



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Spring 2010

Sea of Change

-Danan Roshi-

Dear Sangha,

I'm pleased that the transition of the transfer of teaching authority and re-structuring of our center continues to progress smoothly.

On Sunday, September 12th, 2010 we will have an Ascending the Mountain Ceremony in which Karin Kempe, Ken Morgareidge and Peggy Sheehan will receive full Dharma Transmission, formally becoming my Dharma Heirs and the Spiritual Directors of the Zen Center of Denver.

I will leave the Center at the conclusion of the Fall 2010 training period at the end of December. I plan to build a small house at Twin Lakes near Mt. Elbert in Lake County between Buena Vista and Leadville and undertake some hermitage practice there. Nevertheless, the Lotus in the Flame Sangha and Temple will always be my family and home. So I'll certainly be visiting from time to time.

The new teachers have invited me to share with them each year in conducting the Rohatsu (December) sesshin in the same manner that Karin Sensei and I conducted the last Rohatsu sesshin. I'm touched by their affection and generosity of spirit and look forward to this annual ritual.

Here are a number of items that we are in the process of working out:

- Some students are still in the process of choosing a new teacher. As you know, the teacher-student relationship is profound. Many personal students have been seeking counsel and support from me in this matter. It is heartening to see how smoothly this serious business of committing to a new teacher is going.

- The actual structure for the shared leadership for all the aspects of Dharma teaching will probably involve a lengthy process of experimentation and include periodic discussions with the Lay Order and at Sangha meetings.

- The Monastery Without Walls training program has been turned over entirely to the new teachers who are determining how they will lead the training (e.g. rotation of leadership)

- Although I will continue to lead seminars for the duration of 2010 and deliver teishos occasionally, I will no longer be involved in the following teaching formats: Talk & Discussion, Question & Answer and the newly created Practice & Discussion format. I will administer Jukai during the Fall 2010 training period for the last time.

- I am now stepping down from the ZCD Board of Directors so that one or more of the new teachers will be taking up that position at every BOD meeting. The new teachers will work out how their required participation as BOD members will be implemented.

These aforementioned changes and others that will certainly arise will require some changes to the ZCD By-laws. We'll wait on actually drafting the changes to the By-laws to get a clear feel for the changes before setting out to alter the By-laws. Of course, the entire membership must vote on ratification when the time comes.

Most important in all of this is the harmony of the Sangha! So far "clear is the river, calm is the sea". I believe that this is a testimony to our serious commitment to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Yours in the Dharma,
Danan

On Becoming a Teacher

-Ken Morgareidge Sensei-

On September 12th there will be a ceremony of Dharma Transmission. Three people are going to be named Dharma heirs. In so doing, Danan Henry Roshi will be discharging a great part of his debt of gratitude to the Buddhas and Ancestral Teachers, from whom he has received the Dharma. It is an occasion of joy and deepest gratitude. Gratitude especially for the dedication, the passion and eloquence of Roshi's teaching.

A little while ago a student asked me in dokusan, "Did you know that you were going to become a teacher?" Well, at that point, yeah I did. But the question got me thinking: how long had I known? Was there a defining moment, a moment of choice, of decision?

There appears to be such a moment in Case #45 in the Wu-men Kuan:

When Kuei-shan was studying under Pai-chang, he worked as the cook at the monastery. Pai-chang wanted to choose a founding teacher for Mount Ta-kuei. He summoned the head monk and the rest of the disciples, and told them that an exceptional person should go there. Then he took a water bottle, set it on the floor, and said, "Don't call this a water bottle. What would you call it?"

The head monk said, "It can't be called a wooden clog."

Pai-chang then asked Kuei-shan his opinion. Kuei-shan kicked over the water bottle, and walked out.

Pai-chang laughed and said, "The head monk loses." Kuei-shan thereupon was made the founding teacher of Mount-kuei.

This Koan gives us much to work on, but as regards the matter of transmission, Wu-men says in his commentary:

Though Kuei-shan was altogether valiant, he could not spring out of Pai-chang's trap. Comparatively speaking, he accepted the difficult, and rejected the easy. How so? Look for yourself!

Removing the towel from his head, he shouldered an iron yoke.

The commentators on this koan say that the whole thing was a setup; that Pai-chang had already decided that Kuei-shan was to establish the new monastery. So did Kuei-shan leap clear of one trap only to be caught in another, one from which there was no escape? Did Roshi set a trap for the three of us? When Kuei-shan kicked over the water bottle, was that his moment of decision? Was he trying to escape anything, or to prove anything?

Kuei-shan was tenzo. In "Instructions to the Tenzo", Dogen describes a shipboard encounter with the tenzo of a monastery at Mt. Ayuwang in China (Moon in a Dewdrop p. 58). Dogen describes him as a monk about sixty years old, a truly advanced age in those days. The monk tells him,

"...Last year when the summer practice period was over, I was appointed tenzo of the monastery. Tomorrow is the fifth day of the fifth month, but I have nothing good to offer the community. I wanted to make a noodle soup, but we did not have mushrooms, so I made a special trip here to get some mushrooms to offer to the monks from the ten directions."

Dogen asks, "When did you leave there?"

"After the noon meal."

"How far is Mt. Ayuwang?"

"Thirty-four or thirty-five li [about twelve miles]."

"When are you going back to your monastery?"

"I will go back as soon as I have bought mushrooms."

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Sangha News

Dogen begs the monk to stay for a meal, but the monk replies,

“It is not possible. If I don’t oversee tomorrow’s offering, it will not be good.”

“Is there not someone else in the monastery who understands cooking? Even if one tenzo is missing, will something be lacking?”

“I have taken this position in my old age. This is the fulfillment of many years of practice. How can I delegate my responsibility to others?...”

There it is. In fulfilling his practice of years, taking fully his responsibility, that old tenzo-monk is completely free.

Sweeper, tenzo, teacher, toilet cleaner, tanto, anja, jisha, salad cook, tea server; electrician, sales rep, merchant, nurse, carpenter: Every moment is the fulfillment of our practice whether we have practiced for twenty years or twenty minutes. And we cannot delegate our practice or our lives to others, not even to the Buddha. In kicking over the waterbottle, Kuei-shan fulfills his years of practice in that moment.

Freedom is not about traps, escapes or choices. Picking and choosing is delusion; it is enslavement to ego and all choices are wrong. Kuei-shan did not choose to found a monastery any more that the wind “chooses” to blow or the rain “chooses” to fall. And in that no-choice, Kuei-shan is completely free. When we speak of liberation, it is not liberation *from* anything; it is liberation *as* everything. It is the freedom to be exactly who and what we are, right here, right now. Every moment, this moment, this moment and this moment is the fulfillment of our practice. That’s our liberation.

So, no, there was no particular moment of decision. I can’t say that I chose to become a teacher any more than I chose to be a human being, or that I chose to get old. It is just the way of things. And I can no more avoid or delegate the responsibility than I can delegate my human-ness or my aging. It is in taking on who we are in the here and now, and living it fully as we are able; that is our real freedom.

Lay Ordinations

During the winter angu, two ordinations were conducted. Both reflecting very well Ta Hui’s Vow for Awakening:

Our only prayer is to be firm in our determination, to give ourselves completely to the Buddha’s Way, so that no doubts arise, however long the road seems to be.

Congratulations Paul Stern (Ardorborn) and George Mathews (Mountainstaff)!



Calendar Highlights

Samu

ISesshin

Center Closed

Intro. to Zen Seminar

Samu

Philip Kapleau Remembrance Cer

Board of Directors

Samu

Repentance Ceremony

Weekend Sesshin

Sangha Meeting

Sesshin

Center Closed

April 10

April 17-24

April 25

May 1-2

May 8

May 9

May 10

May 15

May 20

May 28-31

June 13

June 19-26

June 27- July 4

Practice Discussion

Practice discussion is a new addition for some Tuesday evenings. Rather than having a talk and discussion around a Buddhist teaching or doctrine, we will focus on practice issues and questions. Anyone will be welcome to bring up questions or share experience related to practice. This includes formal practice at the center as well as home and daily life practice. We hope this will be a practical, rich and encouraging format for sangha discussion.

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