



Mountains Talking

Lotus in the Flame Temple, Zen Center of Denver

Summer 2009

To Sit Or Not To Sit

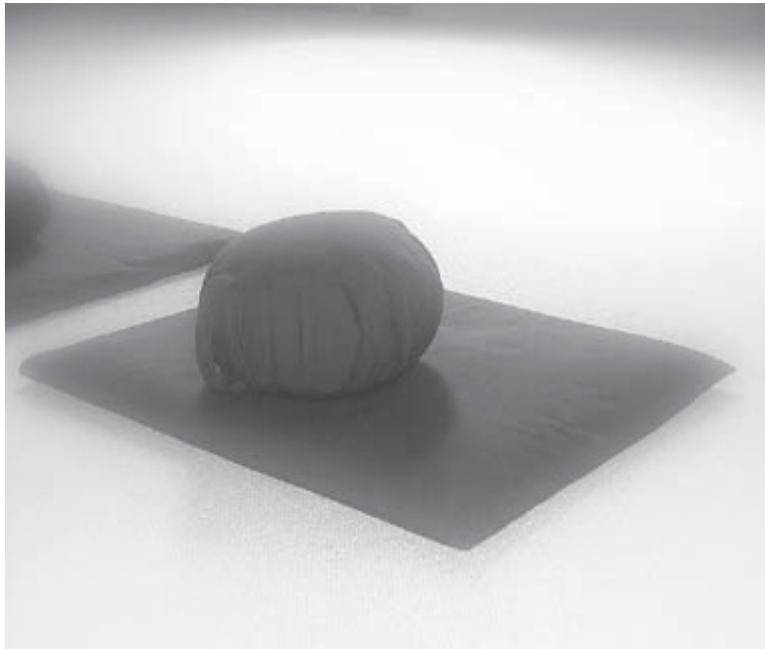
From a talk before an evening sitting
by Roshi

Sometimes it seems strange to me that we now and again drive from our homes, sometimes from considerable distance, meet and just sit here for the evening. Just sit here.

And yet it is not strange at all. Pascal, a seventeenth century mathematician and philosopher, said, "The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room." And again he said, "Most of the problems in the world could be solved easily if people could just learn to sit quietly in a room." Yes, our dogs and cats naturally know how to sit quietly in a state of ease and repose. But we don't know how to settle down and become sane. As one meditation teacher said to her students, "you are all a walking disturbance." So, in fact *zazen* is the most important thing we can do in this life. It is the way that we can get in touch with our true nature, our essential goodness, our natural wisdom and compassion.

The Buddha said, "The mind is restless. To control it is good. A disciplined mind is the road to Nirvana...Like an archer an arrow, the wise man steadies his trembling mind.

It is not easy to control the mind. So we come together and with support of our like-minded dharma sisters and



brothers and the guidance of our teachers, we learn to settle the mind by sitting in *zazen* together.

The most profound and subtle form of *zazen* is *shikantaza*. *Shikantaza* is simply the practice of being here in the present moment quietly. As such, it is the front gate to liberation - just sitting in silence. But the untrained mind is so restless, wanton and unruly that it is all but impossible for beginners to practice *shikantaza*. So we all begin learning with breath counting or following for some time.

In this way the mind will naturally begin to settle. When the mind is sufficiently stable we move to other practices according to our aspiration and temperament.

So we come together for evening sittings where we do enough sitting (three rounds interspersed with *kinhin*, ending in a closing ceremony). It takes that much sitting and walking *zazen* to enable the mind to start settling down and regaining its inherent purity.

The truth is within us. If we'll go on sitting quietly it will be revealed to us. If we do not sit, the truth remains latent with us. Failing to realize it we are unable to live out of our true nature. To sit or not to sit. That is the question - the most important question of our life that we must face every day.

Sangha News

David Harris and Martha Brown continue to celebrate their marriage, which was consecrated on May 14, 2005, at the Zen Center of Denver. We continue to draw from the ZCD Sangha. Gassho!!

Martha's son, John, continues to enjoy a remission from sarcoma. Martha's sister, Bobby, in Sunrise, FL, continues to live with vim and vigor while late-stage cancer attempts to cut her life short. Her oncologist is doing a great job at keeping her comfortable. Visits were made to see John and Bobby, et al, in April and May. Please continue to keep them—and their loved ones—in your hearts, your minds, and your prayers.

Jim and Nancy Long are welcoming to life their brand new granddaughter, Lyla Jacklin Scullion, born May 26th to their daughter Joanna.

Brett James will be taking 14 of his students to China for 15 days. They will live for four days in a Buddhist monastery that runs an orphanage. They will be living, meditating, and learning Kung Fu side by side with the monks who run the monastery and the orphans who live there.

James Marshall will be having an exhibit of his sculpture at Winterowd Fine Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the last week of September and first week in October. Dates are 9/25/09 - 10/8/09 with an opening on Friday, September 25 from 5-7P.

News from the **Campane-Spargo** residence:

Francine (and her 9th floor balconies) will participate in a balcony gardening experiment this summer, as part of a project for the Life on Capitol Hill newspaper. She has met with garden columnist Julie Hutchinson to plan out a garden nine stories above the street, which will be like a garden on the ground (year-round stuff for viewing and enjoying). Planting starts this week. Stay tuned or check next month's Life on Capitol Hill newspaper for updates.

Dear Sangha,

After living at the Zen Center for two and a half years, in 2006 I moved to Arvada in order to be closer to Candy. After her passing it still seemed to be a good location for commuting to Boulder and Loveland for my work with Anatomy in Clay®, as well as being a short drive to the Zen Center.

As of a couple of months ago, I am no longer teaching anatomy courses except for one or two more gigs that I have already committed to. So my life has simplified considerably, and there was no longer a compelling reason to stay in Arvada.

I thought about trying to buy a house, but I realized that I'm no longer able to do the kinds of maintenance work that comes with property ownership. So after some looking around, I lucked into an apartment within walking distance of the Center. The building is called Eden Manor. It is run by the Beth Eden Baptist church as part of their ministry. But they don't seem to mind Buddhists.

This will be an adventure. All my adult life, as a Biology teacher and as a Zen practitioner, I have associated almost entirely with folks younger than myself. In a way that's been wonderful. I think we all derive inspiration from the energy and enthusiasm of the young. But there is also a danger of self-deception. The body-mind ages inexorably. Old age, sickness and death await us all, but it is difficult to acknowledge when you see it only in the mirror.

Now I'm entering a community whose average age is at least equal to mine and probably older. I see old age, but also contentment and good cheer. That too is inspiring.

We share this fascinating journey with all beings, all at different stages of practice, age, place and condition. I find I look forward to living among folks at and beyond my spot on the time curve. More and more I can understand Robert Aitken Roshi's view of aging and death: "I feel like Peter Pan about to set out on a new adventure."

Yours in the everlasting Dharma,
Ken

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Sangha Announcements

Dennis Tesar has been a member of the ZCD for 32 years and is currently an Assistant Zen Teacher. As part of his training, he is offering "Life-Coaching from a Zen Perspective" to members at no charge. The coaching method will be natural, based on what happens in us when we live life without resistance and self-obstruction as the presence awareness that we are. The Method is based on the premise that feelings are just feelings. They are not facts and they are not you, and you can let them go. The focus is to soften or eliminate circular states of mind or trains of thoughts that distract us from our practice on the zazen mat and life in a way that our life works symbiotically with our Zen practice. Please call Dennis at 303-907-9204 if you would like to set up a time to meet.

Kate Lawrence's new book, *The Practical Peacemaker: How Simple Living Makes Peace Possible*, was launched at an author event at the Tattered Cover Bookstore in April. She says it was a long time dream come true! Later on, the book appeared on the *Denver Post's* Local Bestsellers list. Kate is donating all royalties she earns on the book this year to ZCD, and for those who purchase a copy in the ZCD bookstore, she'll donate the entire purchase price. Or you can check it out from our library.

Darren Christiansen has started a yoga group for sangha members. It meets every other Wednesday (more or less) at the Center and includes yoga, zazen, and a brief checking in with one another. It is a way to bring body practice and Zen practice together. Although it is designed for members who practice here, you are welcome to bring friends. The summer schedule is: 7/8, 7/22, 8/5, 8/19, 9/2, 9/16, 9/30 beginning at 6:30 pm. Please contact Darren at: darrenec@gmail.com for more information.

Craig Moseley is organizing once per month golf for sangha on Friday evenings (nine holes). One to two four-somes at a time with dinner afterward for those who wish. Please contact Craig at: Craig.Moseley@comcast.net if you are interested.

Yard Sale

A yard sale is being planned for Saturday, September 11. Please keep this in mind when you are clearing out your attics, garages, and basements and save items you would give away for the yard sale. In the near future, you will receive an e-mail explaining when to bring your "stuff" over and where to place it. Kate Lawrence and Keith Akers are organizing the sale, however this is a big job, and anyone interested in helping, please contact the office.

Temple Preservation

As reported by David Lee at the recent sangha meeting, an application has been submitted to the State Historical Society for funding to address critical foundation and roofing issues, as well as electrical deficiencies. We expect to hear in August whether our grant application has been approved. A copy of the application has been placed in the library reference section for those who wish to see more details. David Lee and Melanie Short, Architect, did a superb job with the application. Nine bows.



Calendar Highlights

Center Closed
Zen Games
ZCD Blue Mt. Sesshin App. Due
Sangha Workday
Potluck Brunch/Am. Contra Dancing
Mountain Sesshin
Center Closed
Zazenkai
Repentance Ceremony
Sesshin Application Deadline
Kannon Ceremony
Seminar

July 1-5
July 19
July 31
August 2
August 9
August 20-23
September 5-7
September 13
August 17
August 17
September 20
October 3-4

Teachers On Vacation

Peggy and Karin went to Italy and from the looks and sounds of it, they had a great time. They successfully forgot all about us for ten days!



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