

# MOUNTAINS TALKING

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SUMMER 2016



**Heart of Compassion**

Karin Ryuku Kempe

# HEART OF COMPASSION

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This morning I want to explore something that has been percolating for me a while and came to the fore-front recently with the events in Orlando, Florida, where a hundred people either lost their lives or were seriously injured, and many others, family, friends, community, found their world changed forever. This event was followed by what has unfortunately become the usual and customary public reaction to a mass shooting on the part of our leaders – more talk, words of grief and handwringing, but great difficulty in moving towards any meaningful formal action and a wide difference between our two political parties in beliefs about the underlying causes, and therefore what to do. Grief and gridlock. Then last weekend there followed even larger horrific attacks, in Istanbul, Bangladesh, and Baghdad. And just this Friday, I added yet another set of shootings, now in Louisiana, Minnesota and Dallas, supplanting concerns abroad.

How does our tradition see such events? What is required from us? Is anything required from us, other than the usual respectful special dedication for the week's chanting? What is the role of compassion, of heart-wisdom in our tradition? How does it function and what do we do with it? Often we come to Zen desiring a sense of stability in an often dangerous world, peace of mind, but then we also wonder about the cost of a detached serenity. Does Zen lack heart? Is it too "cool"?

Actually it's not long after starting to practice that we learn that the spiritual life is not a journey away but a journey towards, that we learn the skill of equanimity by going right into the heart of darkness and difficulty. In other words, we don't escape suffering; we turn in, engage it, and our experience becomes transformed by a vastly enlarged context and a dramatic shift in perspective.

Before I left for our recent mountain retreat, our real estate broker asked what Zen has to say about events such as the Orlando shooting – and each of us in the car had very different answers, like blind men feeling differ-

ent parts of an elephant. One way to see it is like lightning striking a tree in the forest, an impersonal force of nature, but it seems to be closer to the bone to say that really it's like lightning reaching in to strike each of us simultaneously – that intimate. Leonard Cohen says:

*Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in.*

Talking with you this morning, I know this offering is inadequate and incomplete ... but as another Zen guy once wrote, "You have to say something." So I am not speaking in any capacity of authority today; my hope is that you will let the crack stay open, that you will let yourself be disturbed, uncomfortable and challenged, that we may start to build a less arrogant and more respectful society. Also I am not talking about the specifics or politics of these events, about gun control legislation, about radicalization, about fathers and sons, about the marginalization of minority groups, although I have my opinions, just as you do. I am talking about just the raw issues of suffering, of hatred, of heart and compassion and spiritual practice.

But first a word about language. For many years, most of the translations used in going from Japanese or Chinese to English, have translated the kanji for *shin* as mind, and we use it a lot in talking about insight or wisdom, in phrases like this very famous one by Master Huang Po: "There is nothing but the One Mind, besides which nothing else exists. This Mind which is without beginning is unborn and indestructible."

The problem is that in English, this word "mind" often refers to our intellect, our thinking capacity, that somewhat detached capacity to see clearly. But the kanji for mind in Japanese, in Chinese, also means "heart," so really *shin* means the heart-mind, a phrase which includes that broader awareness that our fortunes are linked and our welfare interdependent. The heart-mind not only knows, knows transcendently, intuitively, but also feels.

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Mountains Talking is the quarterly newsletter of the Zen Center of Denver, a Buddhist sangha offering authentic Zen practice and training. For more information, contact:

Zen Center of Denver  
P.O. Box 101013  
Denver, CO 80250

303-455-1500  
office@zencenterofdenver.org

Find us on the web at [www.zencenterofdenver.org](http://www.zencenterofdenver.org)  
And on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/zencenterofdenver](http://www.facebook.com/zencenterofdenver)

Editor: Joel Tagert





## A GRASS HUT ON BLUE MOUNTAIN

*A shining window below the green pines –  
Jade palaces and vermillion towers can't compare with it.*

*- Shih-t'ou, "The Grass Roof Hermitage"*

This June the ZCD held its 10th annual Blue Mountain sesshin at Becky Wethington's property outside of Lyons, Colorado, twenty-one people joining to sit deep zazen in the beautiful straw-bale zendo (a real grass hut!). We were guided by our teachers Peggy Metta Sensei and Karin Ryuku Sensei, and by Shih-t'ou, whose poem "The Grass Roof Hermitage" we recited each day.

Really, words cannot express the profundity of silence felt there on the mountain – a vast spaciousness filled with the cries of nighthawks, the feathery buzz of hummingbirds' wings, the whisper of wind and crack of thunder. Nor can they encompass the warm embrace of sangha or the dedication and insight of our teachers. Nine bows to all who made it possible!







**Ten Ways of Looking at the West**

I

I drive the canyons of the West  
Deliberately,  
The way I drag my finger between  
The shoulder blades of the cat.

II

The earth fired this mountain  
Before it was the West, before  
Weber or Madison or Curtis  
before Morrison or Mancos,  
Dakota or Jurassic.

III

Flaming Gorge ,  
One gigantic rock  
Sliced red on the diagonal,  
Stacked from floor to  
The heaven of the West.

IV

Was it in the West that I loved you?  
Pre-Cambrian? Or before that?  
Tonight I sleep at the edge of your canyon.  
I listen to your starry wind.

V

Golden light of autumn  
Wide, scattered rolls of hay  
Shades of lavender and horses,  
The sky and fences of the West.

VI

In the face of the wide open  
Thighs of the West,  
I am shy.

VII

I see the snow-capped sea monster  
In the bony Western spine  
Of a mountain range risen and resting.

VIII

Sweetwater.  
Deer Lodge.  
Steamboat Springs.  
My tongue plays  
The words of the West.

IX

All afternoon the crows  
Are calling, racing around  
The treetops of the West.

X

Bring the Western sky inside you  
Peace is blue.

- *Jacqueline St. Joan*

**Kinhin**

the walking  
stopped and stared  
in breathless fox samadhi

not letting on  
she'd seen us there  
she walked alert from nose to tail

all four feet  
disappeared  
without a backward glance

something stayed behind  
to circle round  
until the final bell

- *John Steele*





## Zazenkai and Weekend Sesshin in the Works

The summer ango is usually a quiet time for ZCD activities, but not so this year. Since it has been difficult arranging sesshin while we are looking for a permanent home, the teachers are committed to arranging a zazenkai almost every month. We've done pretty well so far this year and are keeping up the pace through the summer months.

The next zazenkai, on Saturday, July 30, will be led by Karin Ryuku Sensei at the Willow Farm Contemplative Center in Hygiene, Colorado, a rural crossroads community in the agricultural lands of Boulder County, about five miles west of Longmont. Susan Nemcek and Steve Mullin reside on a little farm there and have constructed a log zendo attached to their house. They have opened their zendo to host Buddhist groups, retreats, and celebrations from the Front Range as a gift of their practice. It's a lovely zendo in a peaceful place out in the country. The drive from Denver takes a little over an hour; please carpool if possible.

The registration deadline is July 23. We think the zendo can comfortably accommodate 25 students, and we may be joined by a few of Willow Farm's regulars, so we have set capacity at 20 students. Register through Signupgenius.com; a wait list is available if the signup is full. Cost for the all-day zazenkai is \$30, and full attendance is

required (no part-day attendance). Hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The facility is wheelchair accessible. Susan will be preparing a delicious vegan, gluten-free meal for an additional \$7, but if you prefer you may bring your own bag lunch. Indicate your meal preference when you sign up.

If you miss the July zazenkai or want to repeat the experience, you can look forward to the zazenkai at Willow Farm on Saturday, August 27, led by Ken Tetsuzan Sensei. The registration deadline will be August 20. The same arrangements as those for July will apply in August; George Mathews will act as coordinator.

Our third zazenkai will be on Sunday, September 18 at Santosha Yoga in Wheat Ridge at 5810 West 38th Avenue. This will be a full-day event with a partial-day option. Ken Tetsuzan Sensei is planning this zazenkai. The studio is very conducive to zazen, being quiet, cool and subdued. You'll need to pack your own lunch. Unfortunately, the studio is on the second floor and the building does not have an elevator. As usual, cost is \$30 for the full day, \$15 for half.

Lastly, as a preview of the fall ango, on October 21-23 there will be a weekend sesshin at the Benet Hill Monastery in the Black Forest south of Parker-Franktown, northeast of Colorado Springs. We are just beginning planning for this weekend, but mark your calendar now.

- George Mathews

## Rohatsu Sesshin 2016

The Zen Center of Denver's Rohatsu sesshin will once more take place at Shambhala Mountain Center on December 3-10. Our three teachers, Karin Ryuku Sensei, Ken Tetsuzan Sensei, and Peggy Metta Sensei, will jointly conduct the sesshin.

Participants' responses to last year's sesshin at Shambhala were overwhelmingly positive. Distancing ourselves from the hurry-scurry of our daily chores, routines and obligations to this beautiful mountain retreat allowed us to settle deeply into the Zen practice of Right Mind/ No Mind. Wind, cold and snow cleared away our thoughts. The hills and the meadows, trees and rocks, ravens and deer held us in safe concentration.

Shambhala Mountain Center is a Buddhist retreat center located in the Front Range northwest of Fort Collins, about a two-hour drive from Denver. Because Shambhala is a Buddhist facility, our values and practices were welcomed and shared. Shambhala staff attended the teishos. We enjoyed and entered into Shambhala's Tibetan atmosphere, especially the monumental Great Stupa of Dharmakaya. The vegetarian and vegan meals were delicious and plentiful. The lodging arrangements were comfortable and accommodating. The meditation hall was perfect.

Our 2016 sesshin will extend eight days, seven nights, from Saturday to Saturday. The basic fee is \$64.25 per person per day, which includes lodging in the seasonal dorm, three meals a day, and a facility fee, making a total basic cost of \$449.75 for members and \$519.75 for non-members. Lodging upgrades are available at additional cost. Approved partial attendance through Wednesday afternoon will be pro-rated for four days.

Participants will note that this is an increase in cost from last year, when the ZCD subsidized the cost for all participants. This year the Board of Directors concluded that it would not be fiscally prudent to provide such universal subsidies, as doing so would again result in a net loss to the Center of some thousands of dollars. However, the Board has set aside money to assist members experiencing financial challenges that might otherwise discourage attendance. Limited resources should not be a hindrance to any member who wants to go to sesshin. A request for a sesshin subsidy can be made confidentially to your teacher.

The Rohatsu sesshin application, with instructions and information about lodging choices and costs, will be emailed to members and posted on the ZCD website. Shambhala's meditation hall will seat a maximum of 35 participants. The deadline for application with a non-refundable \$50 deposit will be September 30.







## Jukai

Three longtime ZCD members took Jukai at the Rocky Mountain Miracle Center on Sunday, June 19: Greg Fellman, David Lee and Mark Smothers. Together they recited the Sixteen Bodhisattva Vows and received their rakusus and Buddhist names in the presence of their families and fellow sangha members. Afterwards they enjoyed some refreshments and the traditional ... light-saber battle? Turns out Manjusri's sword glows blue and green.

*Above, from left: Ken Tetsuzan Morgareidge, David Lee, Greg Fellman and Mark Smothers.*

## Ascending the Mountain

Our warm congratulations to Rafe Martin, who on June 30 received dharma transmission from Danan Henry Roshi and the dharma name Jnan (from the tenth and final Paramita, *jñāna*, meaning knowledge). Rafe is the resident teacher of Endless Path Zendo and a well-known Buddhist author and storyteller. He now becomes our brother in the lineage of Philip Kapleau, and plans to participate with us in the Diamond Sangha community.

*Right: Danan Henry and Rafe Martin.*



## Rochester Reunion

The 50th reunion of the Rochester Zen Center was held in Rochester, New York on July 1-4. Festivities included the introduction of some of the teachers descended from founding teacher Philip Kapleau, a concert by Leo Kottke and a picnic at the beautiful Chapin Mill retreat center. Old dharma friends and companions converged from near and far to renew relationships and express gratitude for our time together. Both Ken Sensei and Karin Sensei trained at Rochester before coming to the Zen Center of Denver.



As an experience, this is a powerful realization, with profound implications. Nisargatatta, a deeply enlightened Indian teacher, wrote: "Love says, 'I am everything.' Wisdom says, 'I am nothing.'" Between these two my life flows." He is saying, these two are my life, these are one. Wisdom is not opposed to the heart of compassion, they are two sides of the same realization. "I am everything" means I am you and you are me; the injury to a Puerto Rican man injured in a gay bar is my injury, the loss of a child killed in a blast of fire halfway around the world in Bangladesh is my loss, and the death of a black man who worked in a cafeteria is the death of my son. We cannot hide from terror and loss in a ghost cave of nihilism. These people are our own flesh and blood, part of our own body. Our flags should be at half-mast for all of these.

When we chant the Heart of Perfect Wisdom, as we just did this morning, we are chanting the realization of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, that form is emptiness and emptiness form, that there is not a hair's breadth between them, and even to talk in such terms is to tear the fabric of reality. Our great freedom, the freedom which breaks the bonds that create suffering, comes from the direct experience of a vastness which, while we call it empty, is not lacking but omnipotent, alive, all pervading, without a hint of separation, transcendent, containing everything. It's important to really experience that emptiness for ourselves, because that experience transforms our lives and transforms our relationships.

This is the great strength of the Zen tradition. True compassionate action is not doing good for someone else but comes from complete selflessness, by bringing the other in to be me myself. That is why we learn to sit in deep quiet and let go of our usual preoccupations so that we can experience the unvarnished heart-mind. It's not to divorce from the world of form with its complications and challenges, to avoid tough and painful realities, but to give ourselves without reservation. When we truly see the emptiness of no eye, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind,

we are freed to use them all without hindrances, and we open to the vast suffering which pours in through all our doors and is held in a heart-mind without any edges.

The Bodhisattva of Compassion is often depicted as having many hands, many eyes, the better to respond in all circumstances. One ancient master asked another: "How does this Bodhisattva use all those many hands and eyes?" The other master replied, "It's like a man in the middle of the night reaching behind his head for his pillow." No hesitation, without thought, completely natural. This is only possible when our whole body is made



up of hands and eyes, open and aware. To practice compassion therefore is to allow ourselves to be open and porous, penetrated by this world of form, not guarded or armored. To be open is a practice, the constant releasing of our tendency to dry up, harden, close ourselves and pull away. The *Avatamsaka* or *Flower Garland Sutra* says, "Great compassion is the essence of meditation. It is her body (that is the Bodhisattva's body), her source, and her means to spread herself throughout the whole universe. Without this great heart of love and compassion, meditation, however sublime it may be

in other respects, is absolutely of no value."

So we can say that "compassion is not true compassion unless it is active" (as the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying says). That is, compassion is not a fleeting feeling which arises and falls away. It is not a capacity which we each carry in varying amounts; it is a practice, it is the north star by which we can steer our lives.

Bernie Glassman simplified his dharma teaching to three tenets: Not knowing, bearing witness, and loving action. The first two have to be expressed in the third; not-knowing and bearing witness only live through loving action.

In Zen practice, koan practice teaches us to respond instantly and without reservation from the heart-mind

of no separation and not-knowing; in shikantaza practice we bear witness, we stay with whatever arises, without judgment or clinging, resting in the same spaciousness. And loving action is appropriate responsiveness and the practice of the precepts, the awakened heart-mind functioning in the world as non-harming, not stealing, not lying and so forth. What is more, the active expression of compassion is essential for our own happiness. Our own self-centeredness and self-serving actions not only make others unhappy and often cause harm, they make us unhappy as well by dividing us from life as it is and isolating us from other beings. All our negativity comes from our grasping, our rejection and our ignorance, the three poisons of greed, anger and ignorance. Compassion is the antidote, the medicine which heals us as it heals the world.

Our basic Zen practice is our practice of awareness, the practice of no separation, of being awake. But Buddhism offers additional compassion practices which can help us especially in times like this, and I will just talk about two this morning. Both are helpful when we find ourselves feeling hardened, toughened and unresponsive even as we recognize suffering in ourselves or others. Or when we are flooded and overwhelmed by what feels like horrific traumatizing events, so we feel that we can't respond, and find ourselves shutting down and turning off.

The first is one that I think is familiar to many of you: Metta or lovingkindness practice, from the Vipassana tradition. When I teach about it, I remember that the word "metta" has two meanings. The first is a gentle "rain" that covers everything and moistens every place that is parched, and the second is "friend," a good friend who you can trust and depend on. In Metta practice we repeat phrases internally, which help us to align our intention. It's not about creating false sweet emotions, just about directing our awareness, recognizing that all beings, even the most deluded, want to be happy, cared for and at peace. We do not have to like someone or approve a situation to direct loving kindness to them.

The phrases are repeated internally and without judgment:

*May I be happy.*  
*May I be safe, free from danger*  
*May I be healthy, to the best of my ability.*  
*May I be at peace, at ease.*

We always start with ourselves, and that is important to recognize because in our society, it is very difficult sometimes to move past the inner critic and direct our care towards ourselves, especially when events press us from outside. There is a whole field now around what is called "self-compassion" and for those of you who find yourself feeling cynical about this, just listen to these three sentences which support self-compassion practice:

**The active expression of compassion is essential for our own happiness.**

*This is a moment of suffering.*

*This suffering is part of the human condition.*

*How can I skillfully care for myself right now?*

There is a wisdom component to compassion which allows us to not be flooded, completely overcome by the

empathetic response. Each of us needs to monitor the degree to which the door swings open, so that we can maintain our own Bodhi seat, our own internal balance and ability to act. Especially for those who have experienced previous trauma, violence in the world may trigger old wounds, and we may shut down unless we are careful about the amount we let in. So please, if you need to, modulate your news intake and your engagement wisely as you care for yourself in these times.

May I be happy, may my friends and family be safe, may those I conflict with be healthy and free from anxiety and fear, may all beings be at peace. Like a stone set in water, compassion always starts with ourselves, and then radiates out in expanding rings to those we know and trust, to those we are indifferent to, to those we conflict with and always ending with all beings, all beings without reservation, of the past, present and future. In working with groups that are thrust often into conflict, like attorneys, I often add a level for a situation of conflict, recognizing that to the degree that those in conflict can feel safe and at peace, that conflict will be lessened.

The second practice is Tonglen, the Vajrayana practice of giving and receiving, using the breath as an anchor and beginning here, with this one. Those of you who do this practice regularly probably start by first



invoking Bodhichitta, the compassionate wish to benefit all beings. Then on the in-breath you breathe in the distress, anguish or pain of a particular group with the wish that they can be free of that suffering; then on the out-breath, send out enough space to allow that suffering to be relieved, comfort, happiness or whatever specifically is needed for healing. Sometimes this is visualized as taking in the dark, even seeing it as a mass of hot, black, grimy smoke, allowing it to dissolve into the core of your own grasping heart. As it dissolves and your own Bodhichitta is freed, you breathe out, releasing the cool, brilliant light of peace, joy and wellbeing, radiating compassionate energy and love as widely as possible. As with Metta practice, after first starting with yourself, you move to others, gradually increasing the circle to include all beings.

In his wonderful discussion of Tonglen in the Tibetan Book of Living and Dying, Sogyal Rinpoche encourages us to practice letting everything we encounter in our lives open our hearts, the sight of a homeless man begging on the curb, the TV coverage of violence in another state, in another country, the flattened corpse of a squirrel in the road:

*Any of these sights could open the eyes of your heart to the fact of vast suffering in the world. Let it. Don't waste the love and grief it arouses; in the moment you feel compassion welling up in you, don't brush it aside, don't shrug it off and try quickly to return to 'normal,' don't be afraid of your feeling or embarrassed by it, don't allow yourself to be distracted from it or let it run aground in apathy. Be vulnerable: use that quick, bright uprush of compassion; focus on it, go deep into your heart and meditate on it, develop it, enhance and deepen it. By doing this you will realize how blind you have been to suffering, how the pain that you are experiencing or seeing now is only a tiny fraction of the pain of the world. All beings, everywhere, suffer; let your heart go out to them...*

Recently a dharma student sent me this poem from Robinson Jeffers:

*This country least, but every inhabited country  
Is clotted with human anguish.  
Remember that at your feasts.*

*And this is no new thing but from time out of mind,  
No transient thing, but exactly  
Conterminous with human life.*

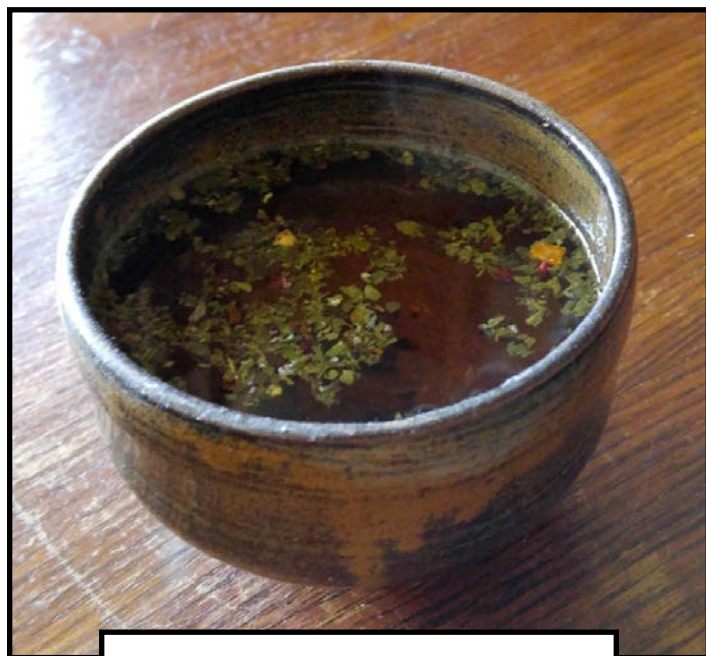
*Praise life, it deserves praise, but the praise of life*

*That forgets the pain is a pebble  
Rattled in a dry gourd.*

Finally, while it is certainly true that at times we do need to retire from the affairs of the world to cultivate our own inner capacity and equanimity, the world calls now to each of us and needs our engagement and attention. It calls us every minute, even as we sleep. In whatever capacity seems right to you, please give your skills, your care and your energy to your circle of communities, to friends and family, our local community, our aching country and our world. There can be no prescription but remember that compassion is not true compassion without action. It may seem that our world has gone crazy with a tsunami of violence and suffering, and that our individual actions have no more impact than bailing the oceans with a teacup. But each cupful is important and contains all waters. Don't hold back. Please use all your many hands and eyes and remember your Bodhisattva vows to save all beings.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings realize the Way. ☸



Hot water pours  
Over dried leaves  
Slowly they unfurl  
Spring in my cup!

- Ken Tetzusan Morgareidge

## Comings and Goings

We bid a fond farewell to member Sara Bauer, who is currently in Hawaii with the Honolulu Diamond Sangha, serving as temple keeper at Palolo Zen Center. We trust she is enjoying her time there, and hope to see her again soon.

We also welcome new members Teri Meehan and Erin Overturf. May your practice be deep, and your sangha friendships likewise!

## Gassho Corner

We offer deep thanks to everyone who helped with our Blue Mountain sesshin, especially sesshin leaders Cathy Wright, Bill Hamaker, Melanie Ritter and Jim Long, our teachers Peggy Metta Sensei and Karin Ryuku Sensei, and Becky Wethington, without whose remarkable labors and generosity Blue Mountain Zendo would not exist. We thank her also as tenzo, for meal after delicious meal.

Thanks are also due our zazenkai organizing crew, especially George Mathews and Francine Campone. We all appreciate your ongoing efforts in this time of transition.

## Calendar Highlights

**Saturday, July 30** - Zazenkai at Willow Farm with Karin Sensei

**Sunday, Aug. 21** - Sangha picnic at Washington Park

**Saturday, Aug. 30** - Zazenkai at Willow Farm with Ken Sensei

**Saturday, Sept. 10** - Introductory Seminar at Rocky Mountain Miracle Center

**Sunday, Sept. 18** - Zazenkai at Santosha Yoga with Ken Sensei

**Sunday, Aug. 25** - Sangha discussion

## Editor's Note

Regular readers of Mountains Talking will notice that this issue presents a considerable departure from past issues, with a photo cover, a two-page layout and several new features, including "Comings and Goings" and "In the Marketplace." The new layout and features will, I hope, allow us to better showcase our community and our sangha members' talents and contributions. It also opens the possibility of print editions in the future. I hope you enjoy it, and welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Also, submissions are always welcome and desired! Send your Zen-related essays, poems, artwork and photos to [office@zencenterofdenver.org](mailto:office@zencenterofdenver.org).  
- Joel Tagert

## In the Marketplace

*In the Marketplace allows ZCD members to reach their fellow sangha members with business, for-sale or want ads. If you would like to place an ad in our next issue, email [office@zencenterofdenver.org](mailto:office@zencenterofdenver.org).*

**Synergy Photographics:** Commercial Photography, Graphic and Web Site Design, Full Color Printed Products from Postcards to Posters. Low minimum quantities available at very competitive rates. Contact Jeff Black at 303-757-1866, [synergyphotographics@gmail.com](mailto:synergyphotographics@gmail.com).

**Jason Polk, LCSW, LAC.** Helping couples and individuals get along better. Couple therapy & Individual therapy. See [Paramitacounseling.com](http://Paramitacounseling.com) or email [jason@paramitacounseling.com](mailto:jason@paramitacounseling.com).

**Share Our Sunnyside Home:** 2 active retired adults, a dog and cat seek ZCD member as roommate. Furnished bedroom with closet and ¾ bath attached. Includes wireless internet access, all utilities, and access to hot tub and backyard. We would like to trade some of the rent for pet care while we travel (approximately 8-12 weeks per year). \$750 per month; first and last month rent upon acceptance. Contact [janngriffiths@gmail.com](mailto:janngriffiths@gmail.com).





ZEN CENTER OF DENVER

PO Box 101013  
Denver, CO 80250  
(303) 455-1500

[office@zencenterofdenver.org](mailto:office@zencenterofdenver.org)  
[www.zencenterofdenver.org](http://www.zencenterofdenver.org)