

Southwind Sangha

An Affiliate of the Atlanta Soto Zen Center
1501 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67208

April 2007

THE PURPOSE OF A ZEN LIFE

(Text excerpted from a 1964 talk by Rev. Dr. Soyu Matsuoka Roshi; *Commentary by Rev. Zenkai Taiun Michael Elliston Roshi excerpted from a conference call with the Atlantic Zen Center in Nova Scotia*)

Matsuoka Roshi: ... Today I would like to have each of you think seriously about Zen as a religion and its purpose for your life. If you do this, it should give your life a new start!

The world abounds with different religions to satisfy mankind's yearning spirit. Throughout time, individuals have yearned for something. For some, it has been the desire to be of good health, of good fame, to have a respected job, to become rich, to avoid mishap or trouble, to win the favor of the gods, or to enter into a "pure land" after death. There are a myriad of things one desires in life and most religions try to satisfy that hunger. Some promise success, heaven or a bountiful harvest if a person faithfully follows their precepts. Many religious people are dreaming of a supernatural power far away from themselves and of a fantastic world of good fortune when they pray and follow religious rites. Instead of living their lives more fully now, they dream fantasy and put their faith in something distant from themselves. Their lives are lived for another time or another being. Should this be the purpose of religion?

Rev. Elliston: It's interesting that Sensei is speaking of Zen as a religion here. We tend to say Zen is not a religion because we don't want it associated with what people have done in the name of religion. For me, and I'm sure for others, Zen has become a religion. What do we mean by that? It's not a system of beliefs to which you must ascribe like Christianity, Judaism or Islam. It's something that starts as a spiritual practice or as an escape from another religion. For many of us Zen becomes a much more profound religion, one not based on beliefs, on tenets or on doctrine. This is Bodhdharma's statement: "A special transmission outside the scriptures, seeing into the heart of being, seeing into the nature of humankind." One might say that is beyond religion, since religion, culturally, is a limited thing. But if there is any meaning to the words "religion" or "spirituality," then one has to admit that Zen ultimately is a religion. It's religious. This is fraught with meanings not appropriate to Zen, (continued on page 4)

About "The Purpose of a Zen Life":

Zenkai Taiun Michael Elliston, Abbot of the Atlanta Soto Zen Center, keeps in touch with the affiliates of ASZC in a variety of ways. The discussion featured in this issue was held via a conference call with the Nova Scotia sangha. Once a year he visits Southwind Sangha and conducts an extended retreat (September 21-23 this year). Some members of our Sangha travel to Atlanta to participate in longer retreats. Throughout the year he is available for telephone and e-mail *dokusan* (one-on-one teaching). These opportunities for teaching by Elliston Roshi are available to all.

Rev. Dr. Soyu Matsuoka Roshi was one of the earlier Zen teachers in America and emphasized zazen for Westerners. He trained students in Chicago, IL, Long Beach, CA, and various other Soto Zen Centers. Elliston Roshi is one of his Dharma heirs and is overseeing publication of Matsuoka Roshi's teachings. The full text of "The Purpose of a Zen Life" can be found in The Kyosaku, published by ASZC, 2006. The Kyosaku is available from the Southwind Sangha

lending library or may be purchased through the Atlanta Soto Zen Center.

Additional commentaries by Elliston Roshi and retreat schedules are available on the website www.aszc.org.

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SANGHA FINANCES

By Shindo Robert Glasmann, Treasurer

The Southwind Sangha ended fiscal year 2006 with slightly more income than expenses. We are grateful to all who contributed to the Sangha, both monetarily and in-kind.

These are the expenses that the Sangha incurred in 2006:

Website:

\$110.35

Contributions to First Unitarian Universalist Church and the Atlanta Soto Zen Center:

\$1,200.00

Insurance:

\$678.00

Licenses and Professional Fees:

\$340.00

Postage, copying, postcards, newsletters, newcomer folders, printing supplies:

\$360.46

Lodging for Elliston Roshi:

\$158.62

Total Expenditures, 2006: \$2,847.43

It is our hope that the Sangha continue to operate under the motto: "No donation required. No donation refused." We want to keep all of our activities free to all, and that donations to us be free-will. If a monetary gift is within your means and you would like to contribute, please make a check payable to the Southwind Sangha. Your donation is deductible from taxable income as provided by law.

You can put your check in the "Dana" basket on the library door, or you can mail it to the Sangha at 1501 Fairmount St., Wichita, KS, 67208-1914.

Cash is good, too! (Let us know if you need a receipt.)

Thank you for your continued support of our activities.

Southwind Sangha Board of Trustees:

- Gekko Kathryn Riley President
- Shindo Robert Glasmann, Treasurer and Librarian
- YanagiDo Delphine Smith, Secretary and Newsletter Editor
- Nento Don Riley
- Ku Wasan Ann Glasmann
- Joanna Lord

OFFICIAL I.R.S. RECOGNITION

By Shindo Robert Glasmann, Treasurer

For the past couple of years, the Southwind Sangha Soto Zen Association (us) has been working to incorporate in the State of Kansas and be recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a religious organization. We are pleased to report that all of this has finally taken place. We recently received word from the I.R.S. that the Southwind Sangha is now officially recognized as a 501(c) (3), tax-exempt charity and religious organization.

We are very grateful to Michael McCafferty, Attorney at Law with Larson & McCafferty, LLC., for his professional assistance and expertise with our incorporation.

501(c) (3) status provides the Sangha with many benefits, such as being eligible for non-profit mailing rates in cases of large mailings and the elimination of sales taxes. In addition, all donations to the Southwind Sangha are fully deductible from taxable income as provided by law.

Our favorite sentences in the IRS determination are: "Contributions to [the Sangha] are deductible under section 170 of the [I.R.S.] Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code."

Do you have any unneeded stocks or bonds lying around? We can suggest a good use for them!

Open Letter from First UU to Southwind Sangha

We have appreciated having the Southwind Sangha located in the church for the past 10 years and look forward to the group moving with us to our new facility. At this time we expect to move in August, but it is likely that for at least part of August temporary arrangements will be necessary. The new owners of 1501 Fairmount are expecting to take possession July 31.

Unitarian Universalism is a faith which draws its inspiration from all the major faith traditions and it has been advantageous to have the close relationship with Southwind Sangha. Several of our UU members are practicing Buddhists and a number of others take part in Sangha activities from time to time. We look forward to this continuing.

-- Elaine Bulatkin, President, First Unitarian Universalist Church of Wichita

HOW TO CHANT

By Gekko Kathryn Riley

My own Zen teacher, Rev. Michael Elliston of Atlanta Soto Zen Center, gave me a couple of tips on chanting passed on from his teacher, Matsuoka Roshi. He said the important thing is to chant from "deep within the belly." How do you do that? When you take a break in the chant, let the air fill your abdomen like a balloon. Then as you chant, the balloon gradually deflates until there is no air left. If you feel a vibration in the belly during this process, that's a sign you really ARE chanting from "deep within the belly."

Another tip is to "chant more with your ears than with your mouth." When I chant, I listen to the sound we are all making together and ask myself, "How can I help with this?" Usually, the answer is, "Go deeper." So I allow my voice to drop to a slightly lower pitch. Usually when I do this, I can hear less of my own "individual" sound, and yet the group sound itself seems to be strengthened.

I like to hold my hands so that the tip of the middle finger is at a 45 degree angle from the tip of my nose, just where the "anchor" would be if I was doing zazen. This prevents my eyes from darting around as I chant. Also, don't worry about running out of air at the same time the others do, so that some of the words are missing. Even when this happens, the drum doesn't run out of air. Just pretend the drum chanted the words missed while everyone took a break. Maybe it did after all!

INCENSE, ICONS & BOWING

Buddha admonished his disciples to be refuges onto themselves. Our emancipation, according to the teaching, depends on our own realization of truth and not on the benevolence of a god or any external power as a reward for good behavior. If humankind's position is supreme, some may ask why do we have statues in our zendo and on our home altars? Why do we burn incense? Why do we put our palms together in a prayer-like position when bowing?

Incense can symbolize the transient nature of life--useful only as it is consumed. The fragrance of burning incense can be helpful in bringing attention back to the moment if we become distracted. At the close of our third Saturday retreats, participants are invited to make an incense offering in honor of the three treasures. The smoke of the incense can invoke

the burning away of pettiness and selfishness. (It should be noted that, at Southwind Sangha, we do not use incense if someone who is allergic to incense is present.)

Some wonder about the bowing in the direction of the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. It is not worship, but rather an expression of a wish to realize Buddha-nature and to express gratitude for the three treasures, gratitude for a place to sit and gratitude for others with whom to sit.

Some newcomers find the "palms together" gesture awkward, as it reminds of a religious belief they no longer hold. This is *gassho*, a traditional Buddhist gesture often used in greeting, with palms joined together in front of the face, fingers straight up and fingertips at nose level. Bowing in *gassho* shows gratitude and respect. – YanagiDo Delphine Smith

MAY SPECIAL EVENTS

7 pm Wednesday, May 2, Introduction to Zen Meditation – Shindo Robert Glasmann, Ino
 7 pm Wednesday, May 9, Five Hindrances of Buddhism – Joanna Lord, Ino
 8 am to 12 noon, Saturday, May 19, Lotus Ceremony – Gekko Kathryn Riley, Ino

These events, as well as our weekly zazen sessions (8 am Sunday, 7 pm Wednesday and 7 pm Thursday), are held in our Zendo, second floor, 1501 Fairmount. Questions about participation in any event should be addressed to Kathryn Riley, senior teacher, 684-8819.

THE PURPOSE OF A ZEN LIFE

(continued from page 1)

unfortunately, but it's cultural. Sensei is, I think, very daring and forthright and brave to just put it on the line and say, "It becomes a religion for you. It becomes the center of your life, your spiritual life."

Matsuoka Roshi: In Zen, the purpose of the religious life is to find the truth about life in this world and then to live with this knowledge. Instead of hoping to obtain some material thing, or fortune from a supernatural being, in Zen we live in order to enter into the true life. We do not even desire to become a Buddha, for doing so takes the emphasis off the present moment of life and puts it into the unpredictable future. Instead, we live this moment to its fullest and so act as to develop the potential to be a Buddha which lies dormant in each of us.

Rev. Elliston: Dogen Zenji, our founder in twelfth century Japan, said "Give up even the idea of becoming a Buddha., Think of neither good nor evil, right nor wrong, thus stopping the function of the mind." Basically if you think about the notion of Buddha, the awakened one, you set up an aspiration and take your attention away from the present reality, which is the only place the Buddha really exists. If we visualize an idea of what a Buddha is like, we try to be like that and that takes us away from the present.

Matsuoka Roshi: The Buddha once said, "If you kill your wrong way of thinking, you will find the truth about life." You ask: How can I rid myself of these errors? The key to this freedom was discovered centuries ago by the Buddha himself after long years of searching for the truth. He finally settled in a seated position under a tree in a garden and resolved not to rise until he had found the truth. Sitting in this position enabled him to find it. One morning, as the dawn broke, the Buddha became enlightened. He discovered the Buddha-nature within himself and the universe. His thinking no longer contained the errors that keep man in misery. Instead, his meditation had shown him the true life. This true life can be known to you too just as it was to the Buddha. The key to it is the same for you as for him—meditation. Meditation will give you the knowledge of this true life devoid of desires and without your yearning for it. When you meditate, you have already entered into the world of the Buddha and have the potential to be enlightened within you. Meditation empties your mind of the wrong ways of thinking so that you no longer desire things for yourself.

You have become, as it is, empty. Your mind has become empty of the wrong way of thinking and your heart has become empty of thoughts of yourself. Yet what has entered in is the wisdom of the Buddha. Enlightenment is not an annihilation of yourself, but a fulfillment. With the wrong ways of thinking, you will forever remain short of fulfilling your potential.

Rev. Elliston to Sangha members: Any comments or questions about the line "If you kill your wrong way of thinking, you will find the truth about life"? How do you kill your wrong way of thinking?

Sangha Member: It seems paradoxical in that the instructions when sitting Zazen are to let thoughts come and let thoughts go. It would be easy to take this to mean stopping all thoughts as opposed to taking a step back from thought as Dogen put it, not relying on thinking.

Rev Elliston: Non thinking, going beyond both thinking and not thinking. If you consider killing your reliance on thought as being really aggressive, suppressing thought, it leads to a misunderstanding of the way of Zen. It's rather letting something run out its tether, letting something go until it hits the wall. Instead of trying to keep it from happening, just let it go so that it hits the wall. This is killing our trying to control thought, just letting go of the innate tendency to try to control everything.

LIBRARY AT 400 ITEMS

The lending library of the Southwind Sangha now has about 400 items about Buddhism and Zen. Holdings include books, magazines, recordings and videos. We offer deep bows of gratitude to the many people who have donated items to our library.

Library items are available for loan to you. Items may be checked out by filling out a card found in front of the item; please print your name and date the item was taken. Our only requirements are that we have your current address, telephone number and email address (please give this information to Del Smith), and that you will return any items you check out. Check-out instructions are also on the wall in the library.

Kindly return all items in a timely manner, so that others may use them. – Shindo Robert Glasmann, Librarian

ENLIGHTENMENT, INDIFFERENCE OR OLD AGE?

By Nento Don Riley

My son and I were eating in a restaurant one evening and the waitress asked if we wanted separate checks or one? I said it didn't matter. She asked what we wanted to drink and I said whatever they had that was brown and sweet and carbonated. I figured I'd wind up with a Pepsi or a Coke depending on which one the restaurant carried. My son looked at me and laughed and said, "You're getting old." He pointed out to me that a couple of weeks earlier when I'd ordered a garlic salad I told the waiter to just give me a half order. He also reminded me that I often would request just a half cup of coffee when asked if I wanted a refill. He said only old people did that. I became a little resentful and told him I hated to see food or drink go to waste.

Then, I reflected as to whether all these things were a sign of getting old or something else.

Of course, I concluded that my seeming indifference or indecisiveness or eccentricity was not really those characteristics, but indicated superior qualities arising from my practice of Buddhism. I had achieved a non-discriminating mind and had attained a state of nonduality in my thinking. My son was observing a highly evolved being.

I also thought about the Friday evenings when my loving wife frequently asked me what I wanted to do that evening and I would usually tell her that whatever she wanted to do was fine without designating that which I preferred. We could watch a video, eat out, or each pursue our separate interests. And I must say that, though I really didn't have a preference, I leaned toward doing something with her, not caring what that something was.

Often she asks me what I want for supper and I ask what we have. After being told what is on hand, I usually say, "Whatever appeals to you, my dear."

Now doesn't this sound like an enlightened attitude instead of indifference or indecision?

Well, I had seen my father engage in many of these behaviors as he aged. Maybe he had gotten increasingly enlightened as he aged, But – he wasn't a Buddhist.

Maybe I should apply Buddhist concepts to my behavior and see if I was just an old codger or awakened. Did my actions arise out of compassion and non-attachment? What is the difference between indifference and non-attachment? Was I non-attached to Dr. Pepper or merely indifferent to the choice of drink, or maybe even indecisive? I certainly would not want to suffer if I really wanted Dr. Pepper and the restaurant didn't carry it. Maybe by giving the waitress the choice, I was avoiding suffering arising out of clinging to an extraordinary desire for Dr. Pepper. After all, can't a person have compassion for himself?

But if we are indecisive when given a clear choice, are we enlightened? Shouldn't we know what we want or say that we want nothing? If we are truly indifferent, shouldn't we just order water? Wouldn't that be truly utilizing skillful means?

This was clearly becoming a very unclear situation. Was my son being insensitive and ignorant of my Buddhist Nature, or was I becoming eccentric, indifferent, i.e., "old"? Ah, maybe this is true emptiness....maybe my behavior has no inherent essence. Or is emptiness the concept that all compounded things are impermanent. Oh my!

Maybe Nagarjuna had an answer in his discussion of the two truths. There is the provisional truth that has to do with truth as it is in our delusional world and there is the truth that exists in the world of non duality and the world that is beyond cause and effect. Maybe I am both enlightened/indifferent and indecisive/old in my thinking. That's probably not quite what Nagarjuna had in mind. Then I thought of a poem by Dayang Jingxuan and I do know what to do now.

Order a full glass of water and let my son pay for his own damned meal.

Hindsight

(Nento Don Riley's musings upon enlightenment, indifference, indecisiveness and possible codgerdom reminded him of this favorite poem by Dayang Jingxuan [n.d.])

In the past, when I began to study Zen,
It was all a mistake.

Wandering through numberless
mountains and rivers,
I wanted to find
something to know,

(It's all clear in hindsight.)

The teacher has pointed out
the ancient mirror
and I see in it
the time before I was born of my parents.

Having learned this,
what do I have?

Release a crow into the night
And it flies
flecked with snow.

THE PERFECT ZENDO – PART II

By Ku Wasan Ann Glasmann

... As Small Sangha sat on their cushions, the breeze through the evergreen boughs brought tangy slices of air. Birds sitting in the pines made bird noises. Dogs shared their barking news. From within the zendo walls, children were never seen but always heard, and the mutterings of grown humans out in the village would come and go according to their tasks.

Small Sangha sat.

One spring as the rain fell, Small Sangha listened to words: "At the place where you regularly sit, spread out a layer of thick matting and place a cushion on it. Sit either in the full-lotus or half-lotus posture.... Then place your right hand on your left leg and your left palm facing upwards on your right palm, thumb tips touching...." Small Sangha was very busy. They thought about their ears and shoulders, their noses and navels, and their lightly touching thumbs. As spring flowed, these instructions seemed to become easier. The days passed and the instructions were often forgotten, and their thumbs drifted apart.....

(to be continued)

THE FIVE HINDRANCES OF BUDDHISM

The early Buddhist texts of the Anguttara Nikaya describe the Five Hindrances of Buddhism. These hindrances are sense desire; ill will; sloth and torpor; restlessness; worry and flurry; and doubt. In the busy routines of today's society, these hindrances are constantly arising in our minds and often it will seem that there is nothing we can do to slow down their overwhelming power over our lives. Yet, ironically, it is often their presence that also inspires our practice. Jack Kornfield in his talk "Hindrances of the Householder" reminds his listeners that the hindrances can be seen as a poisoned tree. "One strategy," he states, "is that you go and find the poisoned tree and you cut it down; you chop it down and try to get rid of it... A second strategy is to simply put up a sign near the tree that says, 'This is a poisoned tree. Don't eat the berries, don't eat the leaves,' and instead of killing

it, to take shade in it, and to enjoy it for what there is of value in it, to have some friendly relationship to it rather than one based on fear. The third and most interesting strategy is the person who comes along and says, 'Oh, a poisoned tree of this kind, just what I've been looking for. These berries make the best medicine for curing a number of illnesses, including the illness of greed, fear, desire, anger, and doubt.'"

I think that Kornfield most clearly sums up this message with a quote from another Zen teacher which states, "This life is a series of mistakes. True practice is one continuous mistake, one after another anyway. The only difference is that you pay attention so you learn from it."

-- Joanna Lord

(Joanna Lord will focus on The Five Hindrances of Buddhism in her dharma talk on Wednesday, May 9.)