As most of you know, the Zen Center of Denver is a Zen Buddhist community affiliated with the Diamond Sangha, an international Zen Buddhist organization in the Harada-Yasutani line that is especially faithful to the teachings of Robert Aitken Roshi. Aitken Roshi recently celebrated his 92nd birthday and on July 12th over one hundred Diamond Sangha members traveled from all over the world to the Palolo Zen Center in Honolulu to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Diamond Sangha. Michael Kieran, the spiritual director of the Honolulu Diamond Sangha greeted us with these words:

*It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Palolo Zen Center on the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Diamond Sangha.*

How fortunate we are that 50 years ago Robert and Anne Aitken followed their dreams and aspirations and began a small zazen group in their home. Though it was their own personal dream, they were at once dreaming the dreams of all of us here today as we sought out a profound realization of the true nature of ourselves and this life. Because the Aitkens followed their dreams, we could follow ours. Because we followed ours, we came in droves to Maui and Honolulu many in those early days showing up on the Aitkens’ doorsteps penniless but sincerely seeking the Way.

We came from Hawaii, North and South America, Australia, Europe and elsewhere. Practicing together we discovered we shared a common bloodline that does not come to us through our parents. Our family recognizes itself not from shared physical features or a common ethnicity, but by a deeper and more immediate identity, born of a practice and realization that dates back over two thousand years and is still unfolding as you read these words.

Our immediate Japanese ancestors saw the future of Zen in the aspirations and ardent practice of lay men and women. That vision was embodied in the West by our founders, the Aitkens, and also by each of us as we have taken our seats in Diamond Sangha zendo throughout the Western world. Some of us remain active in formal practice. Others may have attended only a single sesshin or training period, but we are all here because of the impact Zen practice has had in our lives. Whether as schoolteachers, clerks, or carpenters, as lawyers, business owners, or therapists, our efforts to bring forth the Way of wisdom and compassion in this world are like the many facets of a precious jewel.

Our ceremony and celebration honors this treasure so vivid in the faces here today. Thank you for making ours a truly Diamond Sangha.
In the course of the celebration, Aitken Roshi prepared and presented us with a short homily on the birth of the Diamond Sangha.

The Old Mossy Bank
By
Robert Aitken

It started with a list of people who bought Buddhist books at my shop, Old Island Books, which was located at 59 North Beretania Street in Honolulu. When we were ready, Anne Aitken and I sent a flyer to people on my list announcing that we were organizing a group at our home in Kuliouou to practice Zen Buddhism. Two people came to our first meeting that last Sunday evening of October 1959, Lewis Lancaster and his wife.

We continued to meet, and we had to improvise at first. Our zafus were sofa cushions on the floor. We rang a Pyrex® bowl with a wooden spoon. Our clappers were sticks from construction next door. Our first teisho was a little talk I gave on breath counting.

We’ve come a long way. Time passes like a river. The banks of the river remain the same; but the water is always refreshingly new. Our sofa cushions are still in place but they are being re-covered. The Pyrex® bowl has returned to the kitchen. The scraps of wood we used for clappers have long since disintegrated. Lewis Lancaster and his wife came just that once, and he had to remind me many years later that they were the other two who attended that first meeting.

The Diamond Sangha has a fine temple here in Palolo Valley, and there are Diamond Sangha temples and centers across the world – in Australasia, the Americas and Europe. There are two dozen and more fully accredited Diamond Sangha masters, and their teisho make Zhaozhou do a little dance.

Gassho is the Japanese equivalent of the Sanskrit anjali. It is the greeting, palm to palm, found among people throughout Asia, from the Dalai Lama to the Singhalese peasant, from the Pakistani weaver to the Japanese business executive. One palm is you and the other is me, and we are together. Gassho has universal appeal -- my Tongan American caregivers respond to it with a clear grasp of its intimate message. --Robert Aitken, Miniatures of a Zen Master

Gassho Roshi and Anne.

An excellent booklet entitled The Diamond Sangha At 50, 1959 – 2009, that was prepared as a program for the days events, gives us a glimpse into the rich history of the Diamond Sangha. The booklet can be found on the library table. Enjoy.

Mountains Talking is a quarterly newsletter published by:

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Letter from Roshi

Dear Sangha,

As you are probably aware, there has begun an intentional transitional period as regards the teaching leadership of the Center. The revised weekly schedule and sesshin dates and leadership continue to reflect substantial changes at our Temple. The new teachers have had excellent training and I have full confidence in their practice, realization and ethical grounding. In order to provide greater opportunity for the new teachers to gain the necessary experience to flower as Dharma guides, at this time I am limiting my teaching to one evening sitting and one morning sitting per week and one 7-day sesshin per year.

In the course of the next two years, along with increased teaching opportunity and responsibilities will come further teaching accreditation for the new teachers. This will be followed by my complete withdrawal as a teacher and spiritual director of the Center and finally a new spiritual directorship will be put in place.

I realize that times of change can be unsettling. If you have personal concerns please feel free to talk to me privately. For example, if dokusan opportunity is significantly impaired by the new schedule, adjustments can be made to accommodate long time personal students.

It is my hope that my own legacy deriving from a tenacious commitment to Ancestral Ch’an and Zen may help to provide a strong foundation for the future of the ZCD and the new blood of the successive teachers bring greater vitality and continued appropriate adjustments for our time and place.

As for myself, I plan to build a cabin in the mountains for some retreat practice of zazen and study. I may conduct some out-of-state seminars and sesshins and perhaps take up a writing project or two. Above all I will continue sitting every day and do my best to accord with circumstances, “giving no heed to existence and holding not to non-existence”.

Yours in Dharma
Danan

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Dokusan Schedule*
Tuesday Mornings: Karin Sensei
Tuesday Evenings: Danan Roshi & Peggy Sensei
Wednesday Mornings: Ken Sensei
Thursday Mornings: Danan Roshi
Thursday Evenings: Karin Sensei & Ken Sensei
Friday Mornings: Peggy Sensei

*Please note that Monday evening meditation with dokusan has been cancelled.

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Board of Directors-Call for Nominations
Nominations to the Board of Directors will be voted upon 11/08/09 at the Sangha meeting.

Nominations may be made through the nominating committee (listed below) or from the floor as long as the nominee is present at the meeting. To qualify for nomination to the Board, a potential candidate must be at least 21 years of age, a member for at least one year, not be the member of the same family (husband, wife, sibling, children, or cohabitating adults in a personal relationship) as another Board member. Board members serve for a term of 2 years. There are currently seven members of the Board with one member's term expiring in November, however he is eligible for a second term.

The board may consist of 5-9 members. “The Board must contain a minimum of two men and two women at any given time, either elected or appointed.”

If you are unable to attend the November 8th Sangha meeting, please remember to give your proxy votes to another member, so that we are better able to conduct business.

In consideration of the inclusivity and diversity of the Zen Center of Denver, as reflected in our By-Laws and the Sangha itself, the Board of Directors encourages members to consider these values as you vote your choices for Directors.

Ten thousand bows.

Nominating committee:
Francine Campone: (303) 953-8929
Geoff Keeton: (720) 227-2997
George Mathews: (303) 393-7234
John Steele: (303) 499-9089
Calendar Highlights
Seminar
Healing Village Collective Film*
Kannon Ceremony
Anyen Rinpoche Group*
Sesshin
Center Closed
Sangha Meeting
Sesshin Application Deadline
Samu
Zazenkai
Ceremony of Aid
Talk on the Precepts
Ceremony of Gratitude
Center Closed
Jukai Ceremony
Sesshin (Rohatsu)
Buddha's Enlightenment Cer.
Board of Directors Meeting
Anyen Rinpoche Group*
Teisho & Sangha Potluck
Center Closed

October 3 & 4
October 9
October 18
October 17-18
October 24-31
November 1
November 8
November 13
November 14 & 21
November 15
November 19
November 22
November 26
November 26-29
November 29
December 5-12
December 12
December 16
December 19 & 20
November 1
November 8
November 13
November 14 & 21
November 15
November 19
November 22
November 26
November 26-29
November 29
December 5-12
December 12
December 16
December 19 & 20
November 1
November 8
November 13
November 14 & 21
November 15
November 19
November 22
November 26
November 26-29
November 29
December 5-12
December 12
December 16
December 19 & 20

*Outside group using Center

New Year's Eve Zazen
There will be zazen from 8:00 pm - 10:00 pm. Refreshments will be shared at 10:00 pm. Following refreshments, those wishing to finish the year at the Center will sit until midnight. This is being done to accommodate those who wish to come for a while and join loved ones at midnight.

2010 Sesshin Dates
March 20-27, Danan Roshi
June 19-26, Karin Sensei
ZCD Blue Mountain, TBD
October 16-23, Ken Sensei
December 4-11, Peggy Sensei

2010 Weekend Sesshin Dates
February 12-15, Dennis Tesar (President's Day)
May 28-31, Ken Sensei (Memorial Day)