



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Fall 2002

What Does it Mean to be a Buddhist?

The opening talk by Sensei for the 2001 Rohatsu sesshin

We have completed our preparations for the Rohatsu sesshin. We will now slip into it, plunge into it, or settle into it according to our personality, temperament, aspiration, level of understanding and the like.

The Rohatsu sesshin commemorates the Supreme Enlightenment of the Buddha, Shakyamuni.

What does it mean to be a Buddhist? I think we realize that we are a Buddhist when, somehow, mysteriously, the word “Buddha” resonates deeply in our minds and hearts in two ways. One is the association with the words “Shakyamuni Buddha,” that is the historic Buddha. For the Buddhist, the birth of Siddhartha Gautama is the most significant and glorious event that has occurred in the world. It is through his extraordinary exertion that he came to great awakening and has given everyone tremendous hope – the hope that all sentient beings can abandon their greed, hatred and ignorance, and come to know, as he came to know, this pure, unsullied Buddha Mind that lies at the heart of all existence. The Buddhist finds herself or himself in a state of awe and gratitude in front of the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism. Second is the association with the word “Buddha” in the sense of Buddha Nature, the inherent perfection and purity, which is common to each of us and all existence.

I think we do pretty well in championing Zen Buddhism as the way to realize Buddha nature. However, I suspect that many, perhaps most, tend to use less religious terminology. Instead of “Buddha,” we say “True Nature,” “the Absolute,” “the Ground of Being,” “Ultimate Reality” and the like, or perhaps shift to Christian

terminology such as “divinity” or even “God.” Nevertheless, any Zen Buddhist that finds himself or herself in this sesshin is here to realize their Buddha Nature, their True Self. There is no mistake about that.

In this adventure of planting a foreign religion in our American soil, I think we are far less advanced in being able to identify ourselves with the historic personage of Shakyamuni Buddha. Who was this extraordinary man to whom we are so deeply indebted? We have grown up in such a way that Christ, as man and archetype, is so deeply embedded in our unconscious that we are not even aware of it. Not so with Buddha. We have a lot of catching up to do.

Our Rohatsu sesshin is not so much characterized by greater demands in terms of exertion, stronger discipline and effort, longer sittings, yaza, etc., which is the traditional approach to Rohatsu. Rather, we approach the Rohatsu sesshin as a special sesshin in which we devote ourselves to getting to know the Buddha as man and archetype and working to realize ourselves by way of requiting our debt to him.

So, in the course of this sesshin we will carefully investigate his life and teaching by way of inspiration and instruction. The sesshin will culminate a week from today in the traditional ceremony commemorating the Buddha’s Enlightenment. The rest of the Sangha will join us for the ceremony.

It is my hope that the Buddha Shakyamuni will take form right here in this zendo in our minds and hearts in the course of the coming week.

Sangha News

Dear Sangha,

I have decided to change the yearly Zen Center calendar to reflect the traditional Zen angos that consist of four, three-month training periods rather than our present two, four-month training periods and two, two-month training periods. As such, the spring training period will include April, May and June; the summer training period, July, August and September; the fall training period, October, November and December; and the winter training period, January, February and March.

There are a number of reasons for making this change. The four-month training periods were created for the purpose of focusing my teaching into eight months during the fall and spring spent in Denver so that I could spend the remaining four months doing intense training with Aitken Roshi in Hawaii. At this point I am spending almost all my time in Denver. I spend only about two weeks each winter in Hawaii working with Aitken Roshi. So it is not absolutely necessary to retain this schedule.

I believe that for those who are deeply involved in rigorous formal Zen training, in addition to all their responsibilities as householders, four months of intense training is too long. I have noticed that these practitioners, including myself, begin to flag during the fourth month. Also, as I attend all of the sittings, sesshin, ceremonies etc., I think another yearly schedule will enable me to avoid exhaustion and perhaps reduce the chance of illness and thus hopefully increase my teaching life. While many people my age are thinking about retirement, I hope to continue teaching for many years.

It is still important for the more deeply involved practitioners and their families that the training periods alternate between more intense training, including a lot of daily sitting, dokusan, teishos, sesshin, ceremonies and samu, and less intense formal practice at the Temple during the following training period.

I will be the resident teacher for the spring and fall training periods. Each will include the existing weekly zazen schedule with dokusan, two seven-day sesshin, one zazenkai with a live teisho (open to the public) and dokusan, about five Sunday teishos (open to the public), two seminars, about six samus, three ceremonies (Kannon, Repentance, Ceremony of Aid), Vesak in the spring and Thanksgiving and Jukai in the fall, one Dharma talk or Dharma Discussion, three zazen with question and answer period, three renewal ceremonies for the Lay Order and one Sangha meeting.

Peggy Sheehan and Ken Morgareidge will be in charge of the winter and summer training periods. These training periods will include the regular sitting schedule with daisan held twice a week, two zazenkai with live teishos (open to the public) and daisan, one live teisho on Sundays (open to the public), about eight taped teishos on Sundays, ceremonies (Kannon and Repentance plus Parinirvana in the winter), two samus, one all-Sangha workday, the Fourth of July picnic in the summer, one seminar with me in early August and February, and Monastery Without Walls and Lay Order meetings with me in late September and March.

The Wednesday evening public zazen schedule will remain the same during all the training periods.

Although I will not be the resident teacher during the winter and summer training periods, I will be involved in many aspects of Center life including sitting in the zendo two or three times a week, board of directors meetings and other administrative work, meeting with the Monastery Without Walls and the Lay Order, committee participation, meeting with Peggy and Ken and the office manager regularly, meeting with formal students upon request, conducting seminars in addition to working on koan text revisions, teisho preparation, personal Buddhist studies, fund-raising travel, meeting with Diamond Sangha teachers and other teachers, working with Aitken Roshi for a couple of weeks, visiting inmates in Colorado prisons and Lupe in the Texas Penitentiary, doing some solitary zazen, the Fourth of July picnic and a bit of hiking in the mountains.

This change is made possible only because Peggy and Ken are ready and able to take on a bit of teaching responsibility. As such, they will serve the Sangha while continuing to develop their own practice and realization. This step reflects a new stage in the development of our Temple. I feel proud and very happy about this. I hope you feel the same way.

Yours in the Dharma,

Danan

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Calendar Changes

To begin the transition to three-month training periods immediately, we will add the month of September to the summer 2002 training period. However, the Monastery Without Walls will meet on Saturday, September 21, and the Lay Order will meet on Saturday, September 28 in preparation for the intense three-month fall training period. The enclosed summer and fall 2002 training calendars reflect these changes as we transition to the new Zen Center training schedules.

Not Yet, Not Enough, Not Yet Enough

A letter from Sensei read to Philip Kapleau Roshi at his ninetieth birthday celebration at the Rochester Zen Center on August 18, 2002. Sensei was unable to attend the celebration in person due to the death of his mother.

Roshi, in 1979, in the dokusan room, you wielded the sword of compassion so skillfully and ruthlessly that it changed the course and direction of my life profoundly. I was so stuck in a blissful mind state that I was unable to continue working with the initial koan. For a couple of dokusans you patiently encouraged me to continue to engage the koan and stay on track. But I was unable to shake free from a wonderful oceanic feeling of joy and pick up the practice again. Finally you shouted at me, "If you want to see the view from half way up the mountain, that's your business. But don't come back to dokusan and don't apply to another sesshin. There are others who want to see the view from the top of the mountain that could take your seat in the zendo." I was devastated. The well-timed censure and rebuke accomplished its aim, and I went back down to the zendo and dug in with the determination to be prepared for anything and disturbed by nothing and was able to stay on track and move on.

And from that time to the present I have done my best to continue along the path. Not yet, not enough – not yet enough.

The Buddha said, "There are only two mistakes that one can make on the path to truth. Not starting. And not continuing." Roshi, you have helped thousands to start and hundreds to continue. Nine bows!

Board of Directors Nominating Committee

The tenure of the following three directors is expiring in November: Debra Zapka, Dennis Sienko and Jann Griffiths. These three members have each served two consecutive terms and are ineligible for re-election. The following three board members are eligible for re-election: Patty Kelley, Mike Tabor and Jim Hubbell.

The Board of Directors has selected the following people to comprise the nominating committee for the upcoming election: Peggy Sheehan, Mike Tabor and Jann Griffiths. If you would like to nominate yourself or someone else to the Board of Directors, please contact someone on the nominating committee. The election of new directors will take place at the All-Sangha meeting November 10.

Peace and Acceptance Rally

The Center is co-sponsoring a peace rally Sunday, September 8 at Columbus/La Raza Park at 38th and Navajo Streets. Dennis Sienko will make a short speech on behalf of the Zen Center. Other sponsors of the rally include the Northwest Denver Ministerial Alliance, Mother-to-Mother, the Conflict Center and Muslims Intent on Learning and Activism. Everyone is asked to bring a canned food item for local food banks.

Walk for Hunger

The community outreach committee is working with other Northwest Denver churches to promote the Fourth Annual Northwest Denver CROPWALK, a fundraising walk to fight hunger. Please join fellow Zen Center sangha members and others on Saturday, October 19, beginning at 9 am at the North Presbyterian Church located at 37th and Federal. All participants are asked to collect donations before the walk (donation packets will be provided), and to bring non-perishable food items to the walk. For more information, contact Layne Hartsell at 720-352-7959.

The proceeds from CROPWALK go to three local food banks and to support Church World Services food and development programs worldwide. To learn more about CWS, visit their website at www.churchworldservice.org. This is a great opportunity for engaged Buddhism to enlarge our hearts of compassion.

Sunday School During Teisho

Hoag Holmgren and Leda Swann will hold Sunday School for all Sangha kids upstairs in the auditorium during the first teisho of each month, starting October 6. Parents are encouraged to call Hoag or Leda with any questions or suggestions at 303-258-0240.

Classical Guitar Music Series

Masakazu Ito will perform a second classical guitar concert at the Center Friday, September 20 at 8 pm. Ito's first recital in June was very well attended, and the acoustics in our auditorium proved excellent for this type of "unplugged" classical music. Advance purchase tickets are \$15 (\$10 for seniors and students). Call the Zen Center office to buy tickets. Prices at the door are \$20 (\$15 for seniors and students).

Samu Schedule

Only a few people notified the office manager that they had a preference for samu times. Those people said they preferred to keep the schedule the same. Therefore, samus will continue to be held from 9 am - 1:30 pm.

**Zen Center of Denver
3101 West 31st Ave.
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Gassho Corner

Lindsey Trout, Joel Tagert, Nancy Peters and Geoff Keeton spent hours preparing delicious, gourmet food for the reception at the architect's presentation July 10.

Dear Sangha: Please accept my heartfelt thanks for all the kind cards and notes and flowers that you sent me after my mother passed away. Once again "the wisdom, example and never failing help" of the Sangha is felt and appreciated.

All Good Wishes,
Danan

Upcoming Events

All Sangha Workday	Sept. 15
Classical Guitar Concert	Sept. 20
Monastery Without Walls Meeting	Sept. 21
Lay Order Meeting	Sept. 28
Repentance Ceremony	Oct. 3
Zazen with Q&A	Oct. 15
Sesshin	Oct. 19
All Sangha Meeting	Nov. 10