

Abbot Sabbatical Transition Memo #1

February 4, 2010

Dear Sangha Members,

This memo is to update you on the developments in the transition to my year-long sabbatical in 2011.

As I announced in 2008, I will be on sabbatical from the Zen Center in 2011. During this sabbatical, I will retain the positions of Abbot and Head Teacher and will be on *complete* leave from the Zen Center. This sabbatical will come after 13 years at the helm of ZCLA. These have been years of unrelenting hard work to re-build ZCLA from the ground up and to re-establish it as a Zen training center.

As the founding Zen Center of the Venerable Maezumi Roshi, one of the seminal figures of American Buddhism, ZCLA is a very important temple in the larger sphere of the White Plum lineage and the development of Zen Buddhism in the West. It is also well-regarded in Japan. While many of you may be unaware of ZCLA's history and place in the establishment of Zen Buddhism in the West, this is part of the legacy that is my responsibility to uphold.

Some of you have been with me from 1997; others have joined along the way. It is to our credit that ZCLA has new life following the death of its Founding Abbot. Transitions for organizations from their founders are always fraught with challenges, and ZCLA was no exception. I am deeply grateful for the transition work of Roshi Glassman, who became Abbot upon Maezumi Roshi's passing, and for all of your practice and contributions.

Due to the precarious condition of ZCLA when I returned in 1997, I have had to, by necessity, involve myself in all spheres of ZCLA, including administration, daily operations, re-structuring, training and all practice-related issues, teaching, rebuilding of the resident community, upgrading of the facilities, and confronting and healing the many shadows of the founding years. It has been a daunting task, but one that we have met with integrity and courage. During this time of rebuilding, I have worn many, many hats. It is time now, for me to shed some of these as the Sangha matures and can assume these roles.

This is also a time in my own practice when I can best serve the Sangha by being more available for teaching and training than my administrative duties have previously permitted. Personally, I am very inspired by this opportunity. However, in order for this to happen, some of my duties need to be assumed by others.

Initially, I had planned to take a two-year leave. As various events have unfolded, I decided to leave for 2011 only. I am encouraged by the many shifts I see in people already taking on various positions and the maturing of individuals in important positions.

I allowed for a two-year transition period, which is on target. Last year in 2009, we made many important shifts towards this end. Some key developments last year were the following:

- Acceptance of my sabbatical by the Sangha.
- Reorganization of staffing, including Darla Myoho Fjeld, Executive Circle Steward, assuming the role of Staff oversight.
- Formation of the Many Hands and Eyes-Collective Awakening & Wisdom Circle (MHAE-CAAW) to help me steward the transition process.
- Development of the Teachers Circle with two new Dharma Successors.
- Overall strengthening of Circle Stewards and Circle functioning.
- Continued development of the Board of Directors.
- Completion of the work of Many Hands and Eyes-Prison Circle (2007-2009).

MHAE-CAAW.

Last year, I formed the MHAE-CAAW circle. This group holds a space for my own transition process, as well as guides the overall process for the Zen Center and Sangha. After much reflection, I appointed the following people to this Circle:

- Sensei Raul Ensho Berge (rrberge@sbcglobal.net)
- Sensei Merle Kodo Boyd (via skype and person) (merleboyd@att.net)
- Sensei John Daishin Buksbazen (daishin@speakeasy.net)

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- Executive Steward Darla Myoho Fjeld (dr.fjeld@gmail.com)
- Board Chair Patti Muso Giggans (patti@peaceoverviolence.org)
- Sensei Patricia Shingetsu Guzy (patguzy@att.net)
- Sensei Kipp Ryodo Hawley (ryodo@zcla.org)
- Dharma-Holder Gary Koan Janka (gjanka@ca.rr.com)
- John Plum-Hermit Swanger (via skype and person) (jhswanger@gmail.com)

This group first met in November 2009 to get acquainted and for an initial conversation. The work of how my many responsibilities will be covered during my sabbatical year began during our first meeting on January 23rd. We will be meeting monthly for three-hour sessions, at least for the first half of this year. I appreciate very much the support of time, energy, and commitment from the Circle members and the space which they hold for me as Abbot to go through my own process of transition.

THE MHAE-CAAW PROCESS.

We will utilize the basic model developed in our Bones Spiritual Organizational initiative, undertaken in 2008. This involves three important frameworks:

1. Using the Three Tenets: Coming from Not-Knowing, Identifying Ingredients, Determining Appropriate Actions, Returning to the Process.
2. Using Guiding Questions to frame the process.
3. Allowing the widest possible view to inform specific actions.

At this early stage of the 2010 process, we are identifying ingredients and formulating the guiding questions. MHAE-CAAW will be meeting with Staff, Residents, and the Sangha to surface ingredients, particularly concerns that any of you may have about this transition. The dates and times for these meetings will be announced in the coming weeks. In meantime, if you have concerns that you wish to relay to any of the MHAE-CAAW members, please feel free to contact any of them in person or by email as listed above.

While there will be ample opportunity for input, I encourage you to direct any questions you have now to any members of MHAE-CAAW, so that we can better serve the needs of the Sangha by having information sooner, rather than later. Your questions and concerns addressed to the CAAW members will be incorporated into the Circle's inquiry and process.

SHIFTS IN ABBOT'S FOCUS.

As we undergo this transition, my focus is naturally shifting. These are the important shifts in my focus at this time:

- As previously announced, I will spend more time in Seattle this year with my partner Eberhard. My time in Seattle is not vacation time, but a time when I remain very engaged in the work of the Zen Center.
- I will focus on the backlog of work that has accumulated over the past decade. This includes important work on study documents for senior students, reviewing liturgical documents, and many facets of Maezumi Roshi's archives.
- While I will continue to hold face-to-face (FTF) for members, my focus will be on senior students and those working on koans. The number of students that study with me outside of the FTF room is also increasing.
- I will be giving Dharma Transmission to Dharma Holder Gary Koan Janka (October), and Zen Priest Ordination to John Plum-Hermit Swanger (July) and Tom Dharma-Joy Reichert (August). DeWayne Gojitsu Snodgrass will also complete his training as Head Trainee (July).

By mid-year, I would expect that the main pieces of this transition to be in place, including the handling of the Abbot Seat Holder position. Much of this is developing very organically. We owe this to all the ongoing hard work we have done since 2002 to develop the spirituality of the Zen Center organization through Shared Stewardship, the ZCLA Mandala, and the emerging Collective Awakening inquiry. We will continue to shift our organization, leadership, and ourselves, as we continue to clarify the needs of the Zen Center and take the pulse of the Sangha.

I will periodically issue these memoranda to update all of you on our process. In the meantime, if you wish to communicate with the MHAE-CAAW circle members, please contact any of its members in person, or through the emails listed above.

ABBOT'S SABBATICAL PLANS.

I have no plans for my sabbatical year, other than to spend it with my life partner, Eberhard. Not only have I been blessed by his support, but all of you have as well, directly and indirectly. Since I live a heavily scheduled life from dawn to dusk, I look forward to being without a demanding schedule and to rejuvenate my own energies.

ABBOT'S RETURN IN 2012

In 2012, I will resume active responsibilities as Abbot and Head Teacher. The form and structure of this *may* be different than in the preceding years. It is important that we make the Abbot's position more sustainable for the long term, so that we avoid the overload of responsibility that has been placed on the Abbot. Therefore, this transition extends beyond merely covering the Abbot's responsibilities during the sabbatical, but also involves a wider re-structuring that continues the development of Shared Stewardship and our practice of collective responsibility.

Thank you very much for your attention and support. I have been very blessed, indeed, with sincere and devoted students in the Buddhadharma.

I ask for your continued support and patience as we go through this process.

Roshi Egyoku,

in gassho and appreciation