

Dear Sangha,

I am deeply grateful to Shinryu Roshi for inviting me to serve as Shuso for the winter Ango, and I bow, humbly acknowledging that I feel like a speck of dust. As a performer, I am used to standing under bright stage lights and being seen, but the light of practice is different. Nothing is hidden. My inner critic is already in high gear, roaring for me to give the house a good sweep lest anyone realize just how much dust and muck there is sitting in the corners of my mind.

No more hiding at the back of the Zendo, I must reveal my true colors. But what if they are not bright enough, I'm not smart enough, or don't jump high enough or my nerve fades on me? All the things I have wrestled with for years on display for all to see, and judge. Bowing again, I bring my head lower than my heart and remember that I am not alone.

For the past fifteen years, the Village Zendo has been my spiritual home and a place of belonging. As someone who has mostly always felt out of place, it is no small thing to be received with open arms, warm hearts, and kindness. I feel very fortunate to have found a refuge with this community, and caring for this sangha is of the utmost importance to me, especially now when the whole world seems to be on fire. With all of you, I am ready to roll up my sleeves. There is much to do.

The 8<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist nun and poet Xue Tao wrote, *"I've lingered on my pillow, led around by thoughts that keep me sad and up awake all night."* I imagine that many of us know exactly what this feels like. So much unrelenting suffering in this floating world! How do we respond? Falling into despair or running around frantically putting out fires is one way. But that can leave us discouraged and exhausted. Maybe a more skillful approach is taking a step back, and contemplating moment to moment the wonder of our bodies moving through the great body of the world, and asking what is needed now? And now? And now?

To help us find a way, this Ango we will be studying two Dogen fascicles: *Zenki* "Dynamic Activity" and *Shoji* "Birth and Death." Dogen says, *"There is birth and there is death in undivided activity."* As a dancer, I experience sound and movement, and as a palliative care chaplain at the bedside with people at end of life, I experience silence and stillness. *And* there is sound, movement, silence, stillness and unceasing myriad things in both dancing and dying. Even closer than this, breathing in and breathing out, there is birth and death right now. What will we do while we are here? During this practice period, I hope we will lean in, restore and replenish our bodies, hearts and minds, and resolve to do our part with great compassion for ourselves, and

for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. Dogen tells us that life is just like riding in a boat. There is room in the boat for everyone. Let's raise the sails and readily set forth together!

In Gassho,  
Rakushin