



## ZEN CHALLENGE



As you may have seen on YouTube, Zen River participated in Zen Challenge, an online zazen programme organized by the Soto School. The event was led by Sojiji, where some five hundred people gathered and sat zazen in the Hatto. Many others also came together at Eiheiji, Toshoji, and some other Japanese temples. To represent the international departments of the Soto School, four temples outside of Japan were invited to join, and Zen River was one of them. After an introduction to the participants, there were lectures, a ceremony, and—most importantly—a forty-minute period of zazen together. It was a new and inspiring way to connect with Dharma friends all over the world. We could even see the face of Tessa at Toshoji! The whole event was moderated in Japanese, yet as well as the name Zen River we could hear Uithuizen clearly mentioned. How could our far-off little village have ever thought she would feature in a Japanese programme?

## SPICY SESAME-SEAWEED CABBAGE

3 tablespoons (15 grams) dried cut wakame seaweed  
250 g tofu  
2 cloves garlic  
20 g (2 tablespoons) ginger  
1–2 green onions  
250 g mushrooms

Dash of chilli flakes  
A few stems of fresh coriander (cilantro)  
800 g sweetheart cabbage  
2 tablespoons sesame oil divided  
2 tablespoons soy sauce, divided

then cut it into thin strips.

- \* Roughly chop the fresh coriander.

- \* In a non-stick frying pan, heat up half the sesame oil and stir-fry the tofu. When it becomes crispy add a tablespoon of soy sauce and stir-fry until it evaporates. Set aside.

- \* In the same frying pan, heat the remaining sesame oil and fry the garlic, ginger, green onions, and chilli flakes. When the garlic turns golden, add the seaweed and mushrooms and stir fry for a few minutes until the mushrooms begin to release their juices. Add the remaining soy sauce.

- \* In a pan of boiling salted water, cook the cabbage for one minute. Drain well.

- \* Combine the cabbage with the seaweed and mushrooms, then fold in the fried tofu. Just before serving, put in the fresh coriander. Adjust the seasoning to taste, adding more sesame oil and soy sauce as needed.

- \* Serve alongside rice.

- \* Cover the seaweed with water and let it soak until it fully expands, about 15 minutes. Drain, rinse, and then chop into bite-size pieces.

- \* Medium-dice the tofu.

- \* Peel and roughly mince the garlic and ginger.

- \* Slice the green onions into rings.

- \* Clean and slice the mushrooms.

- \* Cut the cabbage into quarters, remove the hard core,

# 即身是仏 SOKU SHIN ZE BUTSU

## THIS VERY BODY IS BUDDHA

BY TENKEI COPPENS

When Master Baso (709-788) was asked “What is Buddha?”, he famously replied “Mind is Buddha.” And it prompted the questioner to suddenly have a deep enlightenment experience. Several variations on that answer were recorded later, such as “Mind is not Buddha” and “No mind, no Buddha.” When great masters say something, their purpose is not to be found so much in the literal meaning of the words they use as in the effect those words may produce. In fact, the answers Zen masters give to questions—as we can see in the koan records—are often quite baffling, and they are primarily meant to cut through all kinds of preconceived ideas and dualistic notions, and to thereby reveal our true nature.

My current favourite among these classic statements by Zen masters is “This very body is Buddha.” Just saying it out loud right away makes me perk up. Which body? Whose body? What body is really meant here? You may have become used to the expressions above that identify Buddha with mind, and that this mind is ungraspable yet extends in all directions simultaneously. But does that also count for the body? Apparently, it does. While there may have been earlier statements of this principle, the last two lines of Zazen Wasan (Song of Zazen) by Master Hakuin (1686-1769) put the matter very clearly:

*This very place is the Lotus Land of Purity,  
This very body is the Body of the Buddha.*

Interestingly, the kanji (Chinese character) for body (身) is pronounced in Japanese the same way as the kanji for mind (心): ‘shin’. Of course, ‘mind’ in ‘This very mind is Buddha’ does not refer only to the mind that we usually identify with—namely, our cognitive faculty. In this case, ‘shin’ (心) has more the connotation of the heart or core of our very being, the deepest layer of our consciousness. According to Yogacara teaching, we can distinguish eight or nine such layers, and cognition is only number six. So plain thinking or even deep reflection will never get us to the deepest layer. In Zen we employ the method of turning our own light inward to experience this core directly. And if we really manage to do this, all notions of body and mind are forgotten. Or, one could say, we verify who we really are before any such distinctions arise.

This means that the word ‘body’ in ‘This very body is Buddha’ does not refer to the body we usually identify with. It seems that, just as our mind happens to not really be ‘our’ mind but the mind of all beings, our body is not really ‘our’ body but the body of all beings. It is important to remember here that according to Buddhist masters such as Dogen Zenji, even so-called insentient beings such as mountains and rivers are continuously expressing the Dharma. This makes for a highly intriguing world.

Everything and everyone are part of a single, undividable organic and dynamic organism, in which we are intimately interconnected yet in which we all play our own specific role—even though we might be totally unaware of it.

Moreover, this unlimited connectivity applies not only to space but also to time. According to the fourteenth-century Japanese master Muso Soseki, the enlightened person never regards the mind alone as eternal but sees the body too as eternal. That implication is that the vital energy of our life has never been born, and therefore will never die. It just goes through endless rounds of transformation. Lately I have come to think of being born, living, and dying as a continuous recycling process. We may turn to dust one day but not to ‘nothing.’ Who knows what will be next? Some life or lives will have to deal with the karma we pass on—mentally and physically. Energy simply does not die. Muso Soseki quotes a student of Master Dahui who saw a painting of a corpse on a wall and composed the following verse:

*The corpse is there, but where is the person?  
I see that the spirit is not with the skin-bag.*

According to Muso Soseki, Dahui disapproved of the verse and wrote one of his own:

*This corpse itself is the person.  
The spirit is the skin-bag; the skin-bag is the spirit.*

### KARMIC SEEDS

According to Yogacara teaching, karmic seeds have been planted in the deepest layers of our consciousness from all kinds of different sources throughout the ages: from the life we lived up till now, from our parents, and from many lives that were lived before we were born. We have absorbed experiences, feelings, thoughts, and ideas in highly intricate patterns, and these act like seeds that come to fruition whenever causal conditions allow them to do so. Those seeds may manifest as physical marks, psychological characteristics, habitual patterns, and belief systems. As we cling to some of these and try hard to ignore others, we limit our perspective both on ourselves and on the world around us, and this has the effect of obstructing the creative energy of our all-embracing and timeless Buddha body.

Karmic seeds are not just a mental affair: they are energies that materialize in all shapes and forms that often literally engrain themselves in our physical constitution. Altogether, this means that our practice should include a strong corporeal component. We do not only need a ‘change of mind’—we also need to change our physical being in the world and to leave behind habituated patterns of behaviour that tend to make us less and less flexible and

receptive as we grow older. The fact that this very body is Buddha implies that it really is the source of tremendous wisdom and compassion. Nonetheless, it is clear that as well as mental transformation, some physical training will be necessary to unlock those enlightening qualities.

At Zen River we follow the well-known Latin dictum *Mens sana in copore sano*, 'a healthy mind in a healthy body', and have made taking care of our physical well-being an element of training that demands special attention—on a daily basis. Besides a well-balanced diet, it is clear that the long hours of sitting meditation need to be alternated with some forms of physical work and exercise. Fortunately, the rural environment of the temple allows plenty of opportunity for walks, cycling, and running sessions. And, as we will see, working closely together on different projects and in different settings—especially during ritual observances—provides us with valuable cues as to how to move and go about the daily choreography of our life. Something in our very body can be woken up to highly panoramic forms of attention.

On a superficial level we all are, of course, aware of the innate intelligence of our body. It sends us highly relevant information about inner or outer circumstances we find ourselves in—often before we so-called 'understand' what is actually happening. We do not need to 'know' all the various processes that make us feel hungry or thirsty, alert or sleepy: our body gives us very clear signals that we experience directly. And this can also apply to the outward situations we encounter. Just looking at someone's face or gestures can give us hints as to how to deal with them. In fact, much of our communication with the world around us is non-verbal—as if indeed our body does extend far beyond our skin.

Once, as a youngster on a hitch-hiking adventure in north Africa, I ended up looking at the walls of Marrakesh for a long time and I could not resist touching them. At some point, it was as if those walls really became part of

me—as if their skin and my own were the skin of the same body. It was a very tactile and sensuous experience. Later I learned that those walls are adobe structures, consisting of mud applied by hand and dried in the sun. And it is as if that manual labour, particularly the stroking of many hands on the outer surface, could still be felt. It moved me deeply, and the image has stayed with me very vividly over the years.

Ideally speaking, we would experience such connections with our physical environment all the time and be able to receive messages even from far-distant places that are just as intimate as feelings of hunger or thirst. This would prompt us to respond to situations directly without distorting forms of mental or physical conditioning. Artists, musicians, and sports people often develop a motoric memory—at some point their bodies just seems to know what to do. Indeed, we could never drive a car without that kind of intelligence. And this goes for many other things too, even if they happen totally unexpectedly. Have you not, once in a while, been able to catch a cup that fell of a table just before it hit the ground—and before any thought or judgement came up?

#### THE ROLE OF RITUAL

In his brilliant book *Karma*, Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche makes one of the most interesting points regarding realization that I have yet come across: *To be enlightened is to be really aware of both internal states of mind and external situations, and to see what it is that we should do.* Apparently, we have it in us to be completely in tune with the all-inclusive life of the Buddha. But, unfortunately, we happen to harbour a lot of conditioning (often unconscious) not only in how we use our mind but also in the way we use our body. He writes, *"There is physical karma, whereby the body stores physical karmic imprints in the body, just as the mind stores mental imprints"* and *"... that's why many physical purification practices have been developed."*

## Finding Zen River

Writings from 1999 – 2002



Anton Tenkei Coppens & Tamara Mysho Gabeysh

## FINDING ZEN RIVER

Although nowadays it may sometimes seem like Zen River Temple has always been around, a challenging journey preceded its founding in 2002. Our new paperback *Finding Zen River* details this journey. Through their personal letters and colour pictures of the time, we get to intimately follow Tenkei and Myoho through the United States, Japan, and the Netherlands. They leave their teacher Genpo Roshi's Kanzeon Zen Center in Salt Lake City for Kirigayaji, Tokyo. Then, under the guidance of their mentor Hojo-san, they explore Japanese Zen as it is practised in Japan, with all its surprises and culture shocks for Western practitioners. Finally, they arrive in the Netherlands with just two suitcases and a vision. It still takes a long and challenging search before the Buddha statue gifted by Hojo-san will find its proper home. Fortunately, at each step of the way, plenty of people appear to help. *Finding Zen River* is a celebration of all the help and hard work that went into creating one of the first residential Zen centres in a country where Buddhism is still in its infancy. The book can be ordered via our website or at our reception.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, turning one's own light inward is described as a supreme meditation method for purifying the mind. By intensely questioning what it is that sees, hears, feels, and smells, we can unbind ourselves from all kinds of projections and ideas, and start seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling the world around us with an undiluted consciousness. The sutra records how many bodhisattvas came to deep realization using only one of the sense faculties in their meditation yet ended up purifying all of them.

In an atonement ceremony such as Fusatsu, rather than focussing on the mind, we very much focus on the body and, in fact, all participants together try to function as one body. It is a group meditation in action and, among other procedures, includes the making of many full prostrations. Over the ages, bowing has proven to be a highly effective practice for shedding awkward posture patterns, purifying our physical system, and enabling us to move more naturally. During the ceremony, the officiant also conducts *shasui* (a ritual purification of water in a little bowl) and then an attendant uses that bowl to sprinkle the room in all directions with the purified water, transforming it into a spotless Dharma realm. And the chanting—starting with the Verse of Atonement and the invocation of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, followed by the Four Vows and a eulogy on the Three Treasures—can bring us closer together, breaking down artificial personal barriers.

Personally, I am always amazed how easily Fusatsu manages to extend our sense of body and mind and make us together land in the timelessness of this very moment. It is an age-old ritual that simply defies categories of past, present, and future. Of course, it could be conducted in an informal setting, yet the forms into which it has grown over the ages gives it extra momentum. At Zen River we pretty much follow a traditional format, most of us dressed in similar gear, using well-tested choreographies. And

when I look around during the ceremony, I have a sense that we could be anywhere and at any period. For sure, we are taken out of our habitual comfort zone and are given a chance to identify with all those who have performed this ceremony before. If you could see a picture of the whole event, it would almost be difficult to guess when it was made.

Some years ago, I joined a similar ceremony in the Chinese Buddhist temple in Utrecht, with which we maintain close connections. There were differences but the effect was pretty much the same. There just seems to be an advantage to have a set format that we all agree upon, and then follow it to the best of our ability—however alien it may feel at first. In fact, I think that it is precisely forms that are alien to us that can most help us in seeing through our conditioning more clearly. That is probably why traveling, entering new situations, and meeting new people can be such an important part of spiritual practice. Having to learn to speak another language can also be a great asset in that respect. When living in the US, I often became painfully aware of my Dutch conditioning, both mental and physical, while in Japan I was surprised to see how easily I would get stuck in my American conditioning. And then during the international Vesak celebrations in Bangkok that I have attended, at times I have felt oddly Japanese. Even just having breakfast in all these different places was already quite an eye-opener.

Perhaps the function of ritual is not really one of learning particular forms, because if we take them too seriously they can become a new norm or dogma and can stagnate and petrify. Performing ritual is more about how certain forms can free us from both our mental and our physical habitual patterns. Maezumi Roshi loved koan training, yet he once stated quite strongly that we are not supposed to study koans but rather to use koans to study our life. I would like to say the same thing about ritual practice. We



## NEW ANTIQUE BUTSUDAN

One of our strong connections in Uithuizen is the Antiekboerderij (Antique Farm). Roshis Tenkei and Myoho often go there to buy presents, usually Delft Blue or Makkum ceramics, especially for Japanese guests. They became good friends with the owner, Erik Boerma, whose expertise and enthusiasm is really contagious. When Hojo-san, Otani Roshi, Suzuki Roshi, and other dignitaries from Japan stayed at Zen River, they were also very happy to visit the Antique Farm, enjoy a coffee with Erik, and come back with vases, plates, and once even a big cuckoo clock.

A little while ago, Erik bought the inventory of an old farm that included an original beautiful Japanese Butsudan. He did not quite feel like just putting it up for sale in his shop, and he asked Tenkei and Tammy if they could perhaps find a nice home for it in Zen River. Delighted with such a precious gift, they brought it over and, after some time of researching the options, found the reception office was the most suitable destination. The Butsudan needed some repair and to have lights installed but it now radiates its energy directly to anyone who enters there. Very welcome!!

## SHOSAIMYO EP



Lately, Tammy Myoho Roshi has been working on a new musical project called *ShoSaiMyo* which will be released soon. The project consists of two EP's that feature ambient sounds of sutras and dharanis combining different layers of her voice and guitar. She chose the artistic name Myōra, a combination of Myo from Myoho and Ra from Tamara.

The tracks are being produced by Brad Ryudo Stock from Salt Lake City. Brad is also a student of Genshin Roshi, Tammy's mother. He stayed in touch with Genshin when she returned to England in 2006 after becoming ill. To her surprise, Tammy discovered he was a musician, producer, and owner of Painted Sky Studios.

She is now collaborating with him to create alternative arrangements of her songs, with Brad playing instruments and samples, resulting in surprising sounds. The tracks include Daihishin Dharani, Jizo Shingon Dharani, and a riveting version of the ShoSaiMyo. Initially shared through SoundCloud as acoustic recordings made over the past six years ([soundcloud.com/tamaramyoho](https://soundcloud.com/tamaramyoho)), the first EP will be released on June 21st exclusively through Bandcamp @ <https://myora22.bandcamp.com/album/shosaimyo-ep-part-1> All net proceeds go towards supporting Zen River. Enjoy!

practise ceremonial forms to clarify who we really are—in this case on a very physical level.

In that sense meditation and ritual can be seen as complementary counterparts. There is no sharp dividing line between the two and they are essentially one. However, meditation is primarily geared towards purifying the mind, and ritual towards purifying the body. Coming from the understanding that we do not need to seek the real but only to extinguish false views, both approaches can inspire us to recognize our very mind and our very body as the mind and body of the Buddha. And, just as we can learn to turn all everyday-life situations into a meditation practice, we can learn to turn those very same situations into a ritual practice.

As we start dealing with ourselves, others, and the circumstances we encounter in more creative ways, our whole life lights up. We do not only give ourselves but also others

and the things around us more of a chance to shine. Saving all beings then implies inviting everything and everyone to speak their own true voice, free from all kinds of habitual conditioning. Traditionally, the buildings and grounds that together make a temple are seen as the body of the Buddha, so that in itself is already a great place to start. How do we take care of it? And how can we make it expand further and further?

A newcomer at one retreat we did some time ago wrote to me that the most important thing she learned was to open doors for other participants. She said it changed her life. Other people have discovered connection and intimacy through such everyday rituals as cutting carrots, washing the dishes, or mopping the floor. Thus, we start with ourselves and then invigorate the life of the Buddha that we all share throughout space and time. ❀

• Edited by Paul Taium Davis

## TEACHING OF THE GREAT MOUNTAIN

In a few weeks, Zen River will release a new edition of *Teaching of the Great Mountain*, *Zen Talks* by Taizan Maezumi. This book was published in 2001 by Tuttle but has been out of print for a long time. Fortunately, we were granted permission to publish it again. As time passes, the value and relevance of Maezumi Roshi's teaching seems only to increase. In this rapidly changing world, it is such a relief to find a clear articulation of authentic Buddhist practice that connects us with masters and students from across the ages. Edited and put into a poetic format by Tenkei Roshi, Maezumi Roshi's intimate teisho reveal the core of our human calling and, perhaps paradoxically, turn out to be totally disarming and highly reliable at the same time.

This new edition is essentially the same as the one previously published, except for the cover, pictures, and some details in lay-out and punctuation. Special thanks to Seido Suzuki Roshi for his beautiful calligraphy that will be included in the cover design of the book.



## IN MEMORIAM REV. KOICHI ISODA



As was announced online already in a special Zen River Update, our dear Dharma brother, Rev. Koichi Isoda, passed away on February 21. So sad, and still hard to believe. He has played such a vital and inspiring role in establishing and developing Zen River Temple. Over the years Koichi-san

came to visit many times, while Tenkei and Tammy Roshi went to see him and his family whenever they were in Japan. They always kept in close contact; three days before he died Koichi-san wrote an email to Tenkei Roshi, saying "I'll fly to you soon."

So, somehow we still feel his presence very strongly and will do whatever we can to keep up the compassionate spirit he radiated. At the same time, we maintain our intimate connections with his family.

## MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

Live-stream Zazen Sundays and Tuesdays  
Right Speech Class via Zoom, Sat. 16:30  
Study Class via Zoom, Sundays 11:30  
River of Zen Class via Zoom, Mon. 20:10  
Dokusan via Messenger or Skype, weekly  
Access to all Dharma talks during sesshins 11:30  
Online Lectures with guest teachers

REGISTRATION: [OFFICE@ZENRIVERTEMPLE.ORG](mailto:OFFICE@ZENRIVERTEMPLE.ORG)

€25 MONTHLY

## ZEN RIVER TEMPLE

### SUMMER ANGO 2024

May 25 – 30 ..... Falling Flowers Sesshin  
June 8 – 13 ..... Gyōji Week  
June 17 ..... Zazenkaï Madrid  
July 6–11 ..... Young Minds Seminar  
Summer Monthlong Sesshin..... July 27–August 24  
week 1 ..... July 27–August 1 (5-day)  
week 2 ..... August 3–8 (5-day)  
week 3 ..... August 10–15 (5-day)  
week 4 ..... August 17–24 (7-day)  
August 24 ..... Shuso Hossenshiki  
August 25 – September 6.... No scheduled activities



### FALL INTERIM 2024

September 13 – 15 ..... Weekend Sesshin  
September 27 – 29 .... Sacred Mischief, Equanimity  
and the Worldly Winds led by Moshe Coen  
October 26 – 31 ..... Falling Leaves Sesshin (5-day)  
November 9-14 ..... Gyōji Week



### WINTER ANGO 2024-25

November 23 – 30..... Rohatsu Sesshin (7-day)  
December 14 – 19 ..... Gyōji Week  
Dec. 27 – Jan. 1..... New Year's Sesshin (5-day)  
January 3 – 5 ..... New Year's Weekend Sesshin  
January 24 – 26 ..... Bodhidharma Weekend Sesshin  
February 14 – 16 ..... Young Minds Weekend  
Feb. 22 – March 1 .... Ango Closing Sesshin (7-day)



## ZEN BOAT GRONINGEN

Study & Speech, Introduction classes, etc.:  
[www.zenrivertemple.org/zen-river-boat-groningen](http://www.zenrivertemple.org/zen-river-boat-groningen)  
AT OTHER LOCATIONS

8 September ..... Wageningen, led by Senko Sensei  
14–15 Sept. .... Sesshin Nijmegen, led by Jifu Sensei  
19–22 Dec. Sesshin Holterberg, led by Senko Sensei  
29 Jan.–2 Feb. '25 Sesshin Havelte, led by Jifu Sensei

## SUMMER ANGO SHUSO



Rian Chan Khong has been invited to take on the position of Lay Shuso (head trainee) for the upcoming Summer Month-long. Hossenshiki, the ceremony that concludes this intense Ango training period will be held on Saturday, August 24, at 11:00 AM.

Born and raised on a farm in Gemert, Chan Khong studied psychology at the university in Nijmegen and has been engaged in prevention work for various mental-health organizations. At present she works in the Amsterdam area. She is the mother of one adult son, Sander. Chan Khong started her Zen practice with Meindert Musho Seiju Roshi in 2004 and received Jukai in 2012. She did her first sesshin at Zen River in 2018 and became a student of Tenkei Roshi in 2018. Since then, she often takes part in the Zen River programme. Wishing you an inspiring month!