Shogaku Zen Institute
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PREACHING THE DHARMA:
PRESENTING USEFUL INSTRUCTION ON ZEN AND MINDFULNESS

Instructors: Rev. Steve Kanji Ruhl, M.Div. & Rev. Kuzan Peter Schireson, Ed.D.

"Preaching the Dharma" will offer a lively practicum that combines reading and discussion with active experience. Students will learn skillful means for offering basic instructional talks in Zen-based and mindfulness-based dharma principles and practices, whether the setting is one-on-one or with Buddhist sanghas, multi-faith groups, or the general public.

Topics covered will include: the overall purpose of a dharma talk and how to apply personal understanding of the dharma in preparing a talk; choosing a meaningful topic that is appropriate to the student's unique strengths and to the needs of an audience; how to structure a talk for optimum use of material and for effective pacing and length; how to support a talk with useful quotations, where to find them, and how best to deploy them; appreciating the use and impact of various forms of language –formal, colloquial, slang – and of modulating various tones – solemn, humorous, inspirational – in giving talks; the importance of balancing self-disclosure with proper boundaries; learning techniques of communicating not only through spoken words but through employing the body, voice, and eye contact; generating a dynamic, interactive field of connected, engaged listeners; "holding the seat" of authority while giving a talk, yet being open and responsive to questions; the importance of opening dharma talks into discussion forums to welcome collective wisdom and to avoid presenting oneself as a guru; learning to spontaneously channel the dharma by speaking from the hara; and more. Throughout the course Reverends Kanji and Peter will share anecdotes and advice based on their own extensive experience of giving dharma talks.

The course will meet on Tuesday evenings from 5:00-6:30 pm PST from December 3 through February 25 for a total of 13 sessions, comprising 19.5 hours. Because natural ease and confidence in preaching the dharma arise through practice, each participant will give a minimum of three original dharma talks, followed by helpful, supportive responses and questions from fellow students and the instructors. The first talk of 5 minutes will be delivered early in the course, the second talk of 10 minutes will be delivered midway, and the final talk of 20 minutes will be given near the conclusion of the course, in order to track progress.

In addition to creating and sharing individual dharma talks and answering follow-up questions typical of those that might be asked in a zendo, students will read, compare, and discuss in a group-chat several transcriptions of dharma talks by classic Ch'an and Zen teachers, including Lin-Chi and Dōgen, as well as talks by more recent teachers including Shunryu Suzuki, Charlotte Joko Beck, Toni Packer, and others. Excerpts of relevant sermons by non-Buddhists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Martin Luther King, Jr. also will be examined. Additionally, several videos of dharma talks by contemporary Buddhist teachers will be assigned for viewing and discussion. A primary text for the course will be *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God's Word and Keep People Awake*, by Gary Miller and Phil Campbell.

One written paper (5-10 pages, double-spaced) will be required, demonstrating the student's integration of the required readings and viewings and providing his/her/their personal reflections on the experience of preparing and presenting the three dharma talks and of receiving questions and feedback from other students.

Grading will be based on quality of class participation in offering talks, questions, and feedback; on the written paper; and on evidence of growth throughout the course.