



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE RINZAI-JI BOARD

Dear Sangha Members and Friends of Rinzai-ji,

As we welcome the warmth of Spring and rebirth of all things, I feel deep appreciation for this opportunity to see the transitions and transformations at Rinzai-ji. In these post-pandemic times we have welcomed back long-time sangha members for in-person practice together with new practitioners, new residents, and the new Interim-Temple-Director-in-Training, Sogen Yamamoto. After practicing at Shogen-ji Monastery in Gifu, Japan for eight years and brief residency in France, Gen-san is now at Rinzai-ji learning from and sharing responsibilities with Myokyo Judith McLean.

My deep gassho of gratitude to the donors who give financial support as well as those who give their time and energy to make this dharma practice available for all.

We continue to have on-line opportunities to practice, and have consolidated the Zoom links to one link for all Zazen practice times, easily available on the rinzaiji.org website. We encourage those able to come in person to experience the energy and support of sitting together in our beautiful Zendo.

Recent property improvements at Rinzai-ji include the completion of the back porch roof and gutter which functioned very well with the abundant winter rains. Gentei-an now has an upgraded electric service and storage shed with deck. Our thanks to Ron Berger who has overseen this work.

I look forward to taking advantage of the many opportunities offered to practice with you in the coming months. Please check the website and email updates for scheduled events.

Elisa Atwill

Sumie, Calligraphy and Commentary for 2023 by Yamakawa Sogen Roshi.
Translation by Jiun Varant Arslanian.



人人脚下有一坐具地

"Beneath the feet of each person
There is space for one sitting
mat."

There is a way and path for each
and every person and each and
every being.

Take a look at this cute rabbit, she
may be small but nobody can
take her place in this world.

INTERVIEW WITH YAMAMOTO SOGEN, 11 APRIL 2023

After the ceremony and luncheon for Hanamatsuri, Gen-san (G) kindly sat down with Paul Humphreys (P) for a conversation about his previous training and experience of practice outside of Japan. Thanks are due to Monica Morosi-Ordaz for suggesting questions and to Kris Matsuoka (K) for sitting with us to help with translation.

P. Greetings and welcome; of course, already you know how welcome you are. We are all very grateful to have you here. And today, we were able to appreciate your strong chanting during the ceremony for Hanamatsuri. Can you say something about how you learned to chant?

G. About five years ago, there was a founder's ceremony for Kanzan Egen at Shōgen-ji, and I had to study the eko to lead the chant. It was a lot of work!

P. Please tell us your full name and something about your family.

G. My family name is Yamamoto, my first name is Sogen [Sogen's father named Sogen after Yamamoto Sogen Roshi — Jiun]. I was born in Gifu Prefecture, not far from Shōgen-ji. I have a sister and also a brother, Sokin, who trained at Engaku-ji [in Kamakura] and is now training at Shōgen-ji.

P. When did you start training at Shōgen-ji and how old were you then?

G. I started in 2015 when I was 21.

P. Rinzai-ji students who have gone to practice at Shōgen-ji agree that the practice there is very challenging. What did you find most challenging during your training?

G. At first, when senior monks scolded us I did not understand; now I have a better understanding of why [they did that]. Also, eating is sometimes difficult. When the tenzo cooks too much food, we have to eat it all; [on the other hand] when there is not enough, that is all we get. The tenzo has a difficult job. Tenzo and inji might be the two most difficult jobs.

P. Have you served as Inji?

G. Yes when Yamakawa Roshi went to Dai Bosatsu [in 2017] to attend the memorial ceremony for Edo Shimano Roshi; we were there for two days.

P. Is it like sanzen all the time when you are inji?

G. Yes, all the time.

P. Is there anything you especially enjoy about zen practice?

G. I can say Rohatsu is special; very serious, it is very difficult—but almost anyone can do it if they have a strong will to finish.

P. Do you do yaza every night?

G. Yes, during seichu: November, December and January; then again from April 15 until July. During seikan, it is more relaxed, people can go to visit home for a week or two. But in general, there is no outside communication in either seichu or seikan.

P. What is your goal in being a monk?

G. My goal is to live the life of a monk without hesitation.

P. Before coming to Rinzai-ji, you were in France.

G. I spent three months at Shobo-ji [Centre Zen de la Falaise Verte (English, Green Cliff Zen Center) is a Myoshin-ji-affiliated temple about midway between Lyon and Avignon]. I sat in the zendo and sometimes led choka. I also visited a German zen monastery near Munich for ten days, [that was about] 45 minutes away on the Autobahn.

P. There is a song by the German band, Kraftwerk, about the Autobahn.

G. I only know about [the German band] Scorpions [laughter].

P. What are some of the things you like to do besides zen practice?

G. I used to play guitar, but not very much since entering the monastery. I also like baseball.

P. *You must be a fan of Otani-san, the star player of the Los Angeles Angels team.*

G. Yeah, also of Yoshida; he came this year to the U.S. to play with Boston.

K. *We're going to try to go watch a game together.*

P. *Wonderful! Last question, what experience do you hope to have in America?*

G. I would like to communicate with and get to know many people in the U.S. — people of different races and religions, including [not only Buddhism, but also] Islam and Christianity.

P. *Thank you very much Gen-san. We are lucky and very grateful to have you with us!*



Gen-san at Rinzai-ji, 11 April 2023

REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE AT SHŌGEN-JI FROM RINZAI-JI SANGHA MEMBERS

Monica Morosi-Ordaz

In late October of 2019, I had the remarkable opportunity to accompany Myoren to attend a seven-day sesshin at Shōgen-ji. Walking onto the grounds of the monastery was like stepping back

in time and immersing myself in ancient Japanese monastic life. Shōgen-ji is a place that preserves and practices Rinzai zen tradition, from cooking with wood-burning stoves to maintaining a compound of original, ornate wooden architecture that dates back over four centuries.

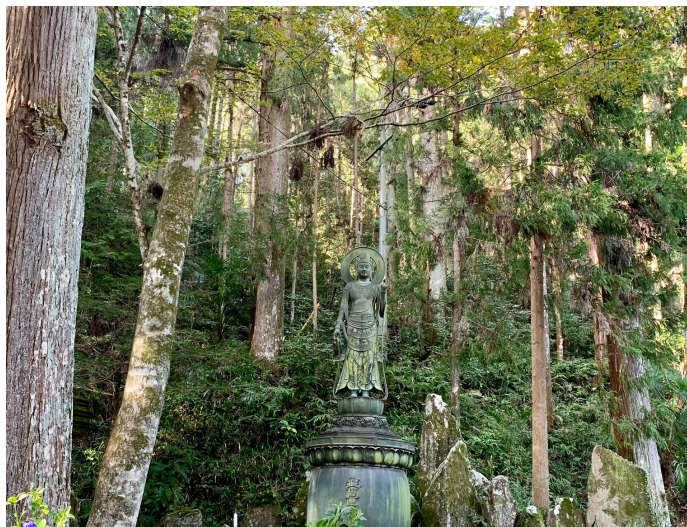
Each day for sesshin, we rose just before 3 a.m. to the frigid cold, put on our robes and wooden slippers, and made our way across the dark courtyard to the sutra hall guided by moonlight. For every meal, we ate rice porridge accompanied by a small serving of pickled vegetables and miso soup, with the occasional appearance of tofu. Samu was scheduled at least twice a day with each period lasting for a several hours. Mopping wooden floors with a towel tightly gripped in both hands and running across the room on all fours proved to be a very exhausting method of cleaning. Many hours were also spent sweeping the grounds surrounded by a lush, dense forest of Japanese maple, cedar, and cypress trees. Moss-covered rocks and austere, towering statues kept me company underneath the canopy of trees from which leaves fell gently to the ground as I swept.

We sat zazen for hours on end throughout the day. My legs ached from sitting still, and at times it felt as if my brain would implode from the pain. In the evening, the bone-chilling breeze would waft through the thin, parchment-lined windows of the zendo and we would sit shivering under our robes. One night, the jiki-jitsu noticed that some lay participants were cold (including myself) and had us run around the zendo perimeter in circles to warm up. Some rounds lasted longer than an hour of running, and we continued this practice almost every evening.

With much resistance, I had to learn to surrender personal preferences and comfort to persist through moments of difficult struggle. On the last day of the sesshin, we were granted our first shower since arriving, and I relished the chance to enjoy a warm bath and clean clothes.

Every day brought a fresh set of physical, mental, and emotional challenges. I found myself manifesting a deeper practice and cycling through

various emotions and states ranging from helplessness to joyfulness, misery to awe. Shogen-ji was an incredibly tough experience that nonetheless left me humbled, grateful, and profoundly inspired.



Sesshin at Shogen-ji, October 2019

Julianna Raye

Part of my intention in going to Shōgen-ji temple was to ‘play my edge.’ I knew that conditions would push me beyond my window of tolerance. I wasn’t sure whether that would be too far or not, but I was willing to find out, come what may.

When I arrived at Shōgen-ji, I was greeted by Jiun the head monk. We had tea together, and I gave my gifts which included some homemade cranberry bread, coffee, and handkerchiefs for Yamakawa Roshi together with a temple donation. A few hours later Jiun tested positive for Covid. Needless to say, that changed the course of life at the temple. For the next two days the morning started two hours later than the usual 3 a.m. Then we had one normal day during which the work was intense. Four monks are responsible for the care of a massive monastery as well as the care and upkeep of the temple grounds which are regularly visited by outsiders. It’s a huge job requiring rigorous labor, and on that day, I got to participate in that with the monks.

The only thing I could compare it to would be a high-intensity fitness workout lasting all day long. And the monks do this every day—I am in awe of the monks’ strength! At one point after six hours of sweeping, I had the thought “This is the hardest thing I’ve ever done.” Particularly challenging was being barefoot in the cold mornings and washing down all the wooden walkways and steps. At the end of the third day I had a fever and was sent into isolation. Myōren—who was my sponsor—also came down with a fever that day and then tested positive for COVID. When another monk tested positive, that made four of us in isolation. Fortunately the virus spared Yamakawa Roshi and the other three monks.

I was sequestered in a small Zendo away from the main building. Strangely, I could only see the kindness of these conditions. The zendo had a kitchen and a bath, and since there is no heat in the buildings, it seemed like a luxury taking a hot bath at night and going to sleep warm. Every day the monks brought me their daily food, which was exquisite. (The local farmers donate fresh produce to the monastery.) In these and other ways, I felt extraordinarily lucky.

I look at the intensity of the monks’ lives—the rigors of their daily existence and of their sesshin training—and am in awe of their fortitude. I am humbled, and even as my intent was to assimilate, it felt instead as if I was being met at the level of my abilities.

At Shōgen-ji, I became acutely aware of the kindness of my conditions. I became acutely aware of how most of the world lives in hardship. And I became acutely aware of the need to contribute with ever more wholehearted commitment to my practice.

Piercesare Grimaldi

In the spring of 2019, I embarked on a most inspiring journey to the Shōgen-ji Zen temple in Japan with my friend and Rinzai-ji shika at that time, Myoren Yasukawa. The temple is nestled

amidst the wild mountains of Gifu prefecture, and my goal was to participate in a samu sesshin, which is a sesshin dedicated to work.

Every day we woke up at three a.m. to begin the day with chanting, meditation, and engaging in samu, ending with yaza until the deep of the night. Initially, the experience was daunting as I was immersed in a culture that was steeped in tradition and discipline. The rules were many, and I could hardly understand the directions in Japanese. Meditation was long and I never felt my body aching so much.

However, as the samu sesshin progressed, I began to appreciate the true challenge of the situation. It pushed me to my limits, testing my physical endurance, mental fortitude, and emotional resilience. And it was through this challenging experience that I began to truly understand the meaning of the teaching I had heard so many times: "everything is the practice."

HELPING AT RINZAI-JI UPDATES FROM MYŌKYŌ

For the last six months, it has been an honor and a gift for me to be able to help out at Rinzai-ji—an honor to be back in residence at the place where I spent three years of my training life with Jōshū Rōshi, and a gift from my Montreal Enpuku-ji community to allow me to be at Rinzai-ji during alternate months.

Life here has been very busy, what with maintaining both the Rinzai-ji in-person and the Enpuku-ji online zazen schedules, organizing and conducting two 3-day zazenkai and one 5-day sesshin, hosting guest teacher Ursula Jarand Rōshi, training zendo officers, taking care of office duties, offering newcomer's orientation, and stewarding the property, much of this with the tremendous help of both Elisa Atwill, the Rinzai-ji Board Chair, and Jion Ned Shepard.

The schedule of zazen and work from before COVID, maintained for many years by Myōren

Zen-ni, Temple Director, was reinstated recently with the arrival of Sōgen Yamamoto, from Shōgen-ji Sodo in Gifu Prefecture, Japan. Gen-san's coming was the result of much work on the part of the Rinzai-ji Board, over the course of two years. Gen-san has been a tremendous help in these first two weeks with zendo, meal and ceremony protocol, and an inspiration as jikijitsu (meditation leader) and eno (chant leader).



Welcome Lunch for Sogen, 2 April 2023

Some different activities have been added to Rinzai-ji's schedule: We have started to hold the monthly memorial service, Reigetsu-ki, for Jōshū Rōshi on the 26th and 27th of the month. I have started conversing with Myōren's two tea teacher friends, at her urging, to plan first a Tea Room re-opening at Rinzai-ji and then to organize monthly tea classes.

Community-wise, we have had a number of wonderful gatherings, both for ceremony luncheons after Daruma-ki, Jodo-ē, and Nirvana-ki, Samu and Lunch Saturdays, and Tea with Myōren (during her visit in February) and a Welcome Lunch for Gen-san - all warm, well-attended, with delicious offerings.

We have a full schedule with zazenkai and sesshin planned through the end of 2023. We also have a number of new practitioners from the neighborhood, which is an indicator that the 'hood is changing. Relationships with different Zen

groups—one two blocks away as well as some Soto Zen Centers and Rinzai Zen Centers farther away and the Shingon temple in downtown Los Angeles—are blossoming.

The grounds are burgeoning with fresh growth from the winter rains and much weeding has been accomplished during samu. The gardens out at the street are returning to the original intention of a rock (rather than weed) garden aesthetic, and the courtyard is slowly but surely being groomed and receiving new plantings.

I look forward to helping Rinzai-ji in whichever way is deemed important for the next few months, and to continued good relations with the local sangha, the greater Rinzai-ji sangha, the Board and Gen-san.

PASSAGES

Haruyo Sasaki (1930 – 2023) by Seisen and Seiun Quintero

It is with a sad heart that we inform you that Haruyo Sasaki passed away on April 7th, 2023, at Mission Community Hospital in Van Nuys, California. Haruyo Sasaki, *nee* Yamada, was born in Nagoya Prefecture, Japan on November 21, 1930. Those of us from Joshu Sasaki's sangha knew Haruyo as the Roshi's wife and a longtime student of Buddhism.

Haruyo married Joshu Sasaki shortly after moving to America in the early 1970's. Thereafter, in support of her husband's teaching, and in support of the Rinzai-ji sangha, Haruyo worked often as Roshi's translator for teisho, ceremonies, lectures and meetings. Between 2002 and 2006 she translated some 190 teishos on the Diamond Sutra given by Roshi, chapter-by-chapter, at the end of his teaching career. Between 1985 and 1992, Haruyo served as translator for more than 250 teishos on the Rinzai Roku as well.



Haruyo is remembered by hundreds of people who listened intently, in the midst of dai-sesshin, to her voice as a translator. While she was widely appreciated in the sangha, she was always a very private person. Among her few close friends were



Teishin Eunice Tropper (deceased 2016), and Caesar Humberto Plaza. Haruyo lived for most of the last two decades in Desert Hot Springs where she enjoyed the unique climate and the hot pools nearby. She swam daily and from time-to-time visited Seiun and Seisen next door for tea and informal concerts by their children.

Haruyo loved classical music and during her years in college sang in the chorus for a performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

By a serendipitous turn, Haruyo relocated at the start of the pandemic to Nikkei Senior Gardens, a Japanese assisted-living facility in Los Angeles. Bill Flynn reports that she was able to live out her final years happily there among Japanese-speaking people of her own age.

A memorial service is scheduled for April 29 at Rinzai-ji.

Kendō Ric Hunter by Myōkyō

Kendō Ric Hunter, long-time student and lay monk of Jōshū Rōshi, died on January 14, 2023, at the age of ninety-three. Both an architect and artist of extraordinary works, Kendō was the founder of the Victoria Zen group in Victoria, BC, Canada in 1974.

After practicing in Japan, and meeting Jōshū Rōshi, he started zazen with people in Victoria and invited the Rōshi to Victoria. Kendō had a long association with Rinzai-ji, Bodhi Manda Zen Center, and Zen Centre of Vancouver, as well as a practice relationship with Enpuku-ji Zen Centre up to the last month of his life. Myōkyō Ōsho travelled to Victoria, BC from Rinzai-ji to hold a memorial service for Kendō at his natural burial site, together with his close family, on February 12.

Dale Carter by Ron Berger

Dale and I were tan-neighbors at my first sesshin in summer of 1975. At the close of the sesshin, we commiserated on the rigors of zendo decorum during the ride back to Cimarron [now Rinzai-ji] in LA. Turns out, we were both professional

carpenters, so there was a bond right away. In the years that followed, our paths crossed in practice at Mount Baldy, and we often were assigned to work on projects together.

We stayed in touch even after Dale left the Zen Center in the early 1980's, settling first in Carpinteria, one of the seaside communities north of Ventura, and later in Mendocino near the mouth of the Navarro River. It seems Dale always wanted to be where he could smell the ocean. After Dale moved to Brazil, we lost touch until last October when I learned he was coming to California to see his daughter Mercedes. Two weeks later I was talking to my old friend at Mercedes' house after our not having seen each other in over 20 years. He was the same Dale—humorous, intelligent, opinionated, but always modest. I even got to hear him say a few words in Portuguese.

[On Saturday 15 April, Koyo Osho served as Doshi for a memorial ceremony for Dale Carter at Mount Baldy Zen Center. Dale's daughter Mercedes was among family and friends who were present in-person at the ceremony.]



Newsletter Committee & Friends:

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MYŌKYŌ JUDITH MCLEAN
ALBERT LIAO

WHY ZAZENKAI? BY MYOSHO GINNY MATTHEWS

Zazenkai is the term we use at Rinzai-ji Zen Center for a short retreat, typically one to three days. Sesshin is the term for a longer retreat of four to seven days. As a fifty-year Zen practitioner in the lineage of Jōshū Roshi, I have found retreat to be essential for a balanced and renewed Zen practice in the midst of what is referred to in Buddhism as “householder” life. Retreat is equally as valuable for the beginning Zen student as for the seasoned practitioner. To step away from the distractions that are particular to our modern life—the screens, messaging, media as well as the age-old needs of jobs, families, everyday chores and errands—to experience for a short time the monastic world of silence, stillness and simplicity has the potential to renew and reset us.

In community but not needing to interact, we are given the opportunity—through the practices of meditation, both sitting and walking, chanting, simple work assignments, silent communal meals—to settle our restless minds and enter into a clearer relationship with ourselves, as well as the world in which we find ourselves, at just this moment.

We encourage anyone who feels drawn to this practice of retreat to consider attending one of the zazenkai offered at Rinzai-ji Zen Center (please see below). Setting aside a day or more of rest from one’s everyday life is an age-old practice in many spiritual traditions. Rinzai-ji is fortunate to be able to offer this opportunity to take ‘time out of time’ with bells, clappers and bows accompanying our inwardly directed journey through silence and stillness.

News of War

By Teresa Bresnan

I wake these mornings with dread
 Dreams of white phosphorus bombs
 Cities demolished, HIMARS rocket blasts
 Tears, cowering pets, dead bodies
 Nature ravaged, the Sprites traumatized
 Life destroyed.

Where do I find refuge from this death and destruction?

Where is my indestructible shelter?

Only my One True Nature

In the space between breaths

In the sound of the Compassionate One

Dissolving this karmic vision of never ending illusion

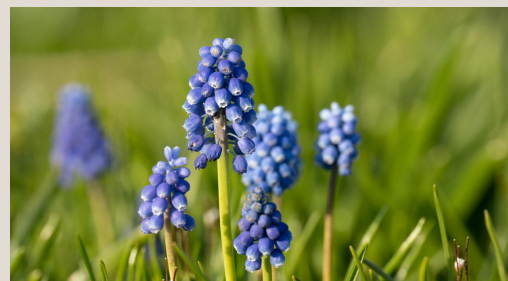
I find some peace in That,

Where I can, when I can.

And—I am so sorry for your misfortune—

May you find happiness and its causes.

November 2022



Practice Schedule at Rinzai-ji

MORNING ZENDO:

WEDNESDAY - SATURDAY MORNING 6:00 - 7:30 AM

EVENING ZENDO:

WEDNESDAY – FRIDAY, 7:00 - 8:30 PM

SUNDAY PROGRAM:

10:00 AM - 11:30 PM

SAMU (WORK PERIOD):

WEDNESDAY – FRIDAY, 10 – 11:30 AM & 2:30 – 4 PM

RETREATS AND GUEST PRACTICE LEADERS AT RINZAI-JI, MAY – AUGUST 2023



May 18-21. Zazenkai with Shaku Kōjyū Oshō

Shaku Kōjyū Oshō returns to lead our May Zazenkai. It will take place from Thursday, May 18 to Sunday May 21st. The retreat will be in person only and will include chanting, zazen, samu, and Dharma talks. For more information and to register, please visit the Rinzai-ji website.

Shaku Kojyu is the abbot of the Daishu-in West Rinzai Zen temple in rural Northern California. He came to Daishu-in West in 2007 and was ordained in Kyoto the following spring. He practiced traditional Rinzai Zen at the training halls in Daitoku-ji and Kosho-ji for ten years before returning to America.

July 21-23. Hō on Sesshin with Chigan Rōshi

Chigan Rōshi returns to lead the Hō on memorial Sesshin honoring the Founder of Rinzai-ji, Denkyō-shitsū Kyozan Jōshū Rōshi from Friday, July 21st to Sunday, July 23rd. This event will be Rinzai-ji's primary celebration of our beloved teacher and we hope all of the Sangha who are able will participate. It will be a hybrid online and in-person retreat. Chigan Rōshi will be joining remotely and will be offering virtual dokusan/practice interviews and dharma talks.

Chigan-kutsu Kyo-On Dokurō Roland Jaeckel is the teacher at Charles River Zen, a Rinzai Zen community practicing in the greater Boston area. Chigan Rōshi received inka shomei, Dharma Transmission, in the Japanese Rinzai Zen Hakuin lineage and is a Dharma heir of Shinge-shitsu Roko Sherry Chayat Rōshi of the Zen Studies Society. He also received Temple Dharma Transmission from Denkyo-shitsu Kyōzan Jōshū Sasaki Rōshi at Rinzai-ji, in Los Angeles.

July 31- August 5th. Sesshin with Jiun Arslanian

Jiun Zenji will be returning to Rinzai-ji for a 5-day, in-person Sesshin. The Sesshin will begin on July 31st at 4pm and end on August 5th at 9pm. It will include zazen, chanting, samu and formal meals.

Jiun Varant Arslanian Zenji was born in Beirut, Lebanon and raised in Southern California. In 2005, after completing graduate studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada he moved to Japan and spent a year training at the Nagaoka Zenjuku in Kyoto. Since then he has been an unsui at Heirin-sodo in Saitama and Shogen-sodo in Gifu where he is presently the head monk.

DANA PARAMITA

With deep bows, we acknowledge contributions from the following individuals and institutions in 2022.

Agnes Lin
 Richard Anderson
 Andreas Zunker
 Ashley Frith
 Brian Buntz
 Charles M Billingsley
 Chigan Dokurō Roland Jaeckel &
 Shūkō Marlene Rubin
 Dale Jaffe
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 Patrick Lavey
 Soko Paul Humphreys &
 Koshin Susan Crozier
 Paul Willis
 Piercesare Grimaldi
 Roy Rico
 Seido & Shunko Clark
 Stanley Edmondson
 Tadashi Shōei & Toshiko Higashide
 Terence Ford
 William Flynn
 Yvonne Kossman

EXCERPT FROM A TEISHŌ BY KYŌZAN JŌSHŪ RŌSHI ON THE RINZAI ROKU, DISCOURSES, SECTION VIII*

As you know, the master Jōshū, in response to the question of whether a dog had Buddha nature or not, simply said "*mu*." We see this in the *Jōshū Roku* (*Record of Jōshū*) and in the beginning of the *Hekigan Roku* (*Blue Cliff Record*). They say that this *mu* is not something standing in contrast with *u*; in other words, it's not nothingness in the dualism of nothing and something, or non-being and being—it's beyond that. This *mu* is beyond being and non-being, beyond nothing and something. It brings both of them together and goes beyond them. People say that when this *mu*, this nothingness, splits apart we get nothing and something, or non-being and being. Often the first kōan in Zen is, "How do you realize this *mu*," this *mu* that encompasses both being and non-being? So they say, you must have this experience of *mu*, without heaven, without earth, without life, without death. But if you say, "I've had this experience and therefore have completed my Zen practice," you are greatly mistaken.

* From Chapter 5 of *Manifesting Zen: Master Dharma Talks from Mt. Baldy* by Kyōzan Jōshū Sasaki. Edited with an Introduction by Kendō Hal Roth. Los Angeles: Rinzaï-ji Press. 2022. To learn more about or purchase Rinzaï-ji publications, visit <https://rinzaïji-press.org/>.



News of Rinzai-ji — Spring 2023

*Bows to readers who have called attention to errors
for which corrections appear below*

Page 2. Gen-san is named after Yamakawa Sogen Roshi; Gen-san actually served as inji for Yamakawa Roshi for one year, including the two days at Dai-bosatsu.

Page 7. The memorial service for Haruyo Sasaki will be held at 11:30 on Sunday 30 April at Rinzai-ji.

Page 10. With apologies for any errors or omissions that remain, corrections are included within the list of donors that appears below:

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Brian Buntz
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Shūkō Marlene Rubin
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