



# Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Winter 2003

## Two Faces of Buddhism Wisdom and Compassion

*From a talk by Sensei at the Lay Order meeting in September, 2002*

Our primary focus for at least the next two years will be working out the new calendar year with four three-month training periods. By means of alternating three-month training periods I hope to work out a slightly different approach to practice and training, addressing some limitations that, I believe, are inherent in lay Zen practice in general.

Buddhism is classically presented as a trinity: *Dhyana* (meditation or absorption), *Sila* (morality) and *Prajna* (spiritual wisdom). If I were writing the book anew, I would add a fourth pillar, *Sati* (mindfulness).

I want to examine these by reading some statements of Aitken Roshi, which I've taken from various articles and books. I have chosen these excerpts because I agree with them, I think they are of enormous importance, and I do not believe the issues he brings up have been adequately addressed and acted upon. And that is what I hope we will do through a skillful use of alternating training periods.

Roshi wrote a few years back: "It is plain that the old way of Zen Buddhist practice is not working very well...It seems to me that our teaching has to change, and the attitude of individual participants toward the practice have to change...I think that we teachers have over-emphasized the *kunin* aspect of the practice. *Kunin* is one of the ten kinds of forbearance – *ku* means 'empty,' *nin* means 'endurance.' *Kunin* is the endurance that comes with acknowledging that all things are empty. This is the basic teaching of Zen Buddhism as you will find when you look at the first four lines of the Heart Sutra. 'Avalokitesvara doing deep *Prajnaparamita* clearly saw that all perceptions and things perceived are empty.' Such realization transformed suffering and distress for Avalokitesvara, as it does for all of us who have the same insight. This teaching is absolutely true, but we have been leaving out some of the stepping-stones.

"I tell the story in my *teisho* on the Ninth Precept about a Tibetan lama who asked me what Zen teaches on the subject of anger. I replied, 'There is no anger and no one to get angry.' He gave me a strange

look and said nothing, but I thought about it a lot afterwards. It seems to me that whereas Theravada Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism tend to leave out concerns regarding realization, we in Zen Buddhism tend to leave out concerns regarding the human character and its cultivation. So I think that mindfulness practice should have much more of a place in the teaching...Formal meditation for twenty-five minutes or so per day, meditation meetings once or twice a week, and periodic retreats – are all helpful methods. Most of us do not, however, live in temples, with their moment-to-moment invitation to religious practice. We are caught up in the accelerating tempo of earning a living, and Right Recollection (mindfulness) tends to disappear except during times of formal meditation."

Yes, mindfulness practice is the glue that connects and binds all of our practices together. It enables our insight gained on the mat to function in our daily lives more readily. That's why there is a strong emphasis on Every Minute Zen practice (a systematic approach to mindfulness training in the course of our daily rounds away from the Temple, facilitated through the *dokusan* process). But most people do not take up this mindfulness practice. It is a great challenge to take one's practice off the mat into one's daily life. And in the course of the mindfulness efforts one examines one's moral or ethical life. It's hard!

Here Aitken Roshi addresses this moral dimension of practice in a question and answer period: "Classical Buddhism was directed towards character perfection. The importance of compassion was stressed, but not the fact the other is no other than myself. In Zen Buddhism, the various koans stress the unity and the harmony of the world and the self, but there is not much emphasis on character perfection. So both sides have strengths and lacks. We need to somehow bring in more of Classical Buddhism to Zen."

Then someone asked, "Do you mean we should offer practice in ethical development?" Roshi answered, "If you are not settled ethically, you are not really ready to sit there with a quiet mind."

How many times have we quoted Aitken Roshi's biting admonition, "Without the precepts as guidelines, Zen Buddhism tends to become a hobby, made to fit the needs of the ego."

We can sum this whole thing up this way: When you ask the Dalai Lama what Buddhism is, he often says it is the religion of kindness. He stresses compassion. When you ask a Zen Buddhist about Buddhism, he or she will speak about empty-oneness in one form or another. Both are incomplete! Zen Buddhism with its extreme emphasis on wisdom (the realization of emptiness and interbeing) tends to give the ethical teachings and character development of Classical Buddhism a back seat. Whereas Classical Buddhism with its emphasis on personality development tends to leave out concerns about *prajna* wisdom, the realization of emptiness and dependent origination. We have a similar split in the modern Zen tradition, itself. The Rinzai sect says, "Get enlightenment and your life will take care of itself." The Soto sect says, "Learn to live well and enlightenment will take care of itself." Both are incomplete.

Our practice and realization can be likened to a bird with two wings. One wing represents wisdom and the other compassion. Both wings must work together.

I want to try alternating training periods that will emphasize the four fundamental aspects of Buddhism – Meditation and Wisdom; and also Morality and Mindfulness. These are, of course, inextricably interconnected, but for us to develop properly they must be emphasized equally. So let's set up training periods accordingly.

The theme or thrust of the fall and the spring training periods will continue to be wisdom, *prajna*, *samadhi*, realization, Mu: the work of waking up and realizing that everything is empty and that the other is myself. The training during these angos is reflected in intense *sesshin*, daily sitting with *dokusan*, initial and subsequent koan study, hard energetic practice on and off the mat, aiming at realization.

Master Dogen said you must practice like someone putting out a fire on your own head. The mystic Saint Teresa of Avila encouraged her nuns by saying, "Strive like men until you die, for you are here for no other purpose than to strive." She's encouraging the male aspect of the psyche (the spiritual warrior) to come forth in us. On and off the mat, in the Temple, this kind of striving is what the fall and spring training periods are about.

Then in the winter and summer training periods we'll shift to practices that emphasize mindfulness, morality

and compassion. We'll concentrate our practice on conduct, ethics, the precepts, the study of doctrine like the *Eightfold Noble Path* and the *Paramitas*. We'll emphasize chanting and prostrations, body practice, walking in the mountains practice, art practice, liturgy practice. It will be a softer, more relaxed and natural style of practice concerned with cultivation of sangha, communication, non-harming, kindness, character development and engagement in the world. This is Classical Buddhism but thoroughly based upon the foundation of *zazen* (concentration) and realization that the other is none other than our self. And I will be participating in the winter and summer training periods.

Joko Beck describes the texture of this kind of practice very well when she says: "Focusing on something called 'Zen practice' is not necessary. If from morning to night we just took care of one thing after another, thoroughly and completely and without accompanying thoughts, such as 'I'm a good person for doing this' or 'Isn't it wonderful that I can take care of everything?' then that would be sufficient."

If taking care of one thing after another includes treating other people and the planet kindly, this is a good description of Soto practice. Just be mindful, meticulous, impeccable – that's enough. Strong concentration, *samadhi*, forgetting yourself is not necessary. So this is not enlightenment practice. But it is very, very important to cultivate this kind of careful character development by way of unfolding a fully balanced practice and the accomplishment of character.

And then in the spring and fall periods we plunge back into energetic pure Zen practice of concentration and realization. The emphasis on concentration and wisdom has already been thoroughly established as an aim of Zen practice over the last fifty years in this country at the expense of the work of character development. By introducing and exploring an emphasis on character development for half of each year, I think that over time, a correction can be made. So that finally we end up with one twelve-month training period that embodies the full spectrum of Buddhism - *Dhyana* (meditation or absorption), *Sila* (morality), *Prajna* (spiritual wisdom) and *Sati* (mindfulness). Or stated differently: deep realization expressing itself as the accomplishment or perfection of character.

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# Sangha News



## Raising the Zendo

Dear Sangha,

There has been a major breakthrough in our temple renovation project! It is not the sudden appearance of a wealthy donor or the response to a large grant application or money falling from the sky. It is an idea that empowers *us* to make the first move in relocating the zendo upstairs into the existing auditorium-sanctuary. With existing donations and pledges and our time and effort we can make the first construction move toward realizing our vision. This vision was the very reason we moved into this extraordinary building four years ago.

Imagine walking up the stairs from the foyer. When you reach the auditorium, you are standing at the same level as the stage. Our current architectural plans call for building a new floor at that level for dormitories with bathrooms and a new, smaller auditorium. But as an interim step, that new floor at the stage level can serve beautifully as the next location for our zendo (as well as for temporary dormitory space). Later, we will complete the full architectural plan, hopefully with some fun and interesting interim phases in between.

What excites me most about this first step of raising the zendo is that **WE CAN DO IT OURSELVES WITHIN SIX MONTHS!** Our architects feel this is a viable plan, and together we are working out the details. In taking this step, we, as a community, will come together to independently begin to realize our vision, working mindfully in harmony and joy for our love of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The building of the floor will not be nearly as wonderful as the building of our Sangha.

I am reminded of the beautiful frontier phenomenon called “barn raising” in which the whole community comes together to help one another raise their barns. Let

us raise a zendo together! Then each of us will have started to fulfill our renovation vision with our own hands and heart.

May the Lotus in the Flame Temple become complete for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Danan Henry

## Peace is the Way to Peace

*A talk given by Sensei at a press conference at the City & County Building October 10, organized by the Rocky Mountain Peace and Justice Center*

This week our congress is voting on a resolution authorizing the United States to overthrow the government of Iraq by military force. Our nation marches as though in a trance to war in which thousands of American and Iraqi soldiers and Iraqi civilians, including children, will be injured, maimed and killed. At such a time it is essential that we uphold and embody the deepest, most profound teachings and doctrines of our various spiritual traditions. Let us not ignore the teachings and examples of the Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and other leaders thoroughly grounded in peace and compassion, committed above all else to non-harming. The Buddha said, “See yourselves in one another and in all others. Then what harm can you do, whom can you hurt?” We are all in this together, so Christ enjoined us to love our enemies. Each of us, deep down, has a tender and loving heart. Let us exclude no one from our hearts.

At this time, a ten year old Afghan boy named Noor Mohammed, “is lying in a hospital bed on the Pakistani border, his eyes gone and his hands blown off, a victim of American bombs.” This is what war looks like.

Let us remember what war really looks like and seek non-violent, peaceful means of dealing with conflict. Violence never has, and never can, lead to peace. Peace is the way to peace.

## Jukai

At the December 1 Jukai Ceremony, the following people were ordained into the Lotus in the Flame Order: Francine Campone, Bill Hamaker, Karin Kempe and Lindsey Trout. The following people took Jukai for the first time: Greg Cicciu, Jerry Cusack, Toby Mathews, Jason Polk and Mark Smothers.

## Weekend Sesshin

The Center will hold its first weekend sesshin February 21-23. This sesshin is intended to help keep your zazen momentum going during the winter training period when there are no 7-day sesshin. Also, it is hoped the weekend sesshin will serve those sangha members whose schedules or family obligations prevent them from attending as many 7-day sesshin as they would like .

The weekend sesshin will begin Friday at 7 pm. Saturday will be similar to the "quiet day" of a 7-day sesshin. Sunday, the sesshin participants will participate in the zazenkai/teisho schedule. The weekend sesshin will conclude at 3:30 pm Sunday. Cost for the sesshin is yet to be determined. Please fill out a regular sesshin application.

## T&D Nights

Talk and discussion nights are scheduled for this winter training period. There will be two rounds of sitting and then a member of the Lay Order will give a short talk on the precepts and facilitate a discussion. Be sure to read the back of your calendar for more information.

## Computer Help Needed

The office manager could use some computer assistance. If any supporting member has expertise with PCs and/or HTML programming and would like to join the computer committee, please notify Peggy Sheehan, the Head of the Zendo.

## New Board of Directors

At the November All-Sangha Meeting the supporting members elected the following people to the Board of Directors: Jesse Brown, Mike Griffiths, Jim Hubbell, Patty Kelley, Mike Tabor, Joel Tagert and Becky Wethington.

## New Website

The Zen Center has a remodeled and updated website at [zencenterofdenver.org](http://zencenterofdenver.org). Some new features include a photo gallery, a teisho tapes catalog (go to the library link) and online donation capability (go to the PayPal link under the temple renovation section). For 2003 sesshin dates, check the calendar link.

Dear Sangha,

It is with great joy that we share with you the news of our upcoming marriage. Aitken Roshi will marry us in Hawaii on February 14. Following a brief honeymoon, we look forward to celebrating with you. The dinner reception will be held March 1 from 6:30-10 pm in the Gates Hall of the Botanic Gardens (1005 York Street, Denver). All sangha members are welcome.

We are deeply grateful for your wholehearted understanding, encouragement and support of our relationship.

Yours in the Dharma,  
Nancy and Danan

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