



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Fall 2007

On the Desirability of Training

By Ken Morgareidge

Training in Zen must be real training; enlightenment must be real enlightenment.

-- Wu-men

At a Zen Center teachers' meeting in early April Roshi informed us (Peggy, Karin and me) that he would be taking a four-month sabbatical starting immediately after the April sesshin. One of the first questions that came up was what about the June sesshin? Should we cancel it? Postpone it? Should we somehow change it; run it using recorded teishos? At some point, in a moment of bravado or maybe foolishness, I volunteered to run it and do dokusan, teisho, the whole shebang.

Well, the next day I had some moments of panic (Ohmigod, what have I let myself in for?), but for the most part I really looked forward to the challenge. Even so, I was still a bit apprehensive about how it would run. After all, it was the first seven-day sesshin in which Danan Henry Roshi was not sitting in the teacher's seat. Would it fall apart? Would all the jobs get done? There were so few participants. But as early as the Thursday night set-up it became clear that it was going to be just fine. Everybody came and did their jobs, even some folks who weren't going to be at the sesshin. The temple and zendo got cleaned. The kitchen was set up, the sleeping mats set out. Everything meshed together. And on Saturday, we were ready. From start to finish; from the opening ceremony to the last prostration, the sesshin flowed seamlessly.

Sitting in the teacher's seat in the zendo and in the dokusan room gave me an opportunity that I've never had before, to really see what was going on with each participant. And I was amazed, gratified and humbled. Whatever worries I might have had quickly evaporated. Everyone was doing their part and more. The sesshin leaders, the jisha, tanto, jiki and tenzo were totally on top of things. Sitting postures were impeccable; the zendo was utterly silent in a silence that was far more than just the absence of sound. There

was no question that real zazen was happening in the zendo and real insight demonstrated time and again in dokusan.

For me, it was a joy from start to finish. What a wonderful experience!

How did it happen? How is it that 15 people from different backgrounds, occupations and families can come together to do the impossible; to find out, each for himself or herself, the true and ultimate nature of reality, and to do it in the most intense and rigorous way possible? Certainly it was a result of the accumulated experience and maturity of the Sangha and of many of its individual members. But that only begs the question. Where did all *that* come from?

The word *training* carries a lot of negative baggage with it. Ever since the '60s notions of discipline, restraint, self control and obedience to authority have been considered, antiquated and even harmful remnants of an obsolete patriarchal system. Nevertheless, without the years of training and, yes, discipline at this center, such a thing as sesshin would be impossible. Almost no one in a modern post-industrial secular society is equipped emotionally, physically or spiritually to undergo six days of silent, motionless sitting for nine or ten hours per day without considerable practice and training. And that's just to participate. To do all that in a leadership position takes far more.

Once in a while I mention to someone that I'm going to a Zen meditation retreat, and the response is usually something

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Sangha News

like, "A retreat? Oh, how fun! Can anybody go? Can I sign up?" And I try to explain as gently as I can that sesshin isn't your garden-variety retreat.

A person who can exert the effort necessary to break through the blindness of eons of conditioning entirely on his or her own is extremely rare. Most of us need a lot of help, guidance and direction. Anyone can sit down, cross their legs and count the breath, follow the breath, or engage a koan. Any of us can do that any time we want to. And therein lies the rub. When the practice is controlled entirely by the ego-self, it will ultimately serve only the ego-self.

In Zen training, we place ourselves voluntarily under the discipline of a teacher, but the discipline is not imposed or forced from the outside or from above. The student is always at liberty to walk away (and sometimes does). The training is not arbitrary; it grows out of the necessity of finding out who and what we are. Ultimately the discipline can come only from within.

Sometimes we chafe at the strict efforts required to follow the zendo forms and the seemingly constant corrections by the teacher and by fellow Sangha members. Letting go of the self and applying the body-mind skills to what is at first an unfamiliar task can be discouraging and frustrating. This is even more true when we face the teacher in dokusan, give what we think is a dynamite presentation of our understanding, only to be told, "No, keep working."

We never become perfect at it, and yet like a musician who practices constantly on an instrument we never stop trying. And just as the musician, through discipline and practice, eventually gets beyond all concerns about technique and hitting the right notes, and can then get to the heart of the music, it is only after much practice and discipline in our Zen training that we can get beyond the step by step concerns of the breath and mindfulness and what candle do I light first, and go directly to the heart of the matter.

All this became intimately and transparently obvious at June sesshin. I was amazed at the level of practice that was demonstrated by each and every participant, and I am so grateful for the training that made it possible. Gassho, Roshi.

Dokusan

During the fall training period, Roshi will offer dokusan on Tuesdays and Thursdays beginning September 4. Dokusan will be offered during both morning and evening sittings. On evenings when a ceremony or other event is scheduled, dokusan will begin during the first round of zazen. If you have any questions about this procedure, please speak to the jisha before the sitting begins.

The dokusan schedule during all other sittings is as follows: **Sunday mornings:** Karin Kempe; **Wednesday mornings:** Ken Morgareidge; **Friday mornings:** Peggy Sheehan.

Updated Contact Information

If you have moved or your telephone number(s) or e-mail address have changed recently, please provide the office with your updated contact information. Helping us keep our contact information up to date will ensure that we can keep everyone informed of scheduling changes, special events, and other matters that are of interest to the Sangha.

Dedicated to Harry Potter Fans

Friday of sesshin, April 2004

By Peggy Sheehan

We and this eating are vacant.

We now know the oryoki form very well. Given that, let's have some fun. Let's let the form be the only structure that is needed, and let everything else go.

Imagine that as you walk out of the zendo on your way to the oryoki table that you have just walked through Gate 9 1/2 in Harry Potter's train station. You are on your way to lunch at Hogwarts where everything takes care of itself.

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The oryoki unwraps itself..Wow..Who did that? The bowls pass themselves. Nobody is there doing that. The spoons lift up and food appears. Nobody doing that. The table and the pictures on the wall are chanting. Nobody else is chanting. The trays move by themselves, the food sings and dances and calls out to you. The tongs serve you salad. Arms are flying everywhere, reaching, pouring, and they're not attached to any body.

Come on now, go for it, let yourself go completely. When Mu shows up to the table, it is magic and all things are possible. So with a joyful heart, be free, completely free, to disappear into oryoki.

Upcoming Events

Center Closed	September 2-3
Chanting Service	September 6
Prajna Ango Opening Ceremony	September 9
Questions & Answers	September 11
Repentance Ceremony	September 20
Sangha Meeting	September 23
Zazenkai	September 30
Chanting Service	October 4
Questions & Answers	October 9
Kannon Ceremony	October 11
Sesshin	October 20-27
Center Closed	October 28
Repentance Ceremony	November 1
Chanting Service	November 8
Zazenkai	November 11
Ceremony of Aid	November 15
Thanksgiving Ceremony	November 22
Center Closed	November 23
Jukai	November 25
Sesshin	December 1-8
Buddha's Enlightenment	
Ceremony	December 8
Center Closed	December 9
Questions & Answers	December 11
Chanting Service	December 20
Center Closed	December 24-28
Ritual Temple Cleaning	December 30
New Year's Ceremony	December 31

Sangha Meeting

The next Sangha meeting is September 23, when you will be asked to elect three members to the board of directors. At the last meeting you approved a 7-member board (6 are required). It is the wish of the board to maintain 7 members to more easily have a quorum present at meetings. There are three vacancies to be filled. Karin Kempe's term ends in November (not eligible for another term); Jason Polk has moved out of state; and Lorraine Heth is no longer eligible due to her new responsibilities.

A nominating committee has been formed, and is now accepting nominations from supporting members. A nominee must be at least 21 years old and a member for at least one year. If you are interested, please notify a member of the committee or if you wish to nominate someone, likewise, notify a member of the committee. Directors serve a term of 2 years (eligible for re-election for one additional term). A committee member will contact each nominee to ensure their willingness and availability to serve.

Additional nominations may be made from the floor at the time of the meeting, provided the nominee is present.

Nominating Committee

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