

From: Zen Studies Society <office@daibosatsu.org>
Subject: A letter from Shinge Roshi on The Sangha Meeting held August 26-28
Date: September 19, 2011 5:36:35 PM EDT
To: [REDACTED]
Reply-To: office@daibosatsu.org

Dear Sangha,

Our Sangha Weekend Meeting, facilitated by three members from An Olive Branch, brought together a wide range of people with diverse points of view, and the intensity of our discussions was mirrored by the weather: Hurricane Irene raged outside, the strong winds and rain purifying our hearts (as well as washing out our roads!).

We had planned this meeting with the goal of deeply hearing each other, knowing that no healing can occur when wounds are untended and left to fester; that we must have the courage to uncover them, facing our pain from the past in the present, so that we can work toward a strong, healthy future. For a summary of the structure of the meeting, please see the link at the end of this email.

The most painful yet crucial aspect of the meeting was an adapted Samoan Circle. Soun Joe Dowling and I, together with AOB facilitators, sat in the inner circle, and participants from the outer circle took an empty chair in turn to speak.

What we heard

First, letters were read from several people who couldn't be there; one in particular was extremely moving in its articulation of the hurt and harm experienced from an unwanted teacher-student liaison. Quite a few spoke of their feelings of betrayal, disappointment and disillusionment. Someone noted how harmful the culture of secrecy and silence in the Sangha has been, which can cause one to deny what one sees and hears—to question one's own truth.

Others stressed the life-changing significance of Eido Roshi's teaching, his founding of New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo, and the need to carry it forward authentically: "The Dharma is like holding water in one's palm; if it's held loosely, it will drain away. Our task is to offer this Dharma water to the next generation. We have to hand over exactly the same water. We don't want to color it, or it will destroy our tradition."

A woman who suffered deep sadness over losing Eido Roshi as her teacher said she has now been able to let go, and hopes others can as well, "so that we can go forward in the spirit of love and acceptance of each other, not allowing our views to fragment our Sangha. My attachment is to the Dharma, and to this place." Concurring, someone responded, "This is an amazing place. I have come to understand something beyond my own thinking. It's easy to become angry, but doing zazen helps that anger go away. We can respect Rinzai Zen practice for what it is—a real treasure. In our hearts we can find compassion to forgive the person who betrays us, or who shouts at us. We're human beings. My stand is to say, I love you." And another said, "This is the only place I can go to discover what I have inside. One must judge oneself, not others. We each have stories; this practice helps me see what is much bigger."

Someone said, "It's clear that these board members care so much, and they've done a phenomenal job, but most have been hand-picked by Eido Roshi. The board membership should be made up of professionals, and should rotate every three years." Agreeing, another person said, "Now we need to help these women [who were harmed by relationships with their teacher] come back to the Sangha, and make this into a safe place for women."

Someone expressed her joy at seeing people who left long ago who cared enough to return for

this meeting, and her hope that they would come back to regular practice.

One of the newest Sangha members said, "I am beyond grateful. This is a magical place. Please don't let it be lost. My generation needs this. I know more young people will come. Please, please, keep it safe."

At the end of each person's comments, one of us responded by reflecting them back to show that they were deeply heard; and then the entire group declared, "We hear you!"

What came from our intense discussions was the realization that we are the beneficiaries of a rare and wonderful practice, Rinzai Zen; that deep listening to each other without crosstalk or snap judgments reveals the treasure of Sangha; and that we are responsible for shaping and guiding Rinzai Zen for future generations of practitioners on American soil.

Further reflections

Several people sent their further reflections to me in emails after the weekend. One person suggested that the attention and effort given to address the issues of the past, and to healing, can cripple the effort to establish a new vision, develop a new plan, and implement a sustainable future for ZSS. "There is a fine line between tending a wound and picking at it."

Another wrote, "All of us know that we are obliged to challenge dualistic moral judgment and appreciate the distinction—and lack of such—between the realm in which cause and effect are one and the realm in which they're separate. On the other hand, we must not forget that the world we live in is, thanks to media and pop-psychology, more materialistic, thus more addicted to such dualism and the simplistic moralism it produces...."

Moving Forward

In the wake of this important weekend, I have done the following:

- Instructed the board to complete its review and revision of our by-laws to rationalize our governance decisions by October 15.
- Nominated new board members with a broad range of backgrounds and professional skill sets to replace those who are stepping down. New members will begin serving in January 2012.
- Ordered an in-depth financial audit to clarify our strongest sources of funding, get a better understanding of our operating and capital expense needs, and examine past practices that may not have been in the best interests of the Sangha. We are looking for this audit to be completed by the end of the first quarter of 2012.
- Begun to investigate ways to broaden our sources of funding, to create reliable income streams that are in line with our mission to offer Rinzai Zen in America. I plan on implementing these in the coming year.
- To increase attendance at New York Zendo, I have planned an ongoing series of workshops and programs (like the one I organized recently at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in brushwork with Kazuaki Tanahashi), to include tea masters, bodywork practitioners, and traditional craftspersons, as well as lectures by visiting scholars to encourage study, in keeping with the vision of ZSS's first president, D. T. Suzuki.
- To increase residency at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, I have begun work on a communication and public relations campaign to improve our visibility and make the world aware of what a great place this is for authentic Rinzai Zen training.

In these endeavors, I am receiving the enthusiastic support of Sangha and Board members, and I look forward to your participation as well.

This past Sunday I led an all-day sitting at Shobo-ji, and the Sangha was invited to join in a

potluck dinner afterward. It is my hope that many more such informal gatherings will take place there, to encourage a warm and mutually supportive atmosphere.

Please join me for our next sesshin at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, Golden Wind, September 24–October 2. If you can't come for this one, do consider attending Harvest Sesshin, October 29–November 6, and Rohatsu Sesshin, November 30–December 8.

It is my intention to put the Zen Studies Society at the forefront of Zen in America once again. Our founding teacher has devoted his life to bringing the Dharma to the West. It is our job to uphold what we have received, and to improve upon the vehicle for actualizing it in our ever-changing world. I am completely dedicated to this.

Gassho,



Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat

To see a full Summary of the Facilitated Sangha Discussion please [click here](#).

[Forward email](#)



Try it FREE today.

This email was sent to [REDACTED] by office@daibosatsu.org | [Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Zen Studies Society | 223 Beecher Lake Road | Livingston Manor | NY | 12758