



# THE COSTIGLIOLE CHRONICLE

August 2024

GYOGENJI: WHERE ZEN PRACTICE  
MEETS LOVE OF THE EARTH

The Gyogenji Zen Temple, supported by the Italian Buddhist Union, is a bridge between the ancient world of Zen Meditation and the contemporary desire for peace, spiritual well-being and the need for a sustainable future. A place where spiritual practice and awareness are intertwined with ecology and regenerative agriculture. A sustainable future made possible by an inner change of how we view ourselves living in interdependency with nature. A living example of how spirituality can meet ecology in a harmony that benefits both the individual and the planet.



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## THE GYOGENJI TEMPLE: A GREEN COMMITMENT

The new Temple called Gyogenji is being built in Costigliole d'Asti, (Piemonte, Italy) in an area recognized by UNESCO, with an action plan dedicated to the preservation of local biodiversity and the protection of the environment. The project

involves both the construction of a new Zen Temple, consisting of a dojo - a place of meditative practice - and apartments for residents and guests. It also includes the creation of a large regenerative agriculture garden on three terraces,

each about one thousand square meters. Through reforestation, regenerative agriculture and sustainable practices, Gyogenji will be an example of an alternative development model, in which the balance between human needs and nature will be restored and enhanced.



At the heart of the project will be the Dojo, flanked by 8 apartments and 12 guestrooms, plus a communal kitchen and dining hall. We are very happy to share the recent construction-process of the Dojo and the first two apartments with you all



# THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DOJO AND APARTMENTS #progetto immobiliare

## THE DOJO

The progression of building activities in 2024:



April: the foundation of the Dojo is ready



May: the walls are being erected





June: The construction of the roof

July: A look inside the dojo





THE FIRST APARTMENTS



April: The foundation



May: Constructing the walls



June: Starting the second floor



July: Building the roof



Apartments with roof ready



A look inside the apartment



## THE SURROUNDING GROUNDS #progetto umanitario



The garden plays a fundamental role in the project: in addition to providing food, it is a concrete symbol of sharing and returning to nature by living in interdependence with the ecosystem. The garden is structured on three terraces reinforced with chestnut wood palisades.

In April we enriched the soil with natural nutrients. We transported a product rich in nitrogen and natural nutrients that will provide the minerals that plants need in a balanced way.



April: the spreading of fertile black soil





You can watch a short  
of the plowing on our  
Youtube channel



We plowed the soil in preparation of planting vegetables.

In May we planted 700 tomato seedlings, plus 50 kilograms of potatoes and watermelons. An organic seed bank provided seeds for melons and pumpkins.







## SAMU

Samu is voluntary work for the community. It is carried out with the same attention and concentration as required in Zen meditation. It is the spirit of zazen in all actions of daily life: serving others, preparing food, cleaning or cultivating the vegetable garden.

Everyone is welcome to experience and share periods of samu at our Zen temple in Costigliole. Donate your time to create an organic and biodynamic garden that will benefit all beings.

Do not hesitate to email us: [dojo@bodai.it](mailto:dojo@bodai.it). We will warmly welcome you!



Weeding herbs





Pumpkins



Potato flower



Melon



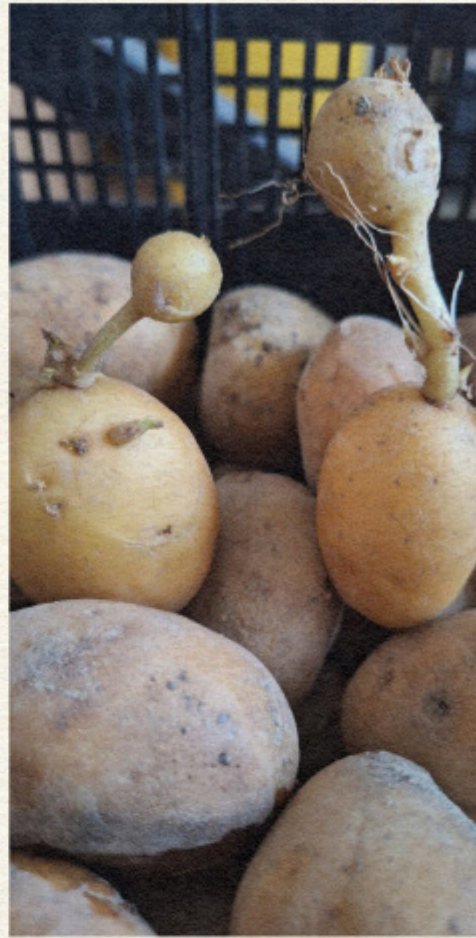
Tomatoes

JULY: WATERING THE FRUIT TREES AND VEGETABLES





JULY: HARVESTING POTATOES





## HARVESTING ONIONS



Because the weather is very hot in the summer, the best time to harvest is at dawn. So we start at 7 pm when the air is still fresh and cool.





## THE ORCHARD

The orchard - an initiative also aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of wine monoculture on the territory - includes kiwi, pomegranate, fig, plum, apple, pear, persimmon, medlar, apricot, and cherry trees, preferably the native varieties. The trees are treated exclusively with organic fertilizers.



### PREPARATIONS IN APRIL

Wood and twigs that had accumulated over time were chopped by the woodchipper, turning them into a rich and nutritious layer of mulch. Mulching is not only a great way to recycle organic garden waste, it also plays a crucial role in protecting the roots of the trees and it enriches the soil as well.

Mulching helps to retain moisture in the soil, thus protecting plants from drought and reducing the need for watering. The wood chips act as a shield, protecting the soil from erosion, compaction caused by rain, and temperature variations. A layer of mulch can save us hours of manual labor, as it limits the growth of unwanted weeds by stifling them.



THE FLOWER GARDEN



In April we started to clean the weeds and plant new flowers.







In June and July, the garden rewarded us by sharing the beauty of many different flowers.







## WATER MANAGEMENT

To create a secure source of water to irrigate the vegetable garden, two big water tanks (containing 60.000 liters of water) were buried on the site. They will collect rainwater and through an ingenious system of tubes the water will be transported to irrigate the garden.





## THE BEES

Within the humanitarian project we have dedicated a 2-hectare field for bees and other pollinators. In recent days we have sown 50kg of flower seeds, a multi-year mixture meant to provide a staggered yield of different melliferous flowers, providing food and shelter for bees and insects for several months of the year. At the end of the flowering cycle the plants will be used as green manure to increase fertility and improve the soil.

A food forest has also been started. It includes nectar producing, truffle species, and a bee keeping activity with three new families of bees.





MEET THE SANGHA:  
ARIANE EIGEN MERCIER (32)  
FROM ALBA, ITALY



Buddhist name 'EIGEN' means  
ETERNAL SOURCE



## MY LIFE CHANGED

I started practicing zazen when I met Zen monk Beppe Mokuza at the Temple La Gendronnière in France in 2009. During the 10-day summer camp I helped with the work in the garden and during meals with the service. But I had never practiced zazen before and didn't even really know what it was!

I was curious to discover what the monks were doing in the dojo... there was always a great silence for long periods. In the morning and in the evening I could hear the sutra chanting from afar, and it seemed magical, almost like sorcery! One day, Beppe asked me why I didn't join for zazen, and my proud answer didn't really convince him: "I don't need it" ... exactly what you shouldn't say to a Zen monk! The next day, he accompanied me to the dojo and sat next to me during the meditation.

My first years of zazen didn't really bring me much "pleasure"; my legs hurt, I often fell asleep, I was bored, waiting for it to finally end... Then there were those rare zazen sessions where everything calmed down and took root in my soul... I thought, "it takes 200 hours of suffering for 1 hour of real presence, but it's really worth it!" I accepted this compromise and patiently waited for the next time I could again taste the flavor of zazen. As Beppe taught me, zazen is the mirror of our suffering in daily life. It took me many years to begin to understand what it means not to stay asleep in your life, not to be carried away by fears and lack of self-confidence. The

work on oneself seems truly infinite, and the traps are awaiting you at every corner!

You left France to live in Italy, why?

During that famous summer camp in La Gendronnière, Beppe and Alessandro were working in the kitchen, and I was in the service team, that's how I met them. On the rest day, Alessandro invited me to paint in the afternoon. Always curious, I accepted... and so I discovered what Sumi-e was. When Beppe came to take a look, he corrected my posture, and we painted a bamboo together... that's when my life changed.

I was 17 years old at the time and had planned to pursue higher studies to become an ambassador, because I wanted to help people. I thought it was a good way to serve others. But once I had my bamboo in front of me, I gave up my initial plan to take a sabbatical year and live in Italy for a few months. Just 5 days after passing my final school exams in France and after getting my driver's license, I took the train to Italy carrying two big suitcases on my shoulders and arrived at the station in Alba.

The Sangha provided for many of my needs and was a constant and vital support for my growth and development during a time of deep adolescent crisis, great traumas and sorrows. The demons of the past surfaced, and the unconditional love offered to me gave me the strength to go beyond and discover who was hiding behind a spoiled, fearful and lonely child.

Gradually, under Beppe's constant driving force, the life of the Sangha expanded, and I had the opportunity to participate in all the Sumi-e workshops in Europe, the retreats, Festivals del Oriente, and other events. After graduating from university in 2017 in Turin, the Festivals dell'Oriente (cultural events all over Italy) had grown to such an extent that I dedicated myself entirely to them. Today, I greatly enjoy taking care of activities related to Sumi-e in Italy and Europe. In 2011 I choose to become a Bodhisattva and in 2022 I took my vows as a Zen Nun.

I am actively present in the dojo and practice zazen every day. Besides that I love to do samu in the garden.

What does the Gyogenji temple mean to you?

The Gyogenji temple represents the culmination of this whole journey, the place where zen monk Beppe Mokuza will be able to fully express his understanding and provide each of us with skillful means to grow more and more. Even though today I still can't grasp the full extent of the project, I feel it's going to be a turning point in all our lives. New ideas, plans, and initiatives are multiplying and slowly taking shape in our minds; their concrete realization in the future will generate "something" whose scale we cannot measure.

Zen in daily life... an answer to the suffering of all beings, at least that's my feeling and a strong encouragement to persevere in practice every day and share the Path with new souls.

ARIANE





## INSPIRATION

Part of the harvest of our vegetable garden will be offered to local people who want to taste the organically produced foods. The Mayor of Costigliole d'Asti received the first produce of our garden in July! During summer, every Friday afternoon, the garden is open to the community for free workshops and guided tours to promote contact with nature and the production of biological food.

The Mayor of Costigliole d'Asti receives our biologically grown vegetables and visited our tomato plants!







## HOW TO JOIN AND SUPPORT OUR PROJECT?

a. Adopt a fruit tree, a bamboo,  
a plant, a cat or a beehive.

Price: €50 a year, €250 for life.

b. Do samu or work on  
the terrain.

c. Make a donation.

Email us: [dojo@bodai.it](mailto:dojo@bodai.it)

Or visit us: [www.zentemple.it](http://www.zentemple.it)



Donations are gratefully received  
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d'Asti:

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