many of them and the gate so narrow.... He shouted for their attention, hoping to explain the situation, but—you know, kids—"They merely raced about this way and that in play and looked at their father without heeding him." Sigh.

Then he hit on a stratagem, the "expedient means" of promising them what they wanted: cool toys! In particular, carts drawn by goats or deer or oxen, their very own. Roughly equivalent to a fast, new smart-phone. That did it! The kids swarmed out the gate, all safe and sound, and the old gent rewarded each with a cart even better than he'd promised: a giant carriage arrayed with jewels and flowers, canopied, made comfortable with an abundance of cushions, and yoked to—yes!—a swift, powerful, pure-white ox.

I wish it had remained a metaphor. But this summer, as the children continued playing, it shifted category. Here we dwell. The grand old house has gone up in flames, no question, and the wise are screaming for the kids' attention. Do the kids hear? Not much, it seems.

It surely isn't accurate or fair to depict them—make that "us"—as completely consumed in games, oblivious to everything except the lure of cool stuff. Obviously, some of us are awake to the inferno raging on all sides, and not everyone is a sucker for the next fancy goat-cart. Yet a great many of us do seem disastrously preoccupied, if not with games then with social media or

with what a young German attorney identified as perhaps the essential element in the Nazis' rise to power: the "automatic continuation of ordinary life." Doing the laundry. Shopping. Getting to work. Watching the Big Game. Keeping on keeping on.

Like many sangha members, I see this as a time of political crisis in the United States and of dangerous trends in the politics of numerous other countries. But I've come to see the fire this time as much bigger than that, as a total cultural and ecological phenomenon that puts the Earth household as a whole in jeopardy. Of course, if our planet's sixth great extinction goes forward, taking our species with it, some stout forms of life will survive and eventually evolve into a new assembly of beings perhaps just as wondrous as the set that we've been privileged to know, a set itself the result, after all, of the fifth extinction. But I find that cold comfort.

If the world as we know it is going to hell in a handbasket, I feel obliged by my love for it, and by membership in it, to impede that process. This sense of obligation persists despite very reasonable doubts about the usefulness of such efforts as I can make; considering the magnitude of the destructive forces now in play, my capacity to affect the outcome seems puny indeed. But concern for effectiveness, at least *my* concern for effectiveness, pales next to the urgings I feel to protect what remains. Or to state the point in patently Buddhist terms, neither the vows we make explicitly nor the values implicit in practice and realization have much to do with feasibility and "realism." How realistic or quantifiable is a bodhisattva's commitment to forgo final awakening until other beings have all awakened?

The question I'm asking myself now, and want to ask you, too, is whether we've reached a point where changing our ways—discontinuing the "automatic continuation of ordinary life"—has become imperative. You and I may have different perceptions of the

Butterfly and bee,  
Pirouette on their blossoms,  
Close to crest of ridge.

~ Ken Schumacher  
(Written on Mts. and Rivers 2009)

## RIVERS & MOUNTAINS

*"I choose to listen to the river for a while, thinking river thoughts, before joining the night and the stars." Edward Abbey*

Our journey begins at a small, sandy beach on the banks of the Klamath River, just above the town of Happy Camp. We are here to test the theory that the venerable Mountains & Rivers sesshin can be successfully experienced on a river. We spill out of our cars and pull the trailer of boats down to the river's edge. With everyone's help, it is easy to get the boats into the water and we move on to the seemingly endless process of rigging. Our affable shuttle drivers come down to chat and collect our keys.

We are a small, odd assortment of folks. Reed, Eric, Suzanna, and Nate form our expert "meditation test team." Emma and Sylva, my 15 and 13-year-old nieces, will row our gear boat and run kayak safety. My dear friend Stacey, with a fresh shoulder injury, has agreed to be Emma's coxswain and rowing coach. Then there is me.

The Klamath River has a huge drainage, with the lower section drawing from one of California's largest wilderness areas. This section has mild to moderate whitewater and minimal development along its banks, making it a good choice for our experiment. Called Ishkêesh by the native Karuk, the Klamath forms a vital artery of fish, water and wildlife that has animated the universe of indigenous peoples for at least 7,000 years.

Here in the lower basin, the Karuk, Klamath, Yurok, and Hoopa tribes have held fast to existence by the very tips of their collective fingernails. The lifeline that has sustained them is this river. Although they have suffered the familiar litany of modern tribal woes, they have

- continued from page 1

conflagration licking at the foundations of the house, how far it's progressed, how swiftly it's growing, what chances our current countermeasures have of extinguishing it, and so forth. But do we agree that the time has come to accept full responsibility for it and to revise our behavior in correspondingly urgent and far-reaching ways?

If so, what might those ways be? A number of sangha members have felt moved to step up their activity in the political process, hoping that the mid-term elections will precipitate much-needed changes in Washington. I share that hope, of course. Yet even the best electoral outcome seems unlikely to produce change of the scope, the profundity, and rapidity that our predicament calls for. Our worst problems lie beyond the bounds of legislation: our ever-swelling population, our seemingly insatiable desires for convenience and comfort, our gross insensitivity to the needs of other beings, our willingness to destroy mountains and rivers and otherwise to exploit "natural resources" for human benefit, our callousness toward members of even our own species, and our continuing failure to cooperate in the common cause of life on Earth. Not to mention our age-old fondness for games and our apparently infinite distractibility. I understand all of these as cultural problems at root, not amenable to political solutions but certainly open to solution through other avenues—if, and only if, enough of us get serious about it. Soon.

As for the wondrous ox-cart of the Buddhadharmā, what role might it play now? It's still ready to roll, I hope, but the old image needs an important correction: the cart isn't waiting for its takers "outside the gate." Unless you buy into the fantasy of escaping to Mars, our tradition, like everything else in our old home, stands to get crisped in the explosive, kalpa-ending firestorm we collectively have set and fueled. Finally, I think we'd better ask ourselves one more question: are the cushions of our fine cart too comfortable? I hope not.

~Nelson Foster

*The quotations are from Burton Watson, trans., The Lotus Sutra (Columbia, 1993), p. 57, and Sebastian Haffner (Raimund Pretzel) quoted in Cass R. Sunstein, "It Can Happen Here," New York Review of Books (June 28, 2018), p. 65.*

## MARCHING FOR OUR LIVES

When my son Lee was seven and old enough to buy his own Legos, he asked to buy some rifles for his Lego men. He was impressed by the machine guns – their realistic form and the associated power and mystique. Lee had some disposable income at the time and so he was off to the races. I still regret my reaction to him when the teenie-tiny plastic machine guns arrived in a package: he opened it and showed the guns to me swelling with pride – and I laughed. I then asked with feigned incredulity, "How much did you spend on these?!?!" \$1.50 for pieces of plastic that must have been manufactured at less than a penny at scale. I laughed. I shamed my son.

I did not know what to do.

This is not a forum that needs to hear my rant about the impact of guns on our society. My personal addition to the nationwide conversation comes from the numerous young people who attended my school over the decades and whom I subsequently visited in a hospital or in jail because they had sought power or control in some way using guns.

While I actually enjoy shooting guns personally, the damage they have done to my students' lives leaves me at the same time angry and sad. Angry at guns' allure, sad at the sudden finality of their impact. I can feel their power and mystique, but without sufficient language to capture my own whirling and conflicting emotions, I was unable to address my son's pride more directly when faced with his new purchase. How could he be so proud of these horrific tools? How can I respond to have him disdain, rather than revere them?! At that point, Lee was aware of my contempt for guns. I'm sure he knew I was afraid of them too, though I'm not sure I ever said that directly. I had been explicit about their impact on the lives of my students. So how could he want to celebrate them by spending money on them for his Lego figures?!?!?

Seven years later, on March 24, 2018, Lee and I marched in Washington DC along with some 800,000 others during

the March for Our Lives. He participated in two school walkouts this year in solidarity with the young people of Parkland, Florida, who are crying, Enough! At 13, Lee's interest is at least as much about missing school time as it is an act of protest. Though I wish his acts of protest were pure, his social justice muscle is not well-toned. Tired of standing and looking at the large TV monitors on Pennsylvania Ave, he wanted to leave the DC March early. We did.

How do we raise children in a gun-happy culture? How do I raise my own son in a gun-happy culture? How do I balance awareness of the issues, the horrific tragedies, and the innocence of childhood? I feel pretty strongly that I have been able to pick the pace of my child's exposure to the impact of guns – largely choosing to accelerate Lee's exposure from what would 'naturally' come his way, given his readily-available sources of information. What is too much? And when am I force-feeding a social justice agenda? In sesshin in June, I revisited my earliest days of protest, remembering the den mother who politicized my Cub Scout experience by encouraging us to protest in favor of the nuclear freeze. This early protest was formative for me, gently inculcating a sense of agency in the protest and in political activism. I offer bows to Nancy Shields, the quiet den mother who, like the tea sellers captured in the old texts, was instrumental in pointing the way to me and others. We'll see how the trip to DC marinates in Lee's growth.

If you haven't seen the speech delivered by Emma Gonzalez at the DC March, you are missing one of the great public speaking moments of our time. Check it out. Emma is a child of our pervasive gun culture, touched intimately by its tragic hand. She lets it all hang out, like Manjusri at the high seat. Have a look, and don't look back.

~Andrew Mason

- continued from page 1

managed to retain large pieces of their culture – lineage, wildcraft, ceremony, and language – all human-crafted reflections of the potent land they inhabit.

Back on the beach, after much sun-screening and messing about, our own little group of humans is ready to go. In our humble state of inquiry, we push off from the shore and onto the river. We make adjustments and arrangements, but eventually, the water draws us into stillness. I row from the back of the boat, leaving the others free to sit. The oars inevitably begin to row me.

Suzanna has gamely jumped into the inflatable kayak to test its kinhin-like qualities and is making her way downriver. Back in the raft, our meditation is occasionally punctuated by someone's raised finger silently pointing to a bald eagle, an osprey or a great blue heron. We watch as an eagle strikes the water's surface downstream from our boats, then retreats to a tree with its catch. Birds crowd this river corridor, many hunting the same fish that have fed the Karuk for millennia, fish whose numbers are dwindling to nothing in the unseasonably warm water of the present-day Klamath.

The placid current eventually gives way to some whitewater and our sitters pick up their paddles. We move in unison to simple commands, falling back into attentive quiet while waiting for the next boisterous stretch. We talk as needed about what lies ahead, learning to read the water in front of us so that we can move together in the rapids. At its best, navigating whitewater is a matter of putting yourself in the right place at the beginning and letting the current to do the work. Do it any other way and the strength of the river will quickly put you in your place. At its essence, the art of rafting is the practice of allowing.

The inflatable kayak proves to be a mixed bag when it comes to meditative efficiency. While a kayak provides contemplative solitude for the kayaker, it is by nature a little tippy. Flipping one of ours on a large wave unleashes



some minor chaos. Pulling a bedraggled kayaker out of the water temporarily shatters the serenity in our boat full of meditators. We break into a discussion about the pros and cons of kayaks in sesshin, newly reminded of the delicate balance between our chosen forms, the ancient, wild forms and their relative effectiveness for the sitter.

And yet, as someone in our sangha observed, cold water can be more stimulating than any tanto's kyosaku if you happen to fall into it unexpectedly. Your koan is either lost completely or fills you to the brim in that stunning moment of contact. Salmon must be equally shocked to be unceremoniously plucked from the water, ripped away from their pursuit of evening stoneflies by the talons of a hunting eagle. The wild forms stand ready for us all, especially when other forms fall short.

We head downstream. We remember how to dig our toes into the sand, sand that feels intolerably hot when we land in the afternoon and exquisitely cool as we pad to the zendo in the morning dark. We carry water in a bucket.

We learn to watch for the turtles who slip silently off their rocks as we pass by. We laugh together. Each day we go about the business of finding our temporary place among the plants and the birds, in the rocks and the water, our temporary place with each other.

The forms bend, sway and hold. The daily practice schedule and camp routine aren't really all that different from backpacking, although boat pumping is substituted for bear bagging. Trading

packs for coolers means that the food is crunchier and that we have avocados. There are sutras read on the boat in Reed's resonant voice while we wait for the girls to finish rigging. Eric emerges from the water transformed into a butoh dancer, covered in waterweed. We aren't counting our steps, but we are still moving. We discover zendos with perfect river views. We float silently together on the water, almost weightless in the morning sun, while a dragonfly sits on Nate's motionless hand. We are shifting, beginning to resemble the landscape we wake up in each day. Human forms, however temporary, reflecting the power of place.

~ Erika Carpenter



# MOUNTAINS & RIVERS

## Announcing the 2019 Spring River Trip

The sangha will be trying out a new sesshin form by holding a Mountains & Rivers river trip in May 2019. It will replace the Spring M&R backpacking trip for this coming year. We are considering making it a regular M&R spring offering, every other year. Please see details below. If you are interested in being part of the 2019 trip, contact Reed Hamilton for more information. For contact information, see the Factoid Sheet included in this newsletter.

May 27, 2019 to June 1, 2019 – One packing afternoon/night in McCloud, plus five days/four nights on the Klamath River.

Location – Meet in McCloud, CA. Drive to the Klamath River and raft from Happy Camp to Stuarts Bar.

Schedule – Very similar to the M&R backpacking schedule, but modified for the river. Please see the accompanying article and the M&R information on the ROBZ website.

Weather – May weather in the Klamath basin can be variable; cold or hot, wet or dry. We will plan for it all.

Water Difficulty/Water Level – The section of the Klamath we will run has some moderate whitewater (Class II and III rapids in some sections). The water level will likely be moderate to high in late May (2000 – 3500 cubic feet per second). If the water is too high to comfortably raft on the Klamath, we will plan for an alternative river in Northern California.

Fitness Level – Participants should have a basic level of fitness, be competent swimmers and have general comfort with water and water sports. There will be several spots in the oar boats which won't require active paddling. Since there will be no required hiking and no backpacking, the trip will be suitable for people who usually can't attend M&R sesshin.

Number of Participants – The maximum number of participants is 12 sitters, plus 4 sitter/guides. This number of participants is ideal to keep costs low.

Costs – We'll share the costs of the trip as usual. We expect the cost of this trip to range between \$375-425/person, depending on membership level. This assumes that 12 people participate. The costs will be higher with lower enrollment. Please express interest as early as possible, so we can plan logistics and confirm the price of the trip.

Not wisdom, not love,  
not seeing into essential nature,  
certainly not eternal bliss.

~ Aitken Roshi's closing poem, chapter 16 of *A Zen Wave*, published 1978, responding to his own question, "What is the Middle Way?"



Graphics from Robert Aitken, *Zen Master Raven: The Teachings of a Wise Old Bird*, used by permission of the artist, Jennifer Rain Crosby.



Wisdom Publications brought out a second edition of *Zen Master Raven* in 2017, with additional artwork and a new introduction by Nelson.

## FUNDS FOR PROJECTS

We all love sitting in our beautiful Dojo and Hojo and enjoy the woods and meadow. It takes work and funds in order to maintain the treasure that we have. We are facing a number of buildings and grounds projects to both maintain and improve our place.

We had to replace our solar batteries. We are in the process of replacing the window on the south gable end of the zendo. We need to replace the Hojo path lighting. We are installing a cell phone booster for reliable phone service for fire and medical emergencies. We are planning to put railings around the zendo decks for safety. The road needs some major improvements due to some heavy rains in the past few years. We had many trees die as a result of the drought and pine beetles, and now have a lot of slash to clean up. In addition there are more dead trees that need to come down.

Financially, it has been our policy to keep sesshin fees as low as possible. We really just about break even with our sesshin fees covering sesshin expenses and honoraria for Nelson. That means we rely on donations for most of our maintenance expenses and special projects.

So... donations to the general fund would be much appreciated.

If you want to send a donation, make a check out to ROBZ and send it to Chris Mulford (bookkeeper), 13224 Red Dog Road, Nevada City, CA 95959.

Thank you.

~ Business and Finance Committee

# NYOGEN SENZAKI (1876-1958)

"Bodhisattvas" or "Fellow students" is the way Nyogen Senzaki would address those who attended his "Floating Zendo" — "Bodhisattvas" because he saw all practitioners as truth-seekers of the Mahayana teachings. He taught that "We are all Buddhas and our minds and bodies are loving-kindness itself" and that all of us are capable of realization and complete liberation, giving us the ability to help others attain the way. "Fellow Students" he would say because he never considered himself superior to others seeking the way and never considered himself finished at any point. He eschewed any hierarchical designations and, if called "Master," would just laugh and declare that he was only a poor, homeless, ordinary monk in the tradition of the original followers of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The way he told his life story, he'd been orphaned as an infant and never knew his Japanese mother. A traveling monk discovered him by her body along a roadside in Kamchatka and took him to Japan, where a Buddhist family adopted him. [Editor's note: Later research indicates that he may have been told this story as a child to spare him knowledge of his actual parentage.] His foster father, a Pure Land priest whom he deeply loved and respected, taught him Chinese and the Chinese classics, and by the age of 18, he had read the complete Chinese Tripitaka. When his dear adoptive father died suddenly, he felt the deepest grief and profound loss. At that moment, intensely experiencing the impermanence of existence, he determined to renounce the world and become a monk.

Before ordaining, he explored many different schools of Buddhist thought, traveling to Ceylon and Thailand and studying with both Soto and Rinzai teachers in Japan. His experience of the Japanese Zen institution, with its hierarchical structure, was very disturbing to him and far from his own deep experience of the true way teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Nevertheless, he persevered under the direction of his teacher, Shaku Soen Roshi, whom he greatly esteemed and loved. Shaku Soen had taken the lead in introducing Zen Buddhism to the West, traveling to Chicago in 1893 to speak at the World Parliament of Religions. He clearly discerned the need and opportunity to continue this work and dispatched Senzaki to the United States

in 1905, followed later by another of his students, D. T. Suzuki.

Senzaki arrived with no financial support and the instruction not to teach formally for at least twenty years, so he supported himself in San Francisco working as a busboy, dishwasher, cook, and language teacher, living humbly in poor neighborhoods, learning English and the ways of Americans. Occasionally, when he saved enough money, he'd rent a place and lecture on Buddhism. Not wishing to call attention to himself, he didn't shave his head and dressed in workman's clothes. He wished only to be "a member of the great American people and walk any stage of life — an American Hotei."

Finally, in 1925, with the help of friends he was able to find various places to start taking students and begin teaching the path of Zen. He characterized these sites as his "Floating Zendo" moving about like a cloud in the empty sky or as a portable temple he carried on his back, as a snail does its shell. Senzaki Sensei also called his Zendo a "Mentorgarten" because he considered all who attended, including himself, equally students and mentors to one another.

Gradually, his sangha grew established and quite active, and eventually, the Floating Zendo floated all the way from San Francisco to Los Angeles and from there even to Heart Mountain, Wyoming, when, in 1943, he was interned along with others who had "Japanese faces," as he humbly put it. Among his many American students in the post-war years was the young Robert Aitken.

In the Mentorgarten, Senzaki taught an unadorned, clear, direct Zen of Shakyamuni Buddha — a Zen that avoided trappings of religiosity, the rigidity of hierarchy, and any overindulgence in the exotic, stating that none of that was necessary for successful practice of the way. He professed a practice undertaken for its own sake, without expectations: just sitting in zazen, clarifying one's mind, allowing one's true mind to come forth naturally as it will. "This is the beautiful art of eloquent silence. In this you will find the source of quiet rest from which flows the stream of penetrating wisdom and everlasting loving-kindness. Zazen meditation is the only way to reach that source."

His last words to us were these: "Friends in Dharma, be satisfied with your own head. Do not put any false heads above your own. Then minute after minute, watch your steps closely. Always keep your head cold and your feet warm.... Each head of each one of you is the noblest thing in the whole universe. No God, no Buddha, no sage, no master can reign over it. Rinzai said: 'If you master your own situation, wherever you stand is the land of Truth.' ... Remember me as a monk, and nothing else. I do not belong to any sect or cathedral. None of them should send me a promoted priest's rank or anything of the sort. I like to be free from such trash and die happily."

~ Allan Finlay (excerpted from his presentation at Founders' Day, Ring of Bone, September 9, 2018)

## CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP: WHERE DO YOU FIT?

This year the sangha formally adopted a new governance document. With our previous way of conducting business, we had a board, which made many of the decisions regarding sangha affairs. With our current model, we conduct most of our business at our Meetings for Practice of Business. Decisions are made by core and sustaining sangha members.

With this change, it is imperative to have a good turnout of core members for these meetings; otherwise, we'll be at risk of lacking a quorum. For this reason, the sangha agreed on a new standard for the quorum at our Meetings for Practice of Business. From now on, it will be 50% of the number of core members, rounded up. For example, if we have 13 core members, the quorum requirement is seven. If we

have core members who rarely attend Meetings for Practice of Business, the risk of not meeting the quorum increases.

Because of this, the sangha agreed to change the criteria for core membership. To be a core member, one must commit to attend at least six of the nine or ten Meetings for Practice of Business a year. The meeting attendance requirement will no longer be one of the five categories to choose from to establish membership status.

When you are sending in your dues for 2019, please consider what category of membership best fits your level of involvement. If you are uncertain of which category works for you, please consult with a member of the Practice and Care Committee.

# NEURODHARMOLOGY

You probably won't be finding any of this in Nelson's upcoming teishos (and alas, he has no blog!), but it is nonetheless worthwhile to get caught up on recent neurological studies of meditation and its impact upon the brain, an organ which has revealed itself to be far more plastic, adaptive, and regenerative than was ever suspected in those golden years of brain science that brought us the frontal lobotomy.

There are a number of good books on the subject now, but I particularly enjoyed James Kingsland's *Siddhartha's Brain: Unlocking the Ancient Science of Enlightenment*. Kingsland, a science journalist for the *Guardian*, writes with classic English skepticism while simultaneously embracing his own Dharma practice and arguing for the deeply transformative effect of meditation practice on the fundamental neurology of the brain.

Kingsland's approach is to travel back in time and to imagine what occurred in the awakening brain of Siddhartha Gautama. Drawing on modern scientific findings, "enhanced enormously through the use of new brain-scanning technologies such as fMRI – functional magnetic resonance imaging," he envisages the neurological transformation that can be inferred from Buddhist texts' colorful accounts of the event under the Bodhi Tree."

The journey is a rich one. Along the way, we get to find out that the *Heart Sutra* is now scientifically validated: the brain has an identified "self-app" called the *cortical midline structures*,

or CMS, which are essentially the homunculus you will find if you pry apart our two hemispheres to expose their filling ("in a sense, the brain is an ego-sandwich"). The CMS is responsible for "accessing autobiographical memory and the relatively stable aspects of our personality but also somehow 'bond' these to important stimuli in our social and physical environment, thus creating the sense of 'me' and 'others.'" The "self" really is essentially empty! Yeehaw! What did I tell you, Gertrude?

Incidentally, another handy term that neurologists have coined is the "default mode network." You know how the brain wanders when not focused on a particular task? I know, I didn't either... Well, that endless tendency of our brain is part of the CMS, set in perpetual motion by our species' early adaptive struggles. Fortunately, meditation's (and psilocybin's) capacity to cut off this network chatter is demonstrable, and the neurological "signature" of the shift in perspective can be read in the brain after only eight weeks of practice.

Which leads us to Kingsland's speculations about, "What has gone so wrong during the evolution of the human brain that it needs to be fixed by meditation?" His thesis is our species struck an evolutionary bargain. We developed the same neural equipment to simulate the mental states of *others* as we use to simulate our own sense of *selfhood*. In exchange, we got "the benefits of language, mental time travel, and theory of mind."

In short, "The self was born on the African savannah. It seems humans intuited long ago that something had gone awry in their distant past, and that it had to do with the origins of self-consciousness."

Having sounded that somber note, Kingsland goes on to discuss meditation's now established efficacy in relieving depression and addiction, managing pain, and relieving anxiety – outcomes that today can be measured in the shaping of the brain's neurological structures. As an additional treat, we even encounter a translation of our old boss, Robert Aitken.

Now, we await brain studies of that elusive experience of *kensho*, a critter that is rarely sighted even in the wild.

~ Robert Tindall

## CORRECTION

A misstatement slipped into the spring issue of the newsletter: Soiku Shigematsu did indeed attend the special Founders' Day event honoring Ruth Fuller Sasaki, but he himself isn't an honorary founder of ROBZ. He's a Zen priest and an old friend, through his father, of both Gary Snyder and Aitken Roshi but hasn't exerted significant influence in the development of our sangha.

## SESSHIN WITH ANDREW MASON

As announced at the September "View from the Hojo", Nelson has appointed Andrew Mason as a Dharma Guide. The Ring of Bone Zendo sangha has responded by inviting Andrew to teach a five-day sesshin next year, in addition to our regularly scheduled sesshin with Nelson. Andrew accepted, and we've set the date for April 19th-24th.

Some members expressed a preference to invite Andrew initially to lead a weekend sesshin, so in deciding to schedule the longer version, the sangha agreed that those wanting to attend only the weekend portion of the sesshin would be given the same opportunity as those who want to sit the full five days. Everyone, please sign up in the usual way. Steve Mulford will be sesshin coordinator and the fees are the usual fees.

I think I speak for the sangha in saying that we are excited for this new opportunity to explore the Dharma.

~ Chris Mulford, Moderator, Practice and Care Committee

## KNOWIN' WHAT'S GROWIN'

After a morning of Zazen on May 5th, Sangha member, Wendy Boes will lead us in spending an afternoon with the remarkable plants of our zendo meadow looking at the characteristics of plants that we often gloss over. It's in the naming that we acknowledge the uniqueness of one plant from another. Through use of our observations aided by books and microscopes, we will hopefully leave a bit more inspired and knowledgeable about those beings among us who photosynthesize.

# RING OF BONE ZENDO CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## GENERAL INFORMATION

[1] Zazen occurs year-round on Wednesday nights, except during January and July and on the dates of Feb 20, April 24, June 12, and Oct 23. [2] Ten dates have been set aside for Meeting for the Practice of Business (MPB), but as few as six MPBs may actually occur, with the remaining dates utilized for other purposes, at the discretion of the Moderator. The expected use of each date will be announced well in advance. [3] View from the Hojo is an informal, semi-annual review of practice and teaching matters, delivered by Nelson Foster.

## SEEDS-TO-SNOW TRAINING SEASON - 2018

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Coordinator</i>
Nov 18	One-Day Sesshin	9 am – 4 pm	Greg Leeson
Nov 21	(No Evening Zazen)		
Nov 25	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Meeting for the Practice of Business (MPB)	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 – 2:30 pm	Moderator
Nov 30 – Dec 8	Rohatsu Sesshin		Marsha Stone
Dec 9	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Dec 16	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 – 2 pm	Nate Popik
Dec 23	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Dec 30	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 – 2:30 pm	Moderator
January 2019	Zendo closed this month		

## FLOWERS-TO-DUST TRAINING SEASON - 2019

Feb 3	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 – 2 pm	Nate Popik
Feb 10	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am - noon	
Feb 15-20	Great Cold Sesshin		Cindy Leeson
Feb 17	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Feb 24	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator
Mar 3	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Mar 10	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch View from the Hojo	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm	Nelson Foster
Mar 15-17	Weekend Sesshin		Chris Mulford
Mar 17	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Mar 24	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Dharma Event (Topic TBA)	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm	Nelson Foster
Mar 31	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 – 2:15 pm	Moderator
April 7	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Buddha's Birthday Celebration	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm – 3 pm	Kate Duroux
April 14	Zendo Workday	9 am – 4 pm	Nate Popik
April 19-24	Five-Day Sesshin (with Andrew Mason)		Steve Mulford
April 21	(No Sunday Zazen)		
April 28	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator
May 5	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Knowin' What's Growin'	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm – 4 pm	Wendy Boes
May 12	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Sangha Circle (Topic TBA)	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 4 pm	Practice and Care
May 19	Work Party for Nelson & Masa (bring sack lunch)	9 am – 4 pm	Suzanna Elkin
May 26	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator

## RING OF BONE ZENDO CALENDAR (CONTINUED)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Coordinator</i>
May 27 – June 1	Klamath River Mountain & Rivers Sesshin (Refer to Newsletter for Details)		Reed Hamilton
June 2	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
June 7	Pre-sesshin Work Party	9:30 am – noon	Nate Popik
June 8-15	Seven-Day Sesshin		Keith Melton
June 9, 16	(No Sunday Zazen)		
June 23	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2 pm	Nate Popik
June 30	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Meeting for Practice of Business	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator
July	Zendo closed this month		

## SEEDS-TO-SNOW TRAINING SEASON - 2019

Aug 4	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm – 2:00 pm	Nate Popik
Aug 11	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am - noon	
Aug 17-24	Summer Mountains & Rivers Sesshin (backpacking sesshin)		Eric Larsen
Aug 18	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Aug 25	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm– 2:15 pm	Moderator
Sept 1	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch View from the Hojo	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm -2:30 pm	
Sept 8	Zendo Workday	9 am – 4 pm	Nate Popik
Sept 15	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Sept 22	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Founders' Day	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm Noon – 3 pm	Kate Duroux
Sept 29	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Meeting for Practice of Business	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator
Oct 6	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm – 2 pm	Nate Popik
Oct 13	Bald Mtn. Assn Workday	9 am – 4 pm	Sheelo Bohm, Steve Mulford
Oct 18-23	Five-Day Sesshin		Judyth Collin
Oct 20	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Oct 27	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm– 2:15 pm	Moderator
Nov 3	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Nov 10	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch Sangha Circle – (Topic-TBA)	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 4pm	Practice and Care
Nov 17	One-Day Sesshin	9 am – 4 pm	Kate Duroux
Nov 24	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator
Dec 1	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Dec 1 –Dec 8	Rohatsu Sesshin		Marsha Stone
Dec 8	(No Sunday Zazen)		
Dec 15	Sunday Zazen/Potluck Lunch Work Hour	9:30 am – noon/noon – 1 pm 1 pm – 2 pm	Nate Popik
Dec 22	Sunday Zazen	9:30 am – noon	
Dec 29	Sunday Zazen/Sack Lunch MPB	9:30 am – noon/noon – 12:30 pm 12:30 pm – 2:15 pm	Moderator



# THE HANDY-DANDY ZENDO EVENT FACTOID SHEET

Event	Date	Contact Name/Info	Fees			Deadline
			Core/Sustaining	Associate	Non-member	
<b>2018</b>						
One-Day Sesshin	Nov. 18, 2018		\$40	\$50	\$60	
Rohatsu	Nov. 30-Dec. 8	\$125		\$155	\$195	
<b>2019</b>						
Great Cold Sesshin			\$155	\$195	\$240	Dec. 15, 2018
Weekend Sesshin	March 15-17		\$100	\$125	\$145	Feb. 15
Zendo Workday	April 14					
Five-Day Sesshin	April 19-24		\$155	\$195	\$240	Feb 19
Work Party for Nelson & Masa	May 19					
Klamath River M&R Sesshin	May 27-June 1		TBD, see newsletter article			March 27
Seven-Day Sesshin	June 8-15		\$220	\$280	\$330	April 8
Mts. & Rivers Sesshin	Aug. 17-24		\$220	\$280	\$330	June 17
Zendo Workday	Sep. 8					
BMA Workday	Oct. 13					
Five-Day Sesshin	Oct. 18-23		\$155	\$195	\$240	Aug. 18
One-Day Sesshin	Nov. 17		\$40	\$50	\$60	Oct 17
Rohatsu	Dec 1 -8			\$155	\$195	Oct 1

# SESSHIN GUIDELINES

Please review the following information if you are interested in attending sesshin.

## SESSHIN SIGN-UP PROCEDURE

1. Heed the deadlines. Space is limited. Early submissions have priority.
2. Send a check for the full fee, your name, address, phone number, membership category, and e-mail to the coordinator. If you don't use e-mail, send a self-addressed stamped envelope.
3. Let the coordinator know if you have a special medical condition or food allergies pertinent to this sesshin.
4. Let the coordinator know if you are unfamiliar with dokusan or meal procedures.
5. If paying the full sesshin fee poses a problem, talk with the coordinator. A fee reduction may be possible.
6. If you are behind in your membership dues, please send with your deposit/fee.

## SESSHIN SIGN-UP CAUTIONS

Your check will be held for deposit until after sesshin.

You may cancel up until two weeks before sesshin and receive a full refund. If you must cancel, please do so as soon as possible to help enable another to take your place. Cancellation within two weeks of sesshin may result in the loss of 25% of your sesshin fee.

Acceptance depends on membership status and the date the coordinator receives your check and is determined at the sign-up deadline. Once accepted, the coordinator will contact you with details about the sesshin or let you know if you are on the waiting list. If you are new to Ring of Bone Zendo, contact the coordinator early so that a participant query can be sent to you, and read *Taking the Path of Zen* by Robert Aitken before you sign up.

Bring a sack supper to the work meeting before sesshin begins. Long sesshin work meetings begin at 5 PM. Weekend sesshin work meetings begin at 7 PM.

Plan to arrive early and stay until cleanup is finished after sesshin. Sangha relations are an important part of our practice. If you come from a long distance, please arrange your flight schedule to allow ample time before and after sesshin. We ask you to arrive no later than 2 PM to help with zendo cleanup and other sesshin setup tasks and to settle in and visit with others.

Post-sesshin is a very important time, especially when it follows a five or seven day sesshin. Plan extra time to unwind and help close down the zendo. Please do not plan to leave before 4 PM at the earliest.

## SESSHIN CHECKLIST

- Bag Supper
- Bowl Set
- Sleeping Bag
- Flashlight
- Slip-on Shoes
- Towel and Toilet Articles
- Dark, Solid-Colored Sitting Clothes
- Warm Clothes
- Rain Gear
- Mosquito Gear (summer)
- Tent (optional)

If you have any questions about sesshin, contact the coordinator.

## MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS SESSHIN

Mountains and Rivers Sesshin are wilderness sesshin, held each spring and summer. We usually go backpacking but are experimenting with the river-based form described elsewhere in this issue. Destinations vary from year to year and season to season, depending on weather, availability of water, trail conditions, etc. We don't look for difficult circumstances, but they often find us, so it's vital to prepare physically and to be equipped for inclement weather. For the backpacking trips, it's a must to break in new boots beforehand and to minimize the weight of personal gear. Plan on carrying ten pounds of group food and supplies, more or less.

We limit M&R sesshin to fifteen people, so sign up early to make sure you get a place. On the day we gather, participants meet by 5 PM at the zendo (or at an assembly point closer to the trailhead or river put-in spot) to divvy up group food and supplies, eat our sack dinners, do some zazen, and go over the procedures for M&R sesshin. Come earlier than 5 PM for visiting time.

Sometimes we do backpacking M&R in an "easy wandering" mode, which entails fewer days walking under full packs than our standard trips. If you're only interested in one of these two modes, before signing up check with the coordinator about which sort of outing it will be. If you aren't certain whether you're up to it physically, ask what level of fitness the route will demand.

We take planning for these sesshin very seriously, aiming for places wild, relatively untraveled, and within reasonable driving range of the zendo. Usually we do a low desert, canyon, or coastal route in the spring and a high-elevation site in the summer. We make every effort to scout our routes in advance, so if you could assist in the scouting (or have destination ideas), please contact the coordinator.

## ROHATSU

The eight-day Rohatsu Sesshin commemorates the awakening of the historical Buddha. At Ring of Bone, we've always marked it as a working-person's sesshin, with weekday zazen from 4:30 to 6:30 AM, and 7 to 9 PM, including *dokusan* with Nelson Foster. Participants maintain their practice the rest of each weekday in their homes and workplaces. On the last night, we sit until midnight, and the next morning, sesshin closes with a walk to Bald Mountain and a sunrise ceremony there. Bring hats, gloves, warm footwear, rain gear, etc. in case of inclement weather. An informal breakfast and clean-up follow.

During the weekdays, Rohatsu attendance is open to all, with or without signing up. Over the weekend, however, we keep a full-time sesshin schedule, and those who wish to attend must sign up. Weekend participants usually leave after Sunday supper but are welcome to depart later (e.g., after Sunday evening or Monday morning zazen). Please work out your plans for this sesshin and specify your arrival and departure times for the weekend portion when you sign up.

We welcome people from out of the area to attend Rohatsu during the weekdays as well as on the weekend. Those who wish to stay for one or more of the weekdays, however, must either spend the time between morning and evening zazen away from the zendo, possibly at the home of a sangha member, or join group activities at the zendo (meals, additional zazen, light manual labor, etc.). When signing up from afar, be sure to indicate whether you're interested in staying for these weekday activities or will be arranging to spend those hours off-site. Just hanging out at the zendo isn't an option.

## ZAZENKAI

Zazenkai are one-day sittings that also require advance sign-up. The daily schedule is as follows:

Densho at 9:00 AM, sutras, zazen, bag lunch with sutras, silent break, zazen. Dharma assembly at 2:00 PM led by a sangha member, meadow kinhin, zazen. The Zazenkai will end at 3:50 PM with a closing ceremony followed by tea and cleanup.



# NOW IS THE TIME TO RENEW FOR 2019!

Your membership category might change each year. Choose the level of participation in ROBZ activities that you will commit to this coming year. *(If you are new to ROBZ, please get actively involved in ROBZ activities for a year and then apply for membership.)*

FORM OF PARTICIPATION	EXAMPLES	SUGGESTED CORE INVOLVEMENT
1. Weekly Zazen at ROBZ	See calendar for schedule	Twice a month
2. Work	Serving on the committees, preparing the newsletter, planning Mts. & Rivers sesshin, planning sesshin meals, shopping for sesshin food, attending workdays, special projects, being a pool leader, coordinating sesshin	Three days a year (approx. 24 hours) including at least one workday
3. Sesshin Attendance	Attending sesshin	Three to four times a year
4. Meetings	For the Practice of Business	At least 6 of the 9 or 10 Meetings for Business
5. Other	Sangha Circles, Dharma Workshops, Buddha's Birthday, Founders' Day	Three to four times a year



Please read the following to decide which membership category best fits your available time & intention:

- I will maintain an ongoing but infrequent pattern of participation in ROBZ activities. I may or may not consider ROBZ my home zendo. I declare myself an associate member for the upcoming year.
- I consider ROBZ to be my home zendo & will participate regularly in at least three of the five ways listed in the table above. This will include weekly zazen (twice a month or more), at least one sesshin during the year, or both. I declare myself a sustaining member for the upcoming year.
- I consider ROBZ to be my home zendo. I will attend at least six Meetings for the Practice of Business a year. In addition, I will participate in three of the other four activities listed above at the suggested core level of involvement. I have applied to the Practice and Care Committee for core membership and been accepted. I declare myself a core member for the upcoming year.
- I would like to just receive the newsletter.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

I prefer to be contacted by:  Phone  Email  Postal Service

I prefer to receive the newsletter by:  Email  Postal Service

It is important that you send this form along with a check payable to ROBZ (\$40 for membership or \$15 for newsletter only) to:

*Cindy Leeson, P. O. Box 676, Colfax, CA 95713*

## SESSHIN LEADER POOLS

Sangha members interested in a leadership position should contact the appropriate pool leader. If you are listed in a pool and your availability has changed, please advise the pool leader (named in **bold italic**).

TANTO: Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Allan Finlay, Reed Hamilton, Eric Larsen, Greg Leeson, Cindy Leeson, **Jenny Long**, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Jim Pyle, Masa Uehara

JIKIJITSU: Sheelo Bohm, Walt Carnahan, Kate Duroux, Suzanna Elkin, Allan Finlay, **Reed Hamilton**, Michael Keown, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, Greg Leeson, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Jim Pyle

JISHA: Sheelo Bohm, Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Allan Finlay, Reed Hamilton, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, **Greg Leeson**, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Chris Mulford, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Jim Pyle

INO: Johanna Bangeman, Judyth Collin, Kate Duroux, Anne Dutton, Anna Gold, Eric Larsen, **Cindy Leeson**, Greg Leeson, Elizabeth Lewis, Jenny Long, Andrew Mason, Steve Mulford, Nate Popik, Dana Turner, Masa Uehara

TENZO: Sheelo Bohm, **Judyth Collin**, Kate Duroux, Michael Keown, Andrew Mason, Chris Mulford

SESSHIN COORDINATOR: Sheelo Bohm, Judyth Collin, Reed Hamilton, **Michael Keown**, Eric Larsen, Cindy Leeson, Greg Leeson, Keith Melton, Steve Mulford, Jim Pyle, Masa Uehara, Jay Veazey, Lynne Westerfield

## DĀNA

Your generosity is a gift that not only supports ROBZ, but also the teacher, the Sangha, the larger Dharma community, and your own practice. If you would like, you may direct your gift to a particular fund or project, such as the Teachers Fund, General Fund, Building Fund, Sangha Assistance Fund, or make a split gift. All undesignated gifts will go into the general fund. You may send a check to:

Chris Mulford, ROBZ Bookkeeper,  
13224, Red Dog Road  
Nevada City, CA 95959

or donate on our website at:  
[ringofbonezendo.org](http://ringofbonezendo.org)

We appreciate your spirit of giving!

## GENERAL INQUIRIES & ADDRESS CHANGES

Please send general inquiries and changes of your contact information to:

Cindy Leeson, Membership Coordinator  
P.O. Box 676, Colfax, CA 95713  
530.346.7782  
[members@ringofbonezendo.org](mailto:members@ringofbonezendo.org)

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Submissions of original artwork, poetry, articles, photographs or anything else that might be of interest to the sangha are appreciated. Please send any materials to:

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The deadline for the next issue will be April 1st, 2019

If you would like to become more involved with creating this newsletter, please write to the editor at the above email address.



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Address Correction Requested  
RING OF BONEZENDO