



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Summer 2006

Sacrifice

An evening talk given by Ken Morgareidge during the April 2006 sesshin

A monk asked Joshu, “What about the cold spring of the ancient brook?” The cold spring of the ancient brook is a metaphor for the origin of everything; our Buddha nature, practice and enlightenment.

Joshu said, “It tastes bitter.”
What an odd answer.

The hardest thing there is, is to give up that which is most precious. It is to let go of all the thoughts, speculations, images related to the separate self, that continuing sense of an individual, separate identity; the “I am, I will, I was, I’m going to, I did” and so on and on and on. It is not easy to cut off speculations, desires, scenarios, all those things which we so strongly identify as *me*. It can be painful, even frightening. Bitter indeed.

But let go we must. This is sacrifice. Sacrifice means to make sacred. And true sacrifice must be total, nothing held back. When Plato became a student of



Socrates, he burned all his books and plays. When asked why, he said, “When you sacrifice a bull to Apollo you sacrifice the whole thing.” A noble sentiment, but the sacrifice of something external does not reach it. Even the sacrifice of Abraham, who was willing to take the life of his own son, does not reach it. The only sacrifice that is of any use is that of the separate self. It is the only sacrifice worth making, the only real sacrifice.

How do we do this? By pouring everything into our zazen, every particle of our attention, of our energy, of our being into Mu, into the breath, into the koan. Robert Aitken Roshi calls it one hundred percent combustion.

Thus do we sacrifice; thus do we enter the sacred. Then and only then do we see clearly that that self, that separate self, which we have preserved and defended for eons, never existed in the first place; that it is all smoke and mirrors.

But make no mistake. The work has to be done. The sacrifice must be made.

So, let’s get on with it.

Sangha News

The New Identity of the Zen Center of Denver

*Excerpt from a talk by Roshi at the Sangha Meeting
May 14, 2006*

As nearly all members are aware, over the last year there has been a radical change in the structure, and thus the identity, of our Zen center.

The ZCD, like most Zen centers, was based upon a closed monastic model. In ancient times it is said that the aspirant sat on the stone entrance to the monastery for three days and nights, demonstrating their seriousness and aspiration, before being admitted into the monastery. There is a sign at the entrance to Eihei-ji, the headquarters of the Soto sect, written by Zen Master Dogen, that reads: "Do not pass through this gate unless you seek to resolve the Great Matter of Birth and Death." The equivalent of this was our strict entrance requirements of the past. No one could practice at the ZCD without first attending a full-day introductory seminar and then beginning a membership track that involved a long list of requirements, including reading the Three Pillars of Zen, attending a certain number of sittings, chanting services, ceremonies, samus, and more. This made for the admission of only the more serious practitioners, and a very disciplined atmosphere. It safeguarded the authenticity of the enlightenment experience and ultimately produced a second generation of teachers.

During the last decade we became increasingly uneasy with this classical monastic model and experimented, unsuccessfully, with some ways that made it possible for people to begin sitting before attending the seminar.

Then, in February of 2005, we held a weekend ZCD Vision Retreat in the mountains to find out what our collective feelings about the ZCD were. It turned out that everyone felt that our closed model was entirely out of touch with our society and our time. Everyone felt that we needed to become less insular, elitist, etc. and become more democratic and egalitarian in order to be relevant to our time and place. Also, some of us felt that a more open Center might be one way to help address the financial solution to a nagging deficit. So we decided to open the Center to the general public at all sittings without compromising the taut, disciplined, silent, deep zendo atmosphere cultivated over decades of practice.

This constituted a radical change in the identity of the Center and created an enormous challenge in developing a method of instructing new people downstairs during the first round of our sitting and integrating them into the zendo upstairs after the first kinhin. In the beginning it was a total catastrophe.

That was a year ago. Although there will always be people who are not interested in, or capable of, such a disciplined approach to meditation, the Monastery Without Walls (MWW) members have worked tirelessly and it is now evident that it is possible to integrate most new people into the zendo without sacrificing or compromising the standards of discipline that is central to Zen practice. This process continues. We still have a long way to go. In the course of thirty years of participating in a closed center, the forms and practice style became so deeply ingrained that it has been nearly impossible to see them objectively and realize what it is like for a new person to walk directly off the street into our zendo and procedures with only a half hour of instruction. And we are constantly encountering unintended consequences. So the challenge continues to be great.

It is now evident that the spiritual health of the Center depends on us all being on the same page. The MWW members are, of course, directly responsible for maintaining the zendo. But it is essential that all of us understand who we are and what is happening here and respond to the constant flow of new people appropriately. This is crucial to our sound and harmonious development. Nearly everything is in the process of changing. The ZCD calendar is being redesigned to communicate more clearly to the general public. New people are not familiar with our different venues. We must include the general public in all of the venues we use with announcements (i.e., assistant teachers giving teishos, recorded teishos, Seniors' Talks, page numbers in chanting books, Q&A, Talk & Discussion, Dharma Discussion, etc.) There are handouts to all new people to help them get started. There is a special bulletin board section just

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for new people. There is a New Member Review Meeting once a month. And the list goes on and on.

However, all the work done by the MWW members and the Office still does not quite reach it. We are asking that all members pitch in, helping new people with what is for them a bewildering array of forms and procedures. Please be attentive, responsive, and kind in welcoming and supporting new people.

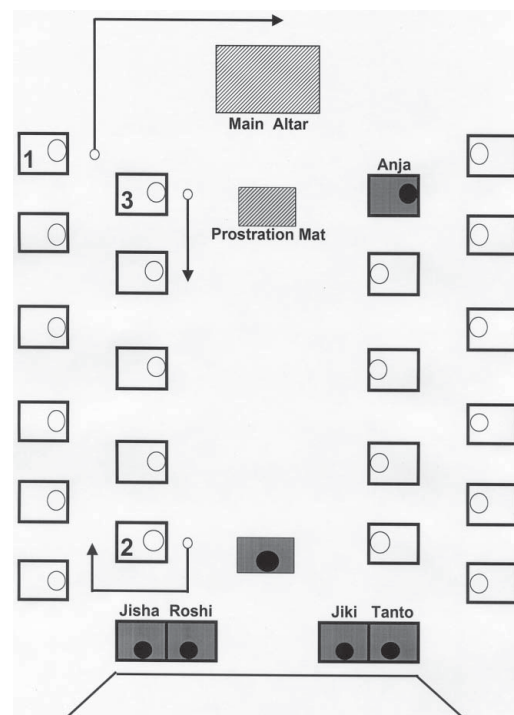
Here is a list of things to keep in mind:

- Most important, try not to forget that this is a different center than the center that you entered years ago and you need to be aware that new people need help.

- Be aware that we are trying to reach, in addition to those interested in Zen as a spiritual tradition, a huge number of people who are interested in meditation as a secular practice of stress reduction.

- Although all new people have been instructed in the forms, it is too much to absorb at one sitting. So most important is helping new people (those not wearing robes) in the zendo:

- If you are not going to dokusan, when you enter the zendo, observe who is in the zendo.
- If seat #1 (the Ino's seat--next to the instruments) is empty, take that seat so you can lead the kinhin line in back of the altar.
- If seat #2 (the first seat on the inside row nearest the auditorium) is empty, take that seat so you can lead kinhin back toward the altar between the two rows.
- If seat #3 (on the inside row nearest the altar on the Speer Boulevard side) is empty, take that seat so you can help new people in that row go in the proper direction at the beginning of kinhin.
- If the above seats are filled by members and you see a new person with no member sitting next to her/him, take that seat so that you will be able to help her/him with the chant book and provide an example for standing, bowing, prostrating, kinhin, etc.



- Please be prepared to move to another seat if requested by the Tanto to help orient new people in the zendo.

- If you are sitting on the other side of the zendo from a new person, even if you do not need to use a chant book, take your chant book and hold it up to chin level so they can see where the chant book is kept and how it is held.

- Remember that we have a two-tiered sangha now.

At this time, almost no one who enters the Center directly through an evening sitting ever comes to teishos, daisan, ceremonies, celebrations etc. When talking to new people/non-members (those without robes) remember that they may not know what teishos, dokusan, daisan, samu, and ceremonies are. Help them out. Direct them to the "Getting Started" section of the foyer bulletin board. Let them know about teishos, dokusan and daisan, etc.

- Know that the new membership requirements are far less stringent and comprehensive than the old membership requirements. So, help new members. Direct new members, where appropriate, to "Members Review Meetings," etc.

Perhaps the most difficult thing in all of this for some long-time members is that change can be painful and the ability to

accept a new identity uncomfortable, even nearly impossible, to embrace quickly. The fact is that the Center is no longer the same institution. It is now almost an entirely lay institution rather than a closed monastery-like temple. All lay Zen centers are, of course, a hybrid of monastic and marketplace traditions. But this hybrid is now open to the public at large on a daily basis and is adapted to interface more naturally with the life of the householder. Our Zen center has finally arrived in the marketplace! And it is wonderful to see the walls fall away and watch those who are capable of the discipline we require flood in. We have unintended consequences to deal with such as a burden on the MWW members in integrating the stream of sometimes totally inexperienced people into the zendo and an unevenness in levels of understanding and participation. We will work through these issues as a result of patience, the passage of time, practicing with the discomfort of change, and appropriate modifications. I am confident that as we become more skillful in working with new people and further developing appropriate methods, forms, and zendo job distribution, within another year we will begin to settle more comfortably into our new Center.

Nine bows to all who are moving forward energetically and making this new era of the Zen Center possible.

—Danan

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New Chanting Schedule

Beginning with the Summer Shila Ango, evening chanting services will be held once per month instead of once per week as in the past. The reason for this change, which was suggested at the recent Sangha Meeting, is to make more time available for zazen. The goal is to have at least one full sitting each week without any other events. Talk and Discussions will continue to be held on Tuesday evenings and ceremonies and chanting services will continue to be held on Thursday evenings.

Upcoming Events

Sangha Picnic	July 4
Shila Ango Opening Ceremony	July 9
Kannon Ceremony	July 13
T&D: The Five Hindrances	July 18
Mountains & Rivers Sesshin	To Be Announced
Workday	July 30
T&D: The Five Hindrances	August 1
Repentance Ceremony	August 10
Day of Play	August 12
Dharma Discussion	August 13
T&D: The Five Hindrances	August 15
Zazenkai	August 20
T&D: The Five Hindrances	August 29