



Universal Zazen

Kikan Michael Howard

In the 13th century a Buddhist monk from Japan traveled to China, seeking a way of understanding and practice that he had not yet been able to find.

Traveling from monastery to monastery he was initially disappointed, but finally found what he considered a true master. After practicing with him for some time, the monk—Eihei Dōgen—returned to Japan and became the founder of Soto Zen there. Our practice at Compassionate Ocean is a continuation of this way.

Not long after he returned to Japan, Zen Master Dōgen wrote a short essay on the foundation practice of our school called *Fukanzazengi*—“Universal Recommendation for Zazen.” This text is regularly studied and recited at Zen centers throughout the world.

Zazen means sitting meditation—sitting zen. In looking at this text, one of the first questions that naturally comes up is, what is meant by *universal*? Here, the term has at least two meanings.

One meaning of universal is that *anyone can do this practice of zazen*. Dainin Katagiri Roshi said, “Whoever you are, wherever you may be, you can do it. For instance, if you are in an office—well, still you can do it. If there is no one there, you can sit down in a chair and calm yourself. If you are talking with somebody, you can realize a certain pause, where no words come up. For that time, you can return to yourself, and breathe.” He emphasizes, “Anyone can do it. This is *freedom*—open to everybody! No exceptions.”



A second meaning of universal is that *in zazen we sit with all beings*. “Sitting with all beings” means sitting in the midst of everything that we are experiencing. That, in turn, means sitting in the midst of the total dynamic working of the whole universe.

Dōgen Zenji did not make a distinction between animate or inanimate beings, visible or invisible beings, or sentient and insentient beings. The understanding is that all beings and things are in some sense alive. Mountains and rivers, tables and chairs, all are equal participants with us. And among the all beings that we sit with is ourselves. This means that we sit with all of our sensations, thoughts, emotions, memories, imaginations, et cetera. These too are beings.

So, zazen is a little different from how meditation is understood in other religions, or in some branches of Buddhism. Zazen is about arranging our circumstances—our environment, and our body and mind—so that we can be right here with all beings. This is what Dōgen Zenji called *shushō*: “practice-realization.”

Practically, what this means is that we pay full attention to whatever we are experiencing, and do our best to treat all the myriad beings that arise with respect.

Katagiri Roshi said, “Even though you don’t know what the truth is, even though you don’t know what the universal rhythm is, you have to move toward it. Every day. And then the universe will stick out its hand and shake.”

Getting to Know Compassionate Ocean

Open House

Saturday, September 12, 1:00–3:00 P.M.

Everyone is warmly invited to the Center's **Open House** to celebrate the start of our Fall programs. Compassionate Ocean offers opportunities for meditation practice, Dharma talks, Buddhist Studies classes, and courses on mindfulness practice (MBSR). We have an ADA accessible building.

- Tour the Center
- Learn about our programs
- Meet our guiding teachers and community members

People who have a connection with Compassionate Ocean are invited to serve as hosts for this event, which will welcome newcomers and current participants alike. For information on volunteering, email or call the Center.



Building photos courtesy of Sarah Grace Photography.



Guiding Teachers



Joen O'Neal and Genpo Michael O'Neal are the Guiding Teachers of Compassionate Ocean Zen Center. They practiced and taught for many years at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center and Hokyoji Zen Monastery under the guidance of Dainin Katagiri Roshi. They have also practiced with Thich Nhat Hanh in France and the United States, and have completed a training for professionals in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction with Jon Kabat-Zinn. Joen and Genpo are ordained Zen priests. Both have received Dharma transmission.

The Guiding Teachers are available for individual meetings regarding life and practice. To set up an appointment, please contact the Center at admin@OceanZen.org.



Fall Programs 2026

Compassionate Ocean Zen Center

652 17th Avenue NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413
(612) 781-7640 • www.OceanZen.org

The Way of Whole-Hearted Sitting

Eihei Dōgen & Dainin Katagiri on Zen Meditation

Taught by Kikan Michael Howard



The zazen I speak of is not learning meditation. It is simply the Dharma-gate of repose and bliss, the practice-realization of totally culminated enlightenment. It is the manifestation of ultimate reality. Traps and snares can never reach it.

—Eihei Dōgen, *Fukanzazengi*

Zazen—*sitting zen*—is the foundation practice of Soto Zen. It is the practice of truly coming home.

In the 13th century, Eihei Dōgen wrote *Fukanzazengi*, a short text on the practice of zazen. This text has been studied and used as a basis for practice in the Soto Zen school ever since. In the 20th century, Dainin Katagiri Roshi brought Soto Zen to the Midwest and beyond, and gave a series of talks on this foundational text.

This course will explore Zen Master Dōgen's *Fukanzazengi* through the lens of Katagiri Roshi's recorded and transcribed talks on this and related topics.

Each class will include zazen (sitting practice), presentations by the instructor, and discussion. The course format will be interactive, exploring how this practice connects with all aspects of our life. The course will also help illuminate key Zen concepts.

Wednesdays, Sept. 23–Nov. 11

7:00–9:00 p.m.

This course will be held in-person at the Center, with an option for remote participation via Zoom.



\$185 • members \$165

Member rates apply to members of all local Buddhist centers. Reduced fees are offered as needed; please contact the Center at (612) 781-7640.

www.oceanzen.org/buddhist-studies

Course instructor

Rev. Kikan Michael Howard is an associate member of the Teacher Ryo at Clouds in Water Zen Center. He transcribes Katagiri Roshi's dharma talks at the Katagiri Transcripts website, katagiritranscripts.net



Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

A Thorough Introduction to Mindfulness Practice

This program is a comprehensive, well-structured introduction to mindfulness practice in everyday life. It follows the nationally acclaimed MBSR model developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, presenting mindfulness as a universal practice for people of any (or no) religious background.

Skills are introduced in class, practiced at home, and integrated to form new habits. The program enables participants to develop their own base in mindfulness integrated into everyday life, using the practices of:

- sitting meditation
- gentle yoga
- body awareness meditation
- daily-life applications of mindfulness
- stress and relaxation practice

What's included:

- an individual interview with the instructor
- eight two-and-a-half hour classes
- a six-hour Saturday retreat
- a copy of the book *Full Catastrophe Living* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- four mp3 guided meditations
- weekly handouts

27 CEUs are available for nurses, social workers, educators, and psychologists. Contact the Center for details.

The course fee is \$350, which includes the above materials. Payment plans and limited need-based support are available. Please contact the Center to discuss. Enrollment is limited, and pre-registration is required.



**Tuesdays,
Sept. 22–Nov. 10 (#626)
6:30–9:00 P.M.
652 17th Ave. NE, Minneapolis**

**Instructor:
Michael O'Neal**



Day of Mindfulness Retreat Saturday, Nov. 7, 9:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M.

This retreat is part of the MBSR program and is included for all current participants in the MBSR course. It is also open to graduates of past Compassionate Ocean MBSR courses on a donation basis. People not enrolled in the current course should visit www.oceanzen.org/retreats to register.

What past participants have said about this course

"It gave me tools to learn how to release tension, relax, absorb the moment, and let go of 'monkey mind'."

"The course had a great impact. For example, my blood pressure readings have been in the normal range for the last month, and that is with me cutting down on medication to almost half the medication I was taking."

"The community aspect was surprisingly what I enjoyed the most. Really being in a room with others going through a journey together was a powerful experience."

"One of the most important things I've done in years."

~ Gift certificates available. ~

If you know someone who might benefit from this program, please share this information.

www.oceanzen.org/mindfulness



Future MBSR Course Dates

Winter: Jan. 19—Mar. 9, 2027

Spring: March 30—May 18, 2027

Meditation and Dharma Talks

Sunday Meditation & Dharma Talk

Most Sunday mornings, Compassionate Ocean offers sitting and walking meditation followed by a Dharma talk and discussion. The talks focus on aspects of Buddhist teaching and their application to everyday life. Our practice is in the tradition of Soto Zen, with inspiration from the mindfulness practices of Thich Nhat Hahn. Everyone is invited to participate. There are no prerequisites or fees; donations are welcome. *In-person and via Zoom.*

Sundays, 9:00-11:15 A.M. (resumes Sept. 13 after an August break)

9:00 sitting | 9:25 walking | 9:35 sitting
10:00—11:15 Dharma talk and discussion

Weekday Meditation

Five mornings a week, Compassionate Ocean hosts a forty-minute zazen (sitting meditation) period followed by a short chanting service. Everyone is invited to participate. *In-person and via Zoom.*

Monday–Friday, 7:00-8:00 A.M.

7:00 sitting | 7:40 chanting service

For newer people

Welcome Sessions

- **Sunday, Sept. 13, 9:00—11:15 a.m.**
- **Sunday, Nov. 8, 9:00 – 11:15 a.m.**

In-person and via Zoom

Guided meditation instruction and a Dharma talk oriented to those newer to Compassionate Ocean or Zen will be presented. Welcome sessions provide extra orientation and are a great time to bring a friend to attend the Sunday program for the first time.

Introduction to Zen Practice Mini-Courses

- **Mondays, Sept. 14 & 21 7:00-9:00 p.m.**
- **Mondays, Nov. 16 & 23 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

In-person only

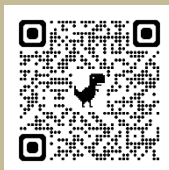
To register: oceanzen.org/intro-to-zen



This two-session introduction to Zen meditation and related practices is a starting point for those curious about Zen. In it, guiding teacher Genpo O'Neal discusses Zen and its place in Buddhism and human life, information about Compassionate Ocean, and instruction in sitting meditation. No fee.

Sesshins (Retreats)

A *sesshin* is a time when formal Zen practice is the primary focus of what we do. Each sesshin offers an extended opportunity to settle the mind and body and open to the deep wisdom of human life. *Sesshin* are held in-person only.



Weekend Sesshins

Friday, Oct. 23, 7:00 p.m.—Sunday, Oct. 25, noon

Led by Genpo O'Neal and Joen O'Neal

Weekend sesshins include sitting and walking meditation, a Dharma talk, a work period, and an opportunity to meet with a teacher. Each sesshin also includes four vegetarian meals.

Location: Compassionate Ocean

Fee: by donation

To register for weekend shesshin:
www.oceanzen.org/retreats

Rohatsu: Buddha's Enlightenment Sesshin

Tuesday, Dec. 1, 7:00 P.M. – Tues., Dec. 8, noon

Led by Michael and Joen O'Neal

The December Rohatsu ("eighth day") sesshin commemorates and reenacts the seven days of meditation culminating in the enlightenment of the Buddha, traditionally celebrated on Dec. 8. Rohatsu sesshins take place at Zen centers throughout the world. This sesshin offers a special opportunity to touch the depth of human life, supporting and being supported by innumerable beings.

If this will be your first sesshin with us, please call Michael at Compassionate Ocean in advance to discuss.

Full participation is encouraged; however, there is an option to register for less than the full seven days. Please contact Michael to discuss.

To register for Rohatsu sesshin:
www.oceanzen.org/rohatsu

Financial Update

Lisa Boesen, Board Chair

Compassionate Ocean exists only because of the generosity of members and friends who support the Center financially. The majority of our income comes from donations, and those contributions make it possible for the Center to offer classes, meditation sessions, Dharma talks, community gatherings, and retreats. **The board is deeply grateful for the open-hearted financial support that the Center receives.**

Compassionate Ocean's 2026 Spring Appeal has just been completed. A total of \$10,900 was contributed by 44 donors. **Thank you** to all who contributed—and to everyone who has supported Compassionate Ocean in the past year by making a financial contribution. **We deeply appreciate your generosity.**

So how is Compassionate Ocean doing as a whole for the year? Compared to the past couple of years, our income is down, and our expenses are up some. Last January, donations were significantly down as Operation Metro Surge hit the Twin Cities. And, as it is for many, inflation is taking a toll on the Center's expenses. For example, our building insurance has gone up by \$1,200 from two years ago. At this time, we are projecting a deficit for the year—probably around \$15,000 on an overall budget of \$137,000.

This is *not* a crisis for the Center. Because of a generous bequest from a long-time member, we have money in

the bank to cover such a shortfall; we will be able to make payroll and pay our bills. However, we don't want to use this bequest simply to fill budget gaps; this gift provides other opportunities that we don't want to lose out on.

In general, we need enough income each year to cover our expenses, which we work to keep lean. So, our financial situation is both a challenge and an opportunity for us all.

One very encouraging note is that that number of our sustaining members is at an all-time high—63. These are people who make an annual pledge for sustaining membership, which is typically our largest source of income. Sustaining members also have an important role in our governance through electing board members. Thank you to our new and continuing members!

If you are not already a sustaining member, one way to help Compassionate Ocean thrive would be to become a sustaining member yourself. Information about sustaining membership can be found at www.oceanzen.org/membership.



And member or not, when the Center's Year-End financial appeal comes around in December, please keep Compassionate Ocean in mind. Thank you.

Remembering Tomoe Katagiri (1932 – 2026)



Genpo O'Neal, Myo-o Habermas-Scher, and Joen O'Neal with Tomoe Katagiri in Spring, 2026

Tomoe Katagiri, wife of Dainin Katagiri Roshi, passed away on May 30 at the age of 94. A memorial service was held on June 28 at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center to celebrate the life of this pioneer of Zen in the Midwest.

Tomoe taught Zen sewing in Minnesota, around the country, and internationally. She humbly and patiently guided countless students to engage with sewing as a spiritual practice while they created their Buddhist robes. Her 1986 guide to the history, meaning, and techniques of Buddhist sewing is still used today.

Beyond sewing, Tomoe contributed to many aspects of Zen life. Her warm heart and sincere presence helped people feel at home with Zen, and many saw her as a guiding spirit. Throughout her long life, Tomoe was a model of Buddhism as a caring, generous, and attentive way of living every day. She was deeply loved.

Working for Peace

Paula Staff

Paula Staff is a longtime member of Compassionate Ocean. Paula received lay ordination from Joen Snyder O'Neal in 1989, receiving the name Kalyana, "spiritual friend." She and her husband Ron were married in 2000 by Joen and Rev. Kendal Gibbens at the First Unitarian Society.

Paula and Ron share a deep commitment to peace. They are both members of Veterans for Peace (www.veteransforpeace.org), an organization of veterans and others devoted to "promoting a sustainable and peaceful world." Paula also belongs to the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (wilpf.org). Here are some of Paula's reminiscences about her Zen practice and her work with Ron in support of peace.



Ron and Paula Staff

My second-grade teacher asked class members to share a favorite word. My word was "compassion." The teacher rolled her eyes and gave a simplified explanation. I felt confused and embarrassed; my mother had taught me, through her words and behavior, many lessons of compassion that have stayed with me my whole life.

One of my first encounters with Buddhism was an audiotope by Thich Nhat Hanh that I found at the library in Austin, Minnesota. I listened to it many times until it was due back.

When I moved to the Twin Cities, a friend thought I might appreciate Compassionate Ocean, which at that time was meeting in a room at the First Unitarian Society. She was correct. As I continued to participate, I felt more settled and at home each week.

In 1999 I asked Joen if I could receive lay ordination. She said yes, and I began sewing my *rakusu* (small Buddhist robe). I struggled with it, and eventually Tomoe Katagiri invited me to sew with her at her house.

My Zen practice has given me strength when I thought I had none left in difficult situations—courage, patience, and hope. It has helped me to remember to pause, breathe, and return to the present where things become clear and possible. And to practice kindness, no matter what. I carry the practices and "inner sangha" in my mind and heart, providing support day by day.

In the early '60s Ron was a Marine stationed in Da Nang, Vietnam, during the war. He was a Combat Correspondent, writing articles and making an occasional broadcast. Fortunately, he never had to fire on anyone.

Ron became a member of Veterans for Peace (VFP) long before I did. All of the veterans I have met over the years in Veterans for Peace have strong feelings about peace

and diplomacy being the only solutions to world conflicts. They are sincere and determined to speak, advocate, and find ways to achieve effective solutions to conflict. Veterans for Peace welcomes associate members such as myself.

In 2014 Ron and I traveled to Vietnam with a VFP chapter for almost 3 weeks. The tour's purpose was to educate people about the impact of unexploded ordinance and Agent Orange in Vietnam, while also including information on the arts and history of Viet Nam. We landed in Hanoi and ended in Ho Chi Minh City. While there, we visited the monastery near the city of Hue where Thich Nhat Hanh (Thầy) first became a monk. We found Vietnam to be a beautiful, amazing country with remarkable, forgiving people.

I was initially invited to join a Women's International League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Arts Committee because they were short a person for an event at a nearby arts high school. We used storyboards made by WILPF members to tell the story of Hmong peoples' journeys from Laos to the USA. I felt honored to be included. WILPF is the oldest continuous peace organization founded by women, originally in the hope of deterring World War I. I have continued to be member because the organization has local, national, and international connections, reminding us that we're a part of something bigger than our narrow concerns. Men are also invited to participate and become members.

There is a role for all in peace work. It's just a matter of finding a situation that suits you. The people I have met have enriched my world and offered me opportunities to learn and to restore hope when all seems lost. It is our connections near and far, nurtured with curiosity, kindness, and love, that create paths to a new future. It simply starts with ourselves nurturing our seeds of peace.



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Flower-Arranging Workshop for Beginners

Saturday, October 3, 9:30 – 11:30 A.M.

In-person at the Center

In Buddhism, we place flowers on the altar as an expression of respect and gratitude, and also as a reminder of the ephemeral nature of our precious lives. Flowers bring beauty into our lives throughout the seasons, and can connect us to nature.

Join us for this hands-on beginner's workshop for those who would like to learn basic guidelines for creating floral arrangements with seasonal flowers. Topics will include elements of classic floral design, color combinations, flower selection, and extending the life of cut flowers. All materials will be provided to create an arrangement to take home.

Taught by Lisa Boesen, who often arranges flowers for Compassionate Ocean, and Ann Thureen, Master Gardener and developer of the U of MN Extension Master Gardener's "Growing Connections" program.

Materials fee: \$25

Additional donations welcome.

To register: oceanzen.org/workshop Space is limited.

