

This document was originally distributed on Internet as a part of the Electronic Buddhist Archives, available via anonymous FTP and/or COOMBSQUEST gopher on the node COOMBS.ANU.EDU.AU

The document's ftp filename and the full directory path are given in the coombpapers top level INDEX file.

This version of the document has been reformatted by Barry Kapke and is being distributed, with permission, via the DharmaNet Buddhist File Distribution Network.

[Last updated: 27 November 1993]

Robert Aitken Roshi,
Diamond Sangha - Zen Buddhist Society,
Koko An Zendo,
2119 Kaloa Way, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822, USA

ON ZEN TEACHING

[This text was originally published in the Diamond Sangha Newsletter, July 1991 pp. 1-2.]

Copyrights (c) by Robert Aitken and Diamond Sangha

I have set forth my views about Zen teaching in a general way over the years. In this essay, I present them as succinctly as I can in a single document.

First of all, let me outline the koan syllabus: After the student realizes the preliminary koan, and this experience is carefully checked and approved, the student goes through a number of introductory koans, and then takes up a series of four collections of traditional cases: The Gateless Barrier, The Blue Cliff Record, The Book of Serenity, and The Transmission of Light. Following this, the student examines The Five Modes of Tozan (Tung-shan), and then studies the classic interpretations of The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts. I check the student's notes, and we go over the problematic cases. When this is done, the formal part of koan study is complete.

Students who have gone beyond their study of The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts can take up collections of cases of Rinzai and Kido - and other collections - in the dokusan room. I would hope that such students, and indeed all students, will treat their many daily-life situations as occasions for practice. There is no end to our practice, and it is inappropriate to consider the point of completing the last koan in any of the books as anything more than a milestone on the never-ending way.

The student working beyond The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts is, however, likely to be involved in leadership, and possibly to be considered for the status of junior teacher, or "apprentice teacher" - the designation I am now inclined to prefer. As matters develop perhaps this new status of apprentice teacher eventuates, and perhaps it does not. Many factors are involved, but certainly approval of the old teacher and acceptance by the other students is required.

The apprentice teacher works closely with, and under the supervision of the roshi, and never assumes any kind of independent role that is not established by agreement with the roshi. She or he can hold interviews (without bows or bells), but is not authorized to check notes. Gradually, with experience in teaching and in other kinds of leadership, the apprentice teacher can be considered for transmission. Or the apprentice teacher might be released by the roshi or by the sangha from

the teaching role, or might resign from it.

Transmission is a requirement for teaching independently. It is the modest and resolved acceptance of oneself as a teacher in the line of ancestral teachers, to labor in the discipline of tradition within the context of the times. Transmission comes down through the line of more than four score generations, beginning with the Buddha Shakyamuni and continuing through the present master of the temple. It requires approval and support by a viable sangha. It involves giving a teisho, leading a shosan, doing jukai or jukai renewal, and completing the Blood Line document, made out in the traditional form, listing the many ancestors down to the new teacher. This document is then signed and sealed by the old teacher, and presented to the new teacher in a public ceremony.

The new teacher is then independent in every way, with the exception of the provision initiated and agreed upon at the 1990 Teachers Meeting: Second generation Diamond Sangha teachers will not name their own successors until after ten years of tenure. I would hope the new teacher would participate in the society of Diamond Sangha teachers and in the overall Diamond Sangha community, keeping the essence of our way, while possibly experimenting carefully with innovations that seem appropriate.

I am open to discussing and possibly modifying these views.

end of file

The Zen teaching of Hui Hai on sudden illumination; being the teaching of the Zen Master Hui Hai, known as the Great Pearl; rendered into English [from the Chinese] by John Blofeld (Chu Ch'an); foreword by Charles Luk. London, Rider & Co., 1962, 160 p. New York, Weiser, 1962, 1972, 160 p. "A complete translation of the Tun Wu Ju Tao Yao MÄn Lun and the Tsung Ching Record."