



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Spring 2002

Engaged Buddhism

Engaged Buddhism is simply an extension of Buddhist practice and insight into the larger world outside the temple or monastery. It is easy to accept this definition as concerns right livelihood and helping the poor and disadvantaged. But it also includes bringing a spiritual and moral perspective to the very center of economic, political, social, and ecological debate. Regardless of our education, conditioning, and world views that we initially bring with us into the zendo, it is a fact that with genuine realization of the Dharmakaya¹, the Sambhogakaya², and the Nirmanakaya³, there emerges and grows in us a commitment to non-harming (which includes a non-violent response to conflict), to justice, to sharing and helping, and to the protection of the environment. These ways of looking at the world are sometimes called universal love, pacifism, socialism, and environmentalism.

Although people of all persuasions are welcome to come and practice with us, it is simply a fact that whether one uses existing labels or not, this practice naturally unfolds in a particular direction. As such, there is bound to be conflict between the ingrained views from our past and the emergence of greater clarity, selflessness, affection, and compassion.

In the face of powerful habit forces of self-centeredness and profoundly distorted views, translating what we come to experience in the depths of our hearts and minds into the voice of conscience and acts of non-harming, love, compassion, sharing, and the protection of the environment, involves a great spiritual battle that rages within all true seekers.

Let's not take the easy way out and dodge the bullets by insisting that political, economic, social, and environmental concerns have no place in spiritual practice and awakening. Unless one is in a monastery, removed from the larger community, one is a political animal whether one likes it or not. In fact, even if one does live in isolation from others, one is still part of the fabric of the world.

Although socialism, environmentalism, pacifism or any "ism", including Buddhism, does not reach that place of genuine realization, nevertheless, with practice and realization, political, social, and environmental concerns are informed by prajna. How essential is the emergence of a sane and compassionate voice for each of us, all beings, and the planet itself!

If you find yourself at odds with the politics of awakening, don't worry about it. Just practice! You might find that you become more selfless, less violent, more kind, less indifferent to the plight of others and the beautiful green earth. Nothing wrong with that!

Danan Henry

We Buddhists must find the courage to leave our temples and enter the temples of human experience, temples that are filled with suffering. If we listen to the Buddha, Christ, or Gandhi, we can do nothing else. The refugee camps, the ghettos, the battlefields will then become our temples. We have so much work to do.

Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda

The kind of suffering that you carry in your heart, that is society itself. You bring that with you, you bring society with you. You bring all of us with you. When you meditate, it is not just for yourself, you do it for the whole society. You seek solutions to your own problems not only for yourself, but for all of us.

Thich Nhat Hanh

If we hold fast to Buddhism we shall have a socialist disposition in our flesh and blood. We shall see our fellow human beings as friends in suffering – in birth, old age, sickness and death – and hence, we cannot abandon them... This is the ideal of pure socialism which must be acted out, not just talked about for political purposes or for selfish, devious gain.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

1. The underlying emptiness and purity of all existence, or selflessness
2. The inherent interdependence and indivisibility of all existence, or oneness
3. The uniqueness of every single thing that appears and then disappears

An Apology for Wartime Complicity

By Shodo Harada Roshi

During the early years of the 20th century through WWII, the Japanese Buddhist establishment, including both Rinzai and Soto sects, were nearly unanimous in their support of Japan's militaristic policies, even to the point of using "holy war" imagery to condone the atrocities committed through Japanese expansionism. It is a very dark and troubling portion of our history, which has been brought to light in the book Zen at War, by Brian Victoria. The following is a letter (edited for space) written by Shodo Harada Roshi of Sogenji Monastery to Mrs. Ina Buitendijk in response to a letter she wrote to several leading Rinzai masters in Japan.

Dear Mrs. Buitendijk

...I would like to begin by offering, as a Japanese, my deepest apologies to your husband and to all others who suffered, and continue to suffer, as a result of my country's actions during World War II.

I myself was born in the year 1940, so my own direct memories of the war years are vague and few. My deepest impressions of what went on in the war were formed by my teacher, Yamada Mumon Roshi, under whom I began my Zen training in the early 1960s. I know that Mumon Roshi has been especially criticized in *Zen at War*, and I offer my sincere apologies on his behalf for anything he may have done to support the Japanese war effort. However, I would like here to relate my own experiences with him, and mention something about his actions following the war.

Mumon Roshi always said to his students, "That war was a war of aggression started by Japan. We priests' transgression in failing to do what we could to prevent the conflict is something that we ourselves must seek forgiveness for." Thus from 1967 he would travel once, twice, or sometimes three times a year to the sites of WWII battles in the South Pacific, apologizing to the people of the area, erecting memorial shrines, and conducting commemorative ceremonies for those—Japanese and non-Japanese alike—who had fallen in combat. The commemorative ceremonies would always begin with a service by a Christian minister or priest, followed by our Buddhist ceremony. To those of us who accompanied him, he would always say, "Bring nothing of your own on this trip. Fill your luggage with school supplies, medicines, and anything else that might be of use to the local people. This is not a pleasure tour—we're going in order to atone for the suffering caused by our country, and you must always keep that in mind."

Mumon Roshi continued these journeys until well into his eighties. Thus it was always with a feeling of repentance that we visited the South Pacific. When we were there, the atrocities committed by the Japanese troops were quite evident, and I was left with a deep sense of pain and humiliation. For many, many people, I realized, the war has not yet ended. I have sought to redress this on a personal level, expressing repentance for Japan's wartime actions whenever appropriate during my teaching trips to the United States, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, and Switzerland. But, as you so correctly point out, there has yet to be any public statement of apology from the various branches of Rinzai Zen Buddhism on an official level, nor from many Zen masters on an individual level...

Implied in your letter is a deeply penetrating question: if the life of Zen Buddhism does indeed flow from the very wellsprings of universal love, how could masters of that tradition not only fail to do what they could to stop the conflict but actually lend their support to the militarists? This question I could not help but direct

toward myself. Examining my thirty years of training in the Way and the understanding it has brought me, I wondered, "How well would my own Zen practice have served me in such a situation? To what extent would I have been able to stand up against all the forces of governmental authority? How far would I have been able to maintain Shakyamuni's admonition to 'avoid all conflict'—the 'golden rule' of the true spirit of Buddhism—in righting the errors of my own government? Is my training that deep in content and function?"

It has been 2,000 to 2,500 years since the original messengers of universal human love—Christ, Shakyamuni, Confucius, Socrates—expounded their teachings. Yet even now we continue to fight and kill each other in one war after another. We can only conclude that religion has lost not only its capacity to guide suffering people but also its very powers of self-purification. Why, indeed, were Japanese Zen masters so unable to mount any resistance to government authority? Why were they so unable to oppose the war? It is important for the future that we attempt to understand these questions. I myself see the roots of such failings as lying in the past several centuries of the nation's history. During the feudal Tokugawa period (1600 - 1868) the temples became, in effect, government organs, used for the registry and control of the citizens. Soon after the Meiji Restoration (1868), when Japan abandoned its isolationist policy and opened its doors to the world, Buddhism was actively suppressed in favor of State Shinto, which the government promoted as a means of creating a unified national consciousness. In some areas of Japan, Buddhism was almost completely destroyed. With the growth of militarism, religion was strictly controlled and close watch was kept on all forms of ideology. Cast as a "foreign religion," Buddhism was placed in the position of having to prove its loyalty to the state. The result of all these forces was a Buddhism largely bereft of content as it moved into the modern age...

This, my answer to your letter, is at best an imperfect one, but I pray that you may understand the intention behind it. And I pray from my heart that you will continue in your own practice and reach full realization of the Way.

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Sangha News

To Build a Temple

Those of us who knew him will never forget him; Pat Powell (1943-1989) was a genuine bodhisattva. He designed and supervised the building of the modest zendo at Columbine street, and put in hundreds of hours of labor by himself on its actual construction. I knew that for all of us involved in building the zendo, it was a labor of love. But, at first, I did not realize the depth of Pat's love for the project. When I learned that Pat, as a naval officer and engineer, had designed, built, and tested the Apollo launch pad cooling systems at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, I mentioned to him that it must have really been something to be involved and responsible for such an immense project. He smiled shyly, looked at the floor and said, "That was OK, but to build a temple, now that is really something!"

Pat truly understood the significance of building a temple. We outgrew the Columbine Temple and have taken a giant step in bringing Zen into 21st Century American culture by gaining possession of our current building, which is in itself a kind of miracle. And now we embark on turning it into a Buddhist temple, not only for ourselves but for future generations - for the continued transmission and fruition of Zen Buddhism in America: "...now that is really something!"

What an extraordinary thing to be doing for ourselves and for Buddhism. I'm not much concerned with the cost and I'm not much concerned with the time it will take to complete the renovation. This is our monument to Zen practice and realization. This is our contribution to the thousands of people who will enter here and practice the Dharma and realize themselves for the benefit of all sentient beings - a contribution to the harmony and well-being of the world. This will be an island of clarity and compassion that will extend throughout the world. This will be the way we try to pay our debt of gratitude to the Buddha, the ancestral teachers, and all who have labored to realize and protect the Dharma for the good of the many.

I invite you all to join me in this good work that Pat Powell was able to do as naturally, unselfconsciously, and serenely as breathing in and breathing out.

-Danan

Diamond Sangha Teachers Circle Meeting

I recently attended a meeting of the Diamond Sangha Teachers Circle, hosted by Diamond Sangha teacher Pat Hawk, at Picture Rocks Retreat Center in Tucson, Arizona. The setting in the Sonora desert was spectacular and the accommodations were excellent. But most impressive was the coming together of Diamond Sangha teachers to explore our interests and concerns as Dharma teachers in our common lineage. Our first item of business was to establish the nature and function of our group.

Here is what we came up with:

"...We understand the Teachers Circle as a forum for exchange and a means of renewal for teachers of the Zen Buddhist lineage descending from Robert Aitken. In this meeting especially, we have found it a potent vehicle for exploration of our experience as teachers, and we want to cultivate the rich give-and-take that our diverse personalities and perspectives make possible.

"We also recognize that the Teachers Circle, like all groups, must make decisions in order to function. Although the Teachers Circle is not constituted to govern, we realize that groups and individuals may look to it for leadership or for correction of members' conduct and we hope to be responsive to such needs when they arise..."

We spent the remaining four days in lively and informative discussion of such topics as the student-teacher relationship, working with beginners, Sangha treasure, congregation models, and koan study together. In the course of sharing and investigating each topic, the discussion naturally branched out to include much additional material.

I return much nourished and energized as a teacher. As the center provides me with travel expenses for these meetings, I want to thank the Sangha for making it possible for me to attend and hope that my teaching contribution will deepen as a result. I look forward to the time when our renovation project is far enough along to make it possible to host the Teachers Circle here in our temple.

-Danan

Architecture & Design Committee Report

The architecture and design committee continues to work with SlaterPaull Architects on the renovation of the temple. The schematic phase is nearing completion and we will soon have a more accurate cost for the overall design, plus some phasing options. The committee is dedicated to keeping costs down while designing a functional, simple, and aesthetically pleasing temple. The current design from SlaterPaull maintains this cost conscious approach in designing a center that will meet our needs while minimizing demolition and reconstruction costs. During the spring training period, the architects will be making a presentation to the Sangha. Look for more updates as this exciting project continues.

Shonen's Departure

Shonen Dunley will be leaving for a period of extended monastic training in Japan in mid to late May. He will spend most of his time at Bukkokuji monastery in Obama studying with Tangen Harada Roshi, and will also take time to travel and visit other temples in Japan. Shonen plans on staying for a year or so to deepen his practice and experience traditional Zen monastic life.

Shonen will stay in contact with the Sangha, and anyone wishing to write to him can reach him by email at shonensan@aol.com, or at the following address: David Dunley, c/o Bukkokuji, Fushihara, Obama-shi, Fukui-ken, 917.

A new office manager has yet to be selected. Supporting members interested in the position should contact the office for a job description. Resumes will be accepted until the end of March, and should be submitted to Shonen, Peggy Sheehan, or Jann Griffiths.

Gassho Corner

A deep gassho to the following Sangha members for donations and services "beyond the call of duty":

- ◆ Debra and Ron Zapka threw a fantastic Sangha holiday party on December 23. Deb and Ron were excellent hosts, sharing their lovely home and providing delectable things to eat and drink.
- ◆ Phil & Dixie Good donated their 1990 Subaru Legacy to the temple. Sensei uses it primarily, but it is also available for use by Sangha members.
- ◆ David Brown did some emergency work on the boiler at a moment's notice and was able to get it up and running again.

Upcoming Events

Kannon Ceremony

March 7

Zazenkai

March 17

Repentance Ceremony

March 28

Dharma Discussion

April 7

Sesshin (application deadline April 3)

April 20-27

Vesak

May 12

Zazenkai

May 19

Ceremony of Aid

June 11

Sangha Meeting

June 16

Sesshin (application deadline June 5)

June 22-29

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