

Sangha Notes

Condolences to Charles Vitale on the death of his nephew.

We mourn the death of Jim Jackson, a long-time friend of the Zen center, senior dharma teacher in the Kwan Um School of Zen and co-leader of the Morning Star Zen Center in Fayetteville, Arkansas, who died in late November of ALS. Condolences to his wife, Barbara Taylor, and his children Margot and Keefe.

Thanks to all who shoveled the Zen center walks through the winter: Jan Schaake, Stan Lombardo, Jane Gnojek, Rita Sooby, and Judy Roitman.

Deep gratitude to Bangere Purnaprajna and Shiva Narasimhamurthy for their extraordinary concert of South Indian music, which they donated as a fund-raiser for the Zen center in March. And thanks to Edna Baginsky and Richard Worker for providing snacks after the concert.

We're proud to announce our revised website, on a different platform with a different host (the same URL works). Thanks to our webmaster John van Sickle for his invaluable help; it took a lot of his skill and time to make it happen and make it look so good. And thanks to our guiding teacher Judy Roitman who wrote much of the new material.

Thanks to Jan Schaake for pruning trees and bushes, and to Stan Lombardo for dealing with yet another plumbing problem.

Thanks in advance to the folks who'll be helping out at our work day, April 12. Spring has sprung and a lot of work needs to be done.

If anyone has not been acknowledged, or if you have anything to add to the next Sangha Notes, please send an email to: info@kansaszencenter.org, or mail to: 1423 New York, Lawrence, KS 66044

The four great vows

Judy Roitman,
Dharma Master/KZC Guiding Teacher

*Sentient beings are numberless, we vow to save them all.
Delusions are endless, we vow to cut through them all.
The teachings are infinite, we vow to learn them all.
The Buddha way is inconceivable, we vow to attain it.*

These are the four great vows, central to all Mahayana Buddhist practices. In our school they are the first thing we do in morning practice. They set the tone and direction of our practice: non-stop, and not for me.

If you Google "four great vows" you'll find a lot of translations. Many of the translations are quite far from the Chinese text, but ours is very close. Even so, Chinese and English are very different languages, and it's helpful to compare the two.

Chinese does not use pronouns or verbs the way English does. Our translation says "we" and other translations say "I" but there is no Chinese word being translated. There is no "them all" either. The Chinese is not, for example, "we/I vow to learn them all" but simply "vow learn." For me, knowing this opens things up. It's not limited: oh, we're the ones vowing over here and you aren't. Just: vow. No subject. Only vow. Only vow action: save, cut through, learn, attain.

In the Chinese the word "sentient" does not appear, although it appears in most English translations. The phrase translated as "sentient beings" is something like "the many beings" or "the multitude of beings." This cuts out checking which being is sentient and which not—clams? viruses? The universe is filled with beings, and our vow is not limited to just some of them.

There's no verb such as "is" or "are." In this, as in the other vows, the two clauses are one: the many beings numberless vow save; delusions endless vow cut...

The word "save" is a translation of a word that means "cross over" as in, "cross over to the other shore." The metaphor

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KANSAS ZEN CENTER

The Kansas Zen Center is a nonprofit organization founded in 1978 in Lawrence, KS. KZC is affiliated with the Kwan Um School of Zen, an international organization with more than 60 centers and groups. The Kwan Um School was founded by Zen Master Seung Sahn, the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West.

MAKING A DONATION

Donations to the Kansas Zen Center are tax-deductible and may be sent to the Kansas Zen Center at 1423 New York Street, Lawrence, KS 66044. A receipt that may be used for tax purposes will be mailed back to you. Thank you for all your support!

BECOMING A KZC MEMBER

Becoming a member of the Kansas Zen Center also makes you a member of the Kwan Um School of Zen. KZC Membership is \$25/month for individuals and \$35/month for families. Membership dues help support your Center, the School and the transmission of Zen teaching.

Members receive the KZC newsletter, the Kwan Um School newsletter, Primary Point magazine and discounts on retreat fees, and they have the right to vote in the annual election of officers and board members. For more information on becoming a member, please call (785) 331-2274 or access our website at www.kansaszen-center.org.

of crossing from one shore to another is common to many religions. In Buddhism it refers to crossing over from suffering to liberation, and the word sometimes used in English is “liberate.”

This first vow really stops the mind: all the numberless beings! How can we save them all? I used to think of it as brave little me facing the universe and vowing to save it. But no, it’s the whole universe together, vowing to save and being saved. Saying these vows, we are a manifestation, the universe talking to itself.

The word we translate as “delusions” is impossible to fully translate. It simultaneously has several meanings, chief among them delusions, passions, and desires. In English you have to pick one. Our school originally used passions, but later settled on delusions. Our “cut through” translates a Chinese word which simultaneously means “cut” and “end” (as in ending a relationship). Words like “eliminate” and “abandon” are often used. The Chinese is blunt, and so are we.

The teachings in the third vow do not refer only to things written down in sutras and commentary. These are useful, but the real teachings cannot be summarized and have no conclusions. As it says in the temple rules, “the sound of the waterfall and the bird’s song are the great sutras.” That is why the teachings are infinite—something is always happening. It’s not a matter of “okay, now I’ve learned that.” Learning is never finished. It can be abandoned, but not finished.

The word “way” in “Buddha way” is translating the Chinese word “dao” which means path. Before the Europeans got to Asia there was no Buddhism or Hinduism or Taoism or shamanism or... Instead, there were various paths, for example, the path of the Buddha. This is a profoundly different attitude, one that encourages tolerance and cross-fertilization. We could use more of that attitude in this world.

Then there’s “inconceivable.” The Chinese says something like “nothing higher than,” and it is often translated as “supreme” or “unsurpassable.” The word “inconceivable” captures the notion of unsurpassable, and then surpasses it. The reason we can attain the Buddha way is because it isn’t locked into our frontal lobes. We can’t conceive the Buddha way any more than we can conceive the taste of salt. But, just as we can attain the taste of salt by putting it into our mouth just once, so we can attain the Buddha way.

So there you have the four great vows: for all beings, no bullshit, never stop, wake up. Just do it. Why not? 🌀

KZC Practice Schedule

KANSAS ZEN CENTER
1424 New York St., Lawrence, KS 66044
(785) 331-2274 info@kansaszencenter.org

SUNDAY

Beginner’s Orientation 9:00 a.m.
Morning Practice 9:30-11:30 a.m.
Dharma Talk 11:00 a.m.

TUESDAY

Morning Practice 6:00-7:00 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Special Chanting 6:30-7:00 p.m.
Evening Practice 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Kong-an interviews with Dharma Master Judy Roitman
second Wednesday of every month

THURSDAY

Morning Practice 6:00-7:00 a.m.

SATURDAY

Morning Practice 6:30-8:00 a.m.

KANSAS CITY ZEN GROUP

Unity Temple on the Plaza
(816) 459-3129 info@kansaszencenter.org

TUESDAY

Evening Practice 7:00-8:00 p.m.
Kong-an interviews with Dharma Master Judy Roitman
the third Tuesday evening practice of the month



Upcoming Events

Spring Work Day and Board Meeting

Saturday April 12
8:30 a.m.

Buddha’s Birthday Ceremony

& Precepts Ceremony

Sunday April 13
10:30 a.m.

Midwest Sangha Weekend in Chicago

Friday April 25 through Sunday April 27
For information go to <http://www.tendirectionszen.org/web-content/events.html>

2-day Retreat with

Guest Teacher Tim Lerch

Friday May 30 6:30 p.m. to Sunday June 1 noon

Foundations of Zen class &

One-day Retreat in Kansas City

This summer
Dates to be announced

Foundations of Zen class &

One-day Retreat in Lawrence

September
Dates to be announced



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

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