Annual Report 2023

A Time of Transition
Dear Sangha members and friends of the Dharma,

2023 has ended, and I am delighted to say that it was an extraordinary year for the Zen Studies Society. We are exceptionally fortunate to have such an enthusiastic and dedicated Sangha, and we are grateful not only for your assistance with the many significant celebrations of the year but also for your generosity in supporting such essential projects as the Monastery Restoration Campaign.

2023 was a year of celebrating Shinge-shitsu Roko Sherry Chayat Roshi, whose tenure as the second abbot of the Zen Studies Society concluded with her official retirement on October 1st. The Dai Bosatsu Zendo Anniversary Sesshin, O-Bon, and Golden Wind Sesshin were beautiful experiences, made precious by the knowledge that these would be Shinge Roshi’s last events in her role as abbot. Our deep gratitude for her vision, hard work, and countless years of service permeated the year and continues to resonate in our hearts. Bestowed with the title of Abbess Emerita by the Board of Directors, Shinge Roshi will continue to make her wise counsel available to the Zen Studies Society and to participate in practice and sesshin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. We are also very happy for the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji Sangha, who eagerly welcomed Shinge Roshi’s full-time attention.

2023 also saw the launch of our new Dharma Teacher Training program. Led by Shinge Roshi, Hokuto Osho, and me, the first cohort of trainees worked diligently for nine months. Upon completion of the training, they were acknowledged as Junior Dharma Teachers of the Zen Studies Society. Congratulations to these nine new Junior Dharma Teachers and the Sangha for this vital step.

Finally, 2023 was a banner year for the Monastery Restoration Campaign. Your generosity and concern for Dai Bosatsu Zendo helped us to begin the first significant restoration and maintenance projects for this historic building. New York Zendo also benefited from some infrastructure improvements. Without our temples, we would not be able to welcome you and offer this timeless practice to the world.

This Annual Report is more than a summary of activities; it is an expression of gratitude for all we have achieved together. Let us continue to walk this path together and keep it vibrant, relevant, and accessible. As we bring the maturity of our practice into the wider world, each one of us makes an essential contribution to a more peaceful, just, and awakened society.

With nine bows,

Chigan Roshi
Abbot, Zen Studies Society
Mission
The mission of the Zen Studies Society (ZSS) is to teach the principles of Rinzai Zen and the practice of meditation as a way of living with insight and compassion.

Vision
Moving forward into a new era and fulfilling the promise of our Dharma heritage, we will become an ecologically self-sustaining community that is a source of refuge, inspiration, and peace for everyone.

Values
ZSS upholds high standards of personal and group conduct and responsibility rooted in the six paramitas (virtues of perfection) of the Buddhist teachings: dana (generosity), sila (morality, living by the ten precepts), kshanti (patience and endurance), virya (assiduous, energetic practice), dhyana/zazen (meditation), and prajna (wisdom).
ZSS strongly promotes a trustworthy, open, and inclusive environment that embraces racial, cultural, generational, and economic diversity, fostering social justice. It encourages collaboration, cooperation, and a commitment to honor patience and courtesy in our communications and interactions with each other and the world.

Inclusion Statement
At New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo, we respect and cherish our fundamental oneness while celebrating our differences. We strive to create accessible and equitable spaces, free from prejudices based on race, ethnicity, age, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, economic status, religion, nationality, and citizenship status, among others. We unequivocally acknowledge the discrimination, prejudice, and privilege that exist in society at large and commit ourselves to the work of building a culture of accountability and healing.
Who We Are

The Zen Studies Society
One of the first Rinzai Zen Buddhist organizations in the United States, ZSS offers authentic lay and monastic Zen training at its New York City temple, New York Zendo Shobo-ji, and mountain monastery, Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji. The simple yet profound teachings of Zen Buddhism are grounded in zazen (meditation). Zen practice is a way of life through which inner peace, insight and deep compassion are cultivated.

New York Zendo Shobo-ji
New York Zendo Shobo-ji (NYZ) opened its doors on September 15, 1968. It provides an oasis of deep stillness in the heart of Manhattan. For 55 years, NYZ has allowed city dwellers to experience traditional Zen practice through daily sittings, monthly retreats, and Buddhist study courses. Well-known Buddhist teachers and scholars – as well as artists and masters of the tea ceremony, Noh theater, shakuhachi, and flower arranging – have presented programs and exhibitions here. Located on the Upper East Side, Shobo-ji combines East and West to create an accessible and immersive Zen experience.

Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji
In 1970, ZSS acquired 1,400 acres of wilderness surrounding a sparkling lake in the heart of New York State’s Catskill Mountains for a retreat center and mountain monastery.

In 1875, the Rev. James Beecher built a rustic lodge on the shore of Beecher Lake. He was the brother of the well-known preacher Henry Ward Beecher and the writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose 1852 book Uncle Tom’s Cabin galvanized the movement to abolish slavery.

In the early 1970s, the first resident community at Dai Bosatsu Zendo (DBZ) lived and practiced at the Beecher House while the main monastery, with its Japanese-inspired architecture, was being planned and constructed.

DBZ’s formal opening was held on Independence Day, July 4, 1976, as a gift to the United States of America. In the 47 years since, generations of Zen students from all over the world have come to practice at DBZ. The Beecher House, which was completely renovated in 2021, continues to be home to our unique Open Space program.

Online Zendo
In March 2020, ZSS launched an online platform in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to offer the Dharma digitally to the general public at minimal or no cost.

The Beecher House and main monastery building at DBZ are equipped with high-speed internet, cameras, microphones, and video conferencing capabilities, including a large display screen for seamless streaming and remote event participation. NYZ is also designed to facilitate online accessibility to its hosted events. In addition to organizing hybrid events at DBZ and NYZ, we consistently offer a diverse array of online-only events.
Through our two temples and online platforms, ZSS offers a rich spectrum of programs tailored to meet the diverse needs of individuals at various stages of their spiritual journeys. These offerings serve seasoned practitioners, beginners, affinity groups, special populations, and activists. Our comprehensive range of programs spans traditional three-month residential monastic training periods, immersive multi-day Zen retreats, activities for special interest groups and underserved communities, and events rooted in Engaged Buddhism.

**Residential Training**

Twice a year at DBZ, a traditional three-month residential training period (kessei) affords Zen students a rare opportunity to explore and deepen their practice. ZSS welcomes lay and ordained students from all religious and cultural backgrounds for kessei, which is structured around daily meditation, chanting, study, and working together in a stunning remote setting. The environment and program allow participants to immerse themselves in the present moment, a rarity in our typically hectic, multitasking lives.

Students are assigned work practice, which includes cooking, cleaning, and caring for our buildings and grounds. Yoga, breathwork, and other body practices are a part of the daily schedule, as are personal and group study periods. Sesshin, a silent week of intensive practice and deep introspection, is held monthly during kessei.

Although the traditional length of kessei training is three months, shorter stays may be arranged. In 2023, 19 participants joined the monastic community at DBZ or NYZ for residential training.

**Intensive Retreats**

Aligned with its core mission of making Zen accessible to those dedicated to realizing their true nature, ZSS offered regular weeklong and weekend silent retreats (sesshin) in 2023. These immersive experiences featured extensive meditation, work practice, individual interviews, Dharma talks, and koan study, expertly guided by the abbot, senior teachers, and ordained monastics.

In 2023, ZSS offered 11 sesshin, with 65 days in silence.

**Introduction to Zen**

In 2023, ZSS offered two Introduction to Zen Weekends at DBZ, providing basic training to newcomers. Additionally, New York Zendo hosted two-hour in-person Introduction to Zen sessions each week and a weekly 90-minute online session in partnership with the Zen Center of Syracuse.

**Meditation and Dharma**

NYZ provides a comprehensive weekly practice schedule that features activities such as sitting and walking meditation, chanting, work practice, informal discussions, and tea service. Our practice week commences on Sunday morning with a chanting service, followed by zazen, cleaning, and informal tea accompanied by conversation.

**Dharma Interviews**

Dokusan or individual teacher meetings are considered an important part of formal training in the Rinzai Zen tradition. In addition to in-person Dokusan at NYZ and DBZ, our teachers offer weekly online dokusan to support practitioners who cannot physically attend events at our temples due to geographical distance, mobility, or health challenges. Dokusan is open to all and offered free of cost.

**Community Events**

ZSS has historically provided a welcoming gateway to the general public with family weekends, forest bathing weekends, work weekends, and special events to observe occasions like O-Bon (an annual remembrance of the deceased), Thanksgiving, and New Year’s Day. ZSS also facilitates Buddhist liturgical and ceremonial functions for significant life milestones.
Open Space at the Beecher House

The Open Space program at the historic Beecher House has welcomed outside groups into an extraordinary retreat setting since the 80’s. The program has hosted groups for meditation intensives, small conferences, yoga, shiatsu, reiki, forest bathing, environmental awareness, 12-step retreats, tea ceremonies, shojin ryori (Japanese Buddhist cuisine), and other Zen arts.

2023 was the second year following the reopening of the restored Beecher House, during which Open Space hosted a full schedule of 14 guest retreats for both new and returning groups. O-Bon and the Healing and Wellness Retreat were once again annual events and enjoyed full attendance.

Equipped with high-speed internet and video conferencing capabilities, the Beecher House is open for group rentals throughout the year. Those interested in renting may visit us at thebeecherhouse.org, request a reservation at info@thebeecherhouse.org or call 845-439-5288.

Art and Culture

In addition to the Open Space programs at the historic Beecher House, NYZ hosts holistic programs encompassing calligraphy, writing, poetry, ikebana, yoga, bodywork, films, and cooking workshops.

In 2023, NYZ offered events focused on traditional Asian arts with a strong relationship to Zen: two ikebana events, two shojin ryori cooking workshops, an introductory calligraphy class as well as a calligraphy series, and a tea ceremony class. NYZ also offered regular Tai Chi classes and a workshop on the Alexander Technique for developing an upright posture.
Steadfast in its commitment to inclusivity, ZSS continues to offer dedicated events for underserved populations.

In 2023, NYZ hosted regular AA meetings, Insight OUT Refuge sessions for LGBTQIA+ practitioners, a book reading by an LGBTQIA+ activist, and NY Insight Generation Meditation for young adults. DBZ offerings included 12-step retreats and the Healing and Wellness weekend tailored for caregivers and individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses.

ZSS continues to collaborate with guest teachers, sanghas, and networks to create integrated offerings. Daily digital meditation and Dharma talks are available through our continued strong relationship with the Abbess Emerita and her sangha at the Zen Center of Syracuse.

In 2023, NYZ organized and hosted many events led by outside teachers, strengthening our relationship with other local sanghas who have been renting space in the temple, including New York Insight and its sub-sanghas (MBSR, Insight OUT, and Generation Meditation) and Triratna NYC. In addition, DBZ hosts retreats for other Zen groups.

Entering its fifth year, the ZSS Engaged Buddhism initiative offers a rich array of monthly articles and weekly online events, featuring dynamic discussions, film screenings, podcasts, workshops, and presentations addressing various social issues. The meeting format comprises a meditation period followed by a group discussion led by members of the Engaged Buddhism committee.

In 2023, monthly Dharma discussions on the first Wednesday centered on Buddhist Approaches to Conflict Resolution and incorporated strategies from the Plum Village sangha, Zen Approaches to Conflict Mediation, and the 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention.

Open to practitioners of all ethnicities, races, and nationalities, the Racial Solidarity Sangha, led by Seiho Jaye Morris met on the second Wednesday of each month. Discussions were inspired by the facilitator’s book-in-progress, A Twelve-Step Approach Addressing Hostility Towards Inclusion and Diversity. Shared insights from the book helped foster racial solidarity and harmony in the group as well as personal resilience for participants navigating lives impacted by structural racism.

The Critical Buddhist Study Group met on the third Wednesday of the month and investigated the intersection of Dharma teachings and Buddhist practice with critical theory and radical political movements.

Looking ahead, we aim to offer more in-person events.

Affinity Groups

Collaborative Circles

Engaged Buddhism Initiative
Notable Events

Abbot Retirement
After 12 years of service, Shinge Roshi retired as abbot on October 1, 2023 with a joyous celebration following the Golden Wind sesshin at DBZ. NYZ also celebrated with a lively party following a 55th Anniversary Weekend Sesshin that was attended at full capacity.

New Abbot Installation
On November 24, 2023, the day after Thanksgiving, Chigan Dokuro Jaeckel Roshi was installed as abbot and took on the responsibilities of leading the Zen Studies Society into the future.

New Abbess Emerita
The Zen Studies Society Board of Directors honored Shinge Roshi with the title of Abbess Emerita by a resolution passed in November of 2023.

New Dharma Teacher Training Program
A new Dharma Teacher Training program, led by Chigan Roshi, Shinge Roshi, and Hokuto Osho, was launched in 2023. The first cohort of trainees worked diligently for nine months and upon completion of the training, were acknowledged as Junior Dharma Teachers of the Zen Studies Society.


Additionally, Ryoju John Lynch Sensei was recognized as a Senior Dharma teacher.
Sangha Participation
In 2023, we welcomed over 5,000 visitors at more than 500 events, including zazen (meditation), Introduction to Zen evenings, Dharma talks, silent retreats, and one-on-one interviews with our teachers. ZSS saw its highest in-person attendance in the past five years. Additionally, our online zendo included participants from all walks of life, transcending barriers of geography and disability.

Publications
In 2023, Shinge Roshi's articles, Deepening our Resolve and In the Midst of the Ordinary were published in Tricycle Magazine. She also published Like a Dew Drop, a compilation of teishos (Dharma talks).

Hokuto Osho’s article, There Is No Teacher of Zen, was published in Lion’s Roar in July of 2023.

Scholarships
ZSS is committed to providing full or partial scholarship support to sincere students who lack the financial means to study and train at our mountain monastery. No one is turned away from practice at ZSS for financial limitations. Thanks to the generosity of a committed donor, a kessei scholarship fund has been in place for the last four years to support students attending residential training periods and internships.

We were able to offer 11 partial or full scholarships in 2023, which supported the recipients and enriched the sangha by allowing for their full presence and participation.
**DBZ Maintenance**

The ZSS Facilities Committee had a busy year attending to maintenance projects. The long-term positive effect of ongoing repairs and attention to the buildings and grounds cannot be overstated. For example, a few years ago we invested in culverts and water management features to keep the road between the Gate House and the monastery from washing away during heavy rains. Ongoing maintenance of these upgrades has kept the road in excellent condition and allowed unobstructed travel to and from the monastery. In 2023, several trees fell across the road, and the DBZ zomu crew quickly attended to the issues.

Additionally, several miles of hiking trails were expanded and marked, and new bridges were installed to enhance entry points. Our goal is to continue to increase access to the beauty and healing benefits of the deep woods surrounding the monastery while carefully protecting the ecosystem. Caring for the 1,400+ acre grounds takes great effort, and we express our sincere gratitude to everyone who helps.

**DBZ Monastery Restoration**

In May 2023, we launched a monumental Monastery Restoration Campaign with a target of $1.5 million. The sangha’s remarkable generosity enabled us to initiate crucial restoration work.

The initial phase of campaign-related projects commenced in June 2023, and we have already achieved significant milestones in revitalizing our half-century-old monastery. The zendo and Dharma hall no longer rely on a gas boiler-based heating system. Instead, three powerful heat pumps now provide heating, dehumidification, and air conditioning. Advanced heat exchangers and ceiling vents offer precise control over temperature and humidity, while the air exchangers’ quiet fans and wireless sensors contribute to a seamlessly managed system.

Externally, ongoing repairs included replacing and staining deteriorated wood on the monastery’s exterior wall and painting along its wooden exterior. The tower housing the daisho, or big bell, is undergoing structural repairs with the replacement of weakened wood beams. Anticipated activities include addressing water leaks from the flat roof above the hallway area outside the dokusan room in the spring of 2024.

The site preparation for the solar array was completed in 2023. This included clearing vegetation and establishing a safety buffer to mitigate tree-related hazards. Despite the challenges posed by the extensive permit acquisition process, we are delighted to report that we are now in the final stage of gaining approval for our photovoltaic system.

Looking ahead, the installation of equipment slated for 2024 marks a significant step forward in activating the solar array. This venture demonstrates our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint.
**Historical Preservation**

The monastery’s historical collection of documents, letters, artwork, photos, and recordings are housed in a dry storage room in the basement. Yet the collection was in considerable disarray, without appropriate archival protection or organization. Under the stewardship of a new resident at DBZ, a retired professional archivist, the collection is now unfolding and being organized. This past fall, Masayo Suemura-san, a researcher from the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Japan, traveled to study our collection as part of a project on Nyogen Senzaki. Of particular interest were the correspondence, calligraphy, and other valued religious and personal items that belonged to the preeminent pioneer of Zen in America. These treasures had been given to the Zen Studies Society by the granddaughter of Nyogen Senzaki’s disciple and supporter, Shubin Kin Tanahashi.

Moving forward, we will continue to explore options for developing an adequate archival system for these and many other gems belonging to ZSS and held at DBZ.

**NYZ Repairs and Renovation**

Several improvements were realized in 2023: out-of-service heating equipment was dismantled, old gas and heating pipes were cut and removed, and a heat pump unit was installed in the dokusan room.

The third-floor shower was retiled, the holes in the wall sealed, and the room repainted. The entryway was repainted and a new altar was added to greet visitors to the temple. Additionally, the front facade of the building was repainted, restained, and resealed. This included replacing the peeling plywood behind the main “New York Zendo” sign that features Soen Roshi’s original calligraphy.

Planned renovation projects for 2024 include replacing the front door of the building, replacing various outdated light fixtures, and repainting either the first or second floor. Sangha members interested in supporting our projects may reach out to office@newyorkzendo.org or call 212-861-3333.
**Revenue Streams**

**Total Unrestricted Revenue**
The total revenue, excluding restricted fund contributions, saw a 34% year-over-year increase in 2023. This growth was driven primarily by the ability to draw from our Endowment Fund and Beecher House rentals.

**Unrestricted Contributions**
Contributions remained the cornerstone of meeting operating expenses and comprised 35% of the revenue. Unrestricted contributions for 2023 were slightly higher than the previous year. We express deep gratitude for the generosity of sangha members. Your donations enabled us to continue offering free events and pay our operating expenses.

**Events**
Event revenue continued to stand as our second most crucial income stream, accounting for 30% of the total revenue. We are pleased to report a 13% year-over-year increase in event revenue, largely attributed to higher in-person attendance. We anticipate continued growth in event participation in 2024.

**Endowment**
A transfer of funds from the ZSS Endowment was the third most important revenue stream, accounting for 13% of revenue. Thanks to generous donors, the ability of ZSS to schedule a regular annual transfer of investment earnings provided a new measure of financial stability to the organization.

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**Rentals**
Rentals stood as the fourth most important income stream, accounting for a tenth of our total revenue. We are pleased to report a phenomenal 329% year-over-year increase in rental revenue, primarily due to the enthusiastic reception of a renovated Beecher House.

**Membership**
Membership revenue accounted for 9% of the total and remained consistent with the previous year. Members directly supported the growth and sustainability of our community, creating a lasting legacy.

**Other Sources**
Additional unrestricted revenue streams comprised income generated from the temple stores, funeral services, and miscellaneous items. We saw a 19% lift in this category over last year primarily due to store revenue.

**Restricted Contributions**
We saw a phenomenal surge in this revenue category, which included capital campaigns and other restricted funds. The sangha’s remarkable generosity allowed us to surpass $750,000 in contributions and pledges for the 2023 Monastery Restoration Campaign.
Ways to Give

Membership
Membership is one way to dedicate yourself to practice and show solidarity with our sangha. At ZSS, we provide various membership options, including individual, family, online, and associate memberships. We encourage you to explore the possibility of becoming a supporting member if you are not already enrolled.

General Fund
The General Fund serves as the Zen Studies Society’s financial bedrock, ensuring vital funding for our day-to-day operations. Your generous contributions empower us to pay for various essential expenses, including compensation, professional fees, facilities, utilities, insurance, and other administration costs. Additionally, your support fuels our development and communications initiatives and program-related activities.

Endowment Fund
The Endowment Fund at ZSS has now been in place for three years. Designed to leave its principal intact, this fund will help ensure the long-term viability of ZSS by generating investment returns to support general operating expenses. We hope that you will consider contributing to the Endowment Fund this year.

Monastery Restoration Fund
The Monastery Restoration Campaign, initiated in May 2023 with a target of $1.5 million, has already garnered over half of the goal. Our endeavor continues as we aim to raise an additional $730,000. We invite you to join this collective effort to safeguard the heritage of DBZ and facilitate sustainable upgrades. Your involvement ensures that this distinctive and invaluable resource remains vibrant for future generations. Join us in preserving the legacy of DBZ!

Planned Giving
The Zen Studies Society Legacy Circle, a planned-giving program, has now entered its fourth year. We are grateful to those who have joined the Legacy Circle, thus including ZSS in their long-term giving plans.
In Deep Gratitude to our 2023 Supporters

$10,000+
Anonymous (4)

$5,000-$9,999
Anonymous (2)
Kokan James Borowiec and Zakke Diane Applegate

$2,000-$4,999
Rinzai-ji Zen Center

$1,000-$1,999
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Chigan Roland Jaecckel Roshi (Oct - Dec)
Vice Abbot
Chigan Roland Jaecckel Roshi (Jan - Sep)
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