



# Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Spring 2006

## Going Straight Into the Myriad Peaks

*Excerpted from a Dharma talk given by Shonen Dunley on January 8, 2006.*

*Shonen has recently relocated to Arizona.*

*The hermit of Lotus Flower Peak held up his staff and showed it to his disciples, saying, "When the ancients got here, why didn't they remain?" There was no answer from the assembly, so he answered for them, "Because it is of no use in daily life." And again he asked, "What will you do with it?" And again he answered in their place, "Taking no heed of the opinions of others, I place my staff across my shoulders. I go straight ahead deep into the recesses of the myriad peaks."*

This is a very rich koan in our collection, and is particularly appropriate to the theme of our training period. Like Case 46 in the Mumonkan, "Step Forward From the Top of the Hundred-Foot Pole," this koan directly addresses bringing our practice and realization into daily life.

Another version of this case begins with, "*When Lianhua [the Hermit of Lotus Flower Peak] was about to die...*"

So this was his final teaching. Crowded around him in his little hut, or peering inside, were his disciples. Seeing that his time was about to come, he made an effort for one last teaching. He took up his gnarled old staff and held it in the air. Ragged sounding, and perhaps a little faint, he called out, "When the ancients got here..."

There with his disciples, and right now in this room, the old hermit raises his staff and presents the essential world for all of us to see. Can you see it? Do you know the place he is speaking of?

But then he asks—"Why didn't they remain?"

When the Buddha attained supreme enlightenment, he remained absorbed in utter bliss and tranquility for

several weeks. It is said that he was tempted to remain that way until his bodily functions ceased. Yet, he got up and sought out his former companions in practice to share the good news. He did not remain in that great silent place where all is stillness and not a single distinction can be found. But why did he get up? Why not just let the body go?

Realization must be a living thing; it must be able to function in one's life or in the end it is of no use. We must step forward from the hundred-foot pole. At that time, there is just the matter at hand. Walking the dog; chopping carrots; making tea; talking on the phone. Each moment, each activity, every person, place, or thing is your life, your total body.

*The disciples were silent. And again he answered in their place, "Taking no heed of the opinions of others, I place my staff across my shoulders. I go straight ahead deep into the recesses of the myriad peaks."*

Fearlessly, without hesitation, he meets whatever life presents. In this case, it was his own death, the last gate to pass through. Many peaks, many valleys. Waves rising and falling, one after another.

We never really know what life will bring to us, how things will unfold. We do not know how much time we have. The most elementary teaching of Buddhism is that everything changes and nothing can remain the same. "All meetings end in separation. All accumulation ends in dispersal. All birth ends in death," as the Tibetan sage Milarepa says. How we face these kind of changes is where all of our fine words and ideas about practice and realization are put to the test.

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## "We Always Together"

Shonen Dunley stepped through the doors of the Columbine house (ZCD) for the first time in 1991. There was immediate affinity. Shonen embraced the sangha and the sangha embraced Shonen. In the course of the next fourteen years, the dharma and sangha would deeply shape Shonen, and Shonen would profoundly help in shaping our community. Wholehearted participation in his practice of Zen and service to the Temple as member, lay ordained initiate, priest, zendo leader, office manager, administrator and dear friend, unfolded as naturally for him as breathing in and breathing out. He has touched each of us personally and touched every aspect of temple life. His unfailing presence in the zendo and presence at the very center of every aspect of temple administration in the office, his contribution to the creation of liturgy and zendo forms, as well as administrative procedures, and his never failing friendliness, warmth, and civility, has produced a legacy that will be felt for years to come.

When I was leaving Bukkoku-ji, Tengen Roshi whispered in my ear, "Danan-san, we always together." So I say to Shonen on behalf of all of us as he moves on, "Shonen-san, we always together."

—Danan

## Going Straight into the Myriad Peaks, Continued...

Everything we do in our practice on the mat and in daily life is about learning to move with our ever-changing circumstances without resistance or clinging, grasping or rejecting. This is zazen, which is far more than a particular posture. Zazen opens us to life, a great life far beyond the narrow confines of what most of the world knows, which is only a fight against what is painful, and the desperate accumulation of what is pleasant, all based upon the idea of a separate and enduring self that must be protected and maintained whatever the cost. Through zazen we see the illusion of me and mine for what it is, a convenient designation, an abstraction, a concept, and step forward into a life without boundaries, where the whole universe is one's own self.

Knowing this is so, we know that there is never any possibility of separation, that we exist together with all beings eternally. This is the true meaning of Sangha, the deep interconnection that can never be broken, not by distance, not by death, not by anything. The changes we see are waves in the eternal ocean, and the ocean is endless and the ocean is one body, and every single drop that rises and falls never loses its essential ocean nature, never is lost from the great ocean.

In this life, there is laughter, there are tears, hellos and goodbyes, but it all has one flavor, the flavor of reality. Going straight into the recesses of the myriad peaks, we fulfill our vows and save all beings.



# Sangha News

## Gerianne Mary Theresa Tesar

A memorial service was held at the Center on December 20, 2005, for Geri, the wife of Dennis Tesar. Geri was born on September 3, 1950, in Marshalltown, Iowa, the oldest of five children of Vincent and Emma (Stoklas) Kriz. Geri loved to read and to go to the library more than she liked to look after her brothers and sisters, who often got into trouble under her care. She graduated from the Marshalltown Hospital LPN program in 1970, the same year she met Dennis, a pre-engineering student at Marshalltown College. They married May 1, 1971. Son Cameron was born before they moved to Ames, Iowa where Dennis received a BS degree in mechanical engineering in 1975.

They moved to Denver on July 1, 1976. Geri continued her love of books, visiting many of the nearby libraries on a regular basis, and began working half-time as a page at the Lakewood Library in 1989. When their daughter Kim (born 8/6/1986) was about four years old, Geri was diagnosed with Stage 0 breast cancer, which led to a mastectomy. Several years later on May 2, 1992, her son Cameron was married to his high school sweetheart, Brandy. They had two children, Brandon, age 11, and Sydney, age 9. In the winter of 1998 Geri broke a rib from coughing. Doctors suspected bone cancer. A bone scan showed no bone cancer, but a CAT scan revealed Stage IV cancer in her liver. She was given six months to a year to live.

After her diagnosis in 1998, Saint Theresa the Little Flower in a vision told Geri that everything would be alright. Instead of living only a year, Geri led a full life for seven years until her liver cancer started growing uncontrollably in June of 2005. A childhood friend of Dennis who was diagnosed with brain cancer recalls Geri saying to him, "People are uneasy about death because they don't know when the bus will arrive, but I can stand up on the curb and see the bus coming." She seldom complained about her illness and maintained a proactive attitude right up until the end.

In her last days, Geri was soothed by the familiar honking of the geese on their journeys to Crown Hill Park and memories of wings slowly undulating overhead in the diminishing light of a calm winter dusk. Geri passed away at

3am on December 20, 2005, with Dennis sleeping at her side and her cat, Bastet, lying at her feet.

## New Office Manager

Richard Miklic has been selected as the new office manager, taking the position opened by Shonen Dunley's departure. Richard has been an active member of the Center for six years, and his strong background in administration, writing, and so forth will be a great asset to the Center. Richard has recently retired, and sees the position as a way of deepening his practice and involvement at the Center. Richard and Shonen worked together on all aspects of the position to ensure a smooth transition, and Shonen has full confidence in Richard's ability to serve the Sangha with impeccability. We are very fortunate to have such a capable person at the helm!

## Dokusan/Daisan Schedule

During this training period, Roshi will offer dokusan on Tuesdays and Thursdays during both morning and evening sittings unless a ceremony is scheduled. Daisan will be offered on Wednesday mornings by Ken Morgareidge, on Friday mornings by Peggy Sheehan, and on Sunday mornings by Karin Kempe unless a ceremony is scheduled. For daisan instructions, see the bulletin board in the foyer.

## Renovation Update

The rumors about a new temple renovation project are true. A continuous eight-foot partition will be constructed to separate the zendo and auditorium spaces on the second floor. The temporary shoji screens behind the leader seats will be replaced by a permanent eight-foot wall, which will extend outward in both directions, going up and around the stairwells and sound booth. Sliding shoji screens will be built into the walls to allow access to the auditorium.

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During the workday on January 29th, the first six center rows of auditorium seating were reduced from 15 to 11 seats to make room for the new walls. Construction is scheduled to be completed between the end of February and the beginning of March, but no later than the end of April. A deep gassho to Dennis Tesar for his hard work in designing the partition, selecting the contractor, and supervising all phases of the construction process.

### T'ai Chi Ch'uan Classes

T'ai Chi Ch'uan classes will resume during this training period. T'ai Chi Ch'uan is an ancient Chinese health-giving system of exercise and self defense. It is an adjunctive practice at this Center and is taught as an extension of zazen.

Classes will be held from 6-7pm on the following Wednesdays: March 15, 22 & 29; April 5 & 12; May 3, 17, 24 & 31; and June 7. Please contact the office by March 10th if you would like to attend this set of ten classes. Donations are appreciated.

### Buddhist Christian Interfaith Retreat

On Saturday, May 13, 2006, from 9am to 1pm, the Buddhist Christian Interfaith Community at St. Paul's

United Methodist Church will sponsor a half-day retreat at the Zen Center. The retreat will be on the *Body of Light Meditation* and will be led by the Venerable Claude d'Estree, a senior dharma teacher ordained by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. For additional information, please consult the website at [www.stpauldenver.com](http://www.stpauldenver.com). You may register for this retreat by sending an email message to [office@stpauldenver.com](mailto:office@stpauldenver.com).

### Upcoming Events

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|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Prajna Ango Opening Ceremony | March 5            |
| T&D: Zendo Forms             | March 14           |
| Kannon Ceremony              | March 16           |
| Dharma Discussion            | March 19           |
| Zazenkai                     | March 26           |
| Repentance Ceremony          | April 6            |
| <b>Sesshin</b>               | <b>April 22-29</b> |
| Shosan                       | April 29           |
| Ceremony of Aid              | May 11             |
| Sangha Meeting               | May 14             |
| <b>Vesak</b>                 | <b>May 21</b>      |
| Sangha Yard Sale             | June 10            |
| <b>Sesshin</b>               | <b>June 17-24</b>  |
| Shosan                       | June 24            |

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