



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Winter 2002

Trust in Allah but Tie Your Donkey

A morning talk given by Sensei during the April 1999 7-day sesshin

There is a Sufi aphorism that goes, “Trust in Allah but tie your donkey”.

I think that in sesshin we are pretty good in tying our donkey, that is, making effort and doing the hard work that needs to be done. I am always moved by how hard people work in sesshin to settle the mind against seemingly impossible odds. People are so often very courageous and energetic in their sesshin practice.

But trusting ourselves seems to be much harder for many of us. I have struggled with self-doubt for my entire spiritual journey and am only now, as I approach sixty, beginning to trust myself.

It occurred to me while reflecting on this that perhaps the reason that so many people - more than seventy percent - believe in a personal God conceived of as a very large man with a white beard who lives somewhere up in the sky and runs everything, is because it is too hard to trust one's self, to trust in one's own nature. It is easier to trust and rely on someone else whom I take to be smarter and more spiritual than myself.

But the fact is that the truth is within us. Each of us is endowed with wisdom and compassion. We already have everything we need to be happy and live well. But it is so hard for so many of us to have faith and to trust ourselves.

Of course, such faith and trust comes with practice. When the mind is denuded of all sorts of discriminating thought, we begin to uncover our pure unsullied mind which is thoroughly at rest and thus free of greed, hatred, and ignorance. And with this discovery we are naturally able to begin trusting ourselves. But I think we can actually cultivate trust to some degree. This cultivation begins of necessity with acceptance. Perhaps one reason that some of us have trouble trusting ourselves is that our parents did not fully approve of us. Living under a cloud of disapproval we learned to distrust ourselves. So perhaps some of us have to do some of our own parenting here in accepting ourselves just as we are, being kind to ourselves and approving of ourselves. This paves the way for self-confidence and trust.

So can we accept ourselves just as we are and practice right there? In this way we won't distance ourselves from ourselves and will more readily come to realize that the truth we seek lies no where else but in this present moment, where we have always been; right here in our own hearts.

Let us really trust ourselves even as we work hard to uncover our true minds of peace, love, and abundance.

Birth and Death

Shoji, by Dogen Kigen

1.

“Because a buddha is in birth and death, there is no birth and death.”

It is also said, “Because a buddha is not in birth and death, a buddha is not deluded by birth and death.”

These statements are the essence of the words of two Zen masters, Jiashan and Dingshan. You should certainly not neglect them, for they are the words of those who attained the way.

2.

Those who want to be free from birth and death should try to understand the meaning of these words. If you search for a buddha outside birth and death, it will be like trying to go to the southern country of Yue with your spear heading towards the north, or like trying to see the Big Dipper while you are facing south; you will cause yourself to remain all the more in birth and death and lose the way of emancipation.

Just understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvana. There is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided; there is nothing such as nirvana to be sought. Only when you realize this are you free from birth and death.

3.

It is a mistake to suppose that birth turns into death. Birth is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, in Buddha-dharma birth is understood as no-birth. Death is a phase that is an entire period of itself, with its own past and future. For this reason, death is understood as no-death.

In birth there is nothing but birth and in death there is nothing but death. Accordingly, when birth comes, face and actualize birth, and when death comes, face and actualize death. Do not avoid them or desire them.

4.

This birth and death is the life of buddha. If you try to exclude it you will lose the life of buddha. If you cling to it, trying to remain in it, you will also lose the life of buddha, and what remains will be the mere form of

buddha. Only when you don't dislike birth and death or long for them, do you enter buddha's mind.

However, do not analyze or speak about it. Just set aside your body and mind, forget about them, and throw them into the house of buddha; then all is done by buddha. When you follow this, you are free from birth and death and become a buddha without effort or calculation. Who then continues to think?

5.

There is a simple way to become a buddha: When you refrain from unwholesome actions, are not attached to birth and death, and are compassionate toward all sentient beings, respectful to seniors and kind to juniors, not excluding or desiring anything, with no designing thoughts or worries, you will be called a buddha. Do not seek anything else.

Translated by Arnold Kotler and Kazuaki Tanahashi, from *Moon in a Dewdrop, Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, copyright 1985 San Francisco Zen Center, pp 74-75.

Birth Announcement

Hoag Holmgren and Leda Swann have a new member of their family. Anders Gray Holmgren was born on Thursday, October 4th at 10:17 AM, weighing in at a burly 7 pounds 13 ounces. Anders was born at home with the assistance of two midwives. Leda and Anders are both doing very well (Hoag is too!) Congratulations!

Mountains Talking is a quarterly newsletter published by:

The Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver:

3101 West 31st Ave. Denver, CO 80211
303-455-1500 (Tel.), 303-455-1062 (Fax)

E-mail: office@zencenterofdenver.org

Website: www.zencenterofdenver.org

Spiritual Director: Ven. Danan Henry Sensei

Sangha News

Renovation Update

The Architecture and Design Committee met on 11/28 with our architects, Jim Paull, Clayton Cole, and Melanie Parson of SlaterPaull. After spending lots of time working with their preliminary ideas, and giving much consideration to sangha input, the committee has decided to move forward with the general concept of the initial plans, which is felt to be a masterstroke in terms of function and form. Now we move forward through the program and schematic phases of the project, and the work becomes more detailed in nature. The ZCD has



The Architecture and Design Committee hard at work with SlaterPaull architects. Pictured are (from left to right) Bob Gamage, Danan Henry, Clayton Cole, Melanie Parson, Mike Tabor, Jim Paull, Ron Zapka, John Emelin, and Mike Griffiths.

engaged the services of Pat Mershon of JHL constructors, a local contracting firm with extensive experience with religious structures. Pat will assist us and SlaterPaull to realize the functionality we seek at the most reasonable cost. The Architecture and Design Committee continues to seek sangha ideas and suggestions. Contact the committee through the office. Updates will be posted on the bulletin board.

Jukai & Lay Ordination

This year's jukai and lay ordination ceremonies were very well attended. Jukai is the most serious of all ceremonies we have at the temple. Participants receive the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts, the moral and ethical guidelines of Zen Buddhism, and thus formally enter the Way. Taking the precepts for the first time were Kymm Cicciu, Len Edgerly, Alex Gilliam-Grove, Nancy Peters, Janice Petersen, Luke Sanzone, Chandler & Emily Snyder, and Suzy Williams. Additionally, many others renewed their commitment to follow and embody the precepts.

Following the precept ceremony, Jann Griffiths and Mike Tabor received lay ordination into the Lotus in the Flame Order. During the ceremony, the ordinands took the Bodhisattva Precepts and ordination vows, and received Dharma names and rakusus. Jann was given the name Bright Flower, and Mike was given the name Steady Light. Ordination represents the highest level of commitment to the path of Zen one can make at this temple, so Jann and Mike deserve our deepest respect and gratitude.

A Thousand Hands Unlimited Activities

About 10 Sangha members have started meeting regularly to share ideas and plan activities to practice engaged Buddhism through the Thousand Hands Unlimited community outreach committee. The immediate focus is on compassionate responses to the current devastation in Afghanistan. Plans are under way for hosting a disaster relief fundraising concert, sponsored by the Colorado

Campaign for Middle East Peace (CCMEP), in the Zen Center auditorium. Several members are actively participating in community-wide efforts to call for an end to the violence in Afghanistan and immediate assistance to the millions of people facing imminent starvation there. In the future, members will focus on projects the Sangha can undertake to help alleviate suffering in the local community. Please contact Nancy Peters, Emily Snyder, or Lindsey Trout for the dates of upcoming meetings.

Buddhist Sunday School

Any sangha parents or members interested in developing a Buddhist-themed Sunday School for children at the Center should call Hoag Holmgren at 303-258-0240 or email him at hoag@colorado.edu. If enough people are interested, an exploratory meeting will be scheduled.

Guest Speaker

On Saturday, January 26 at 7 PM, Shohaku Okumura, Dharma heir of Kosho Uchiyama Roshi, will give a talk at the Center. We'll have two rounds of sitting followed by the talk. Rev. Okumura is head of Sanshin Zen Community, a network of Soto Zen sitting groups and practitio-

ners, and is currently the director of the Soto Zen Education Center in San Francisco. He is also the translator of a number of works on Zen, including *The Wholehearted Way* and *Dogen's Pure Standards for the Zen Community*.

Housekeeping Committee Request

If anyone has some spare waste baskets and terry cloth washcloths, the housekeeping committee would greatly appreciate them. They can be left in the office or given to Lindsey Trout.

Gassho Corner

Deep bows to:

The members of the Architecture and Design Committee, for many long hours of meetings and difficult decisions in this initial planning phase of the renovation.

Taylor Owen for donating a snow blower and the services of a handyman to the temple.

Mike Tabor for emergency electrical work during sesshin.

Upcoming events

Kannon Ceremony

January 17

Zazenkai

January 20

Parinirvana Ceremony

February 7

Zazenkai

February 17

All Sangha Workday

February 23

Zen Center of Denver
3101 West 31st Ave.
Denver, CO 80211