

# MOUNTAINS TALKING

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FALL 2017

**Completely “Yes!”**  
**Peggy Metta Sheehan**



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Front and Back Covers: *Geoff Keeton*

# COMPLETELY “YES!”

**Peggy Metta Sheehan**



*The Gateless Barrier, Case 12: Jui-yen Calls “Master”* your own consciousness up to now.” Don’t. No, no.

The Case:

*The priest Jui-yen called “Master!” to himself every day and answered himself “Yes!”*

*Then he would say “Be aware!” and reply “Yes!”*

*“Don’t be deceived by others, any time, any day!”*

*“No, no!”*

Wu-men’s comment:

*Old Jui-yen buys himself and sells himself. He brings forth lots of angel faces and demon masks and plays with them. Why? Look! One kind calls, one kind answers, one kind is aware, one kind will not be deceived by others. If you cling to understanding you are in trouble. If you try to imitate Jui-yen, your discernment is altogether that of a fox.*

Wu-men’s verse:

*Students of the way do not know truth;  
they only know their consciousness up to now;  
this is the source of endless birth and death;  
the fool calls it the original self.*

You have spent your day practicing zazen in sitting and working, walking and eating. I hope you have encountered Jui-yen’s “Master!” and equally this “Yes!”

I hope you have not spent your morning ensconced in your own consciousness up to now. I looked up the word ensconced, by the way, which is *to establish or settle oneself in a safe and comfortable place, to nestle or hide away*. So I hope you did not come to zazenkai to nestle and hide away, very strong habit that it is, and just as easy to do in zazen as it is in watching TV, driving your car or discussing politics. Are you open to taking your seat here in each and every round, available in each moment to meet the unknown and unknowable rather than your own consciousness up to now? Being comfortable is way overrated. Jui-yen says, “Don’t be comfortable, Don’t be deceived by others, those familiar others, or by

This reference to nesting reminded me of a passage in the Bible:

*A follower came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go, and Jesus replied: “Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”*

Every day Jui-yen called “Master!” to himself and answered “Yes!” “Be aware!” “Yes!” He, too, has no place to lay his head, and demonstrated this daily for his monks. He clings to nothing and comes forth fresh and new again and again. For who is this Master? Who is calling? What is this “Yes!”?

Jui-yen’s daily practice reminds me of another wonderful Zen master’s teaching:

Every day at mealtime master Chin Niu would himself bring the pail of boiled rice and do a dance in front of the monks’ hall. Laughing loudly he would say, “Dear Bodhisattvas, come and eat.”

Dear Bodhisattvas, what is your daily presentation? How do you show up for your life? What is your “Yes! Yes! Don’t think!”? Nothing fancy, special or unique is required, but you must get up and do your dance wholeheartedly. Give yourself completely, letting go of yes and no, past and future, inside and outside. Join with each moment, exactly, doing what is right in front of you.

How about right now? Are you completely sitting? What is “Yes!”? Yes to just sitting, to this breath, to a pain in the knee or low back, yes to grief or yearning. Yes. Completely Yes - warmth, cool breeze or sweat, birds whistle, bong, clap, step, pee and drink water or tea – ahh. Nothing, nothing is outside this Yes, and anything will show you the Master.

Another way to explore this “Yes!” is to simply let go of “No.” What in you, right now, is saying no? Anything? Take a look. Is there any sense of resisting the Truth of what is, of this moment? Look. And remember Nyogen Sensaki’s simple teaching of holding up his fist and open-

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Editor: Joel Tagert





## NEW TEMPLE DESIGNS

At a sangha meeting Oct. 8, architect Todd Afflerbaugh of Semple Brown Design kindly presented to the sangha the most recent renderings of our planned temple building at 1856 S. Columbine. The most noticeable change is the significant alteration in the second-story floor plan, which allows for a more interesting stepped roof form on the southwest corner. The sangha further discussed options for the ceiling in zendo, one being a wood-paneled ceiling (above).

The renderings also show some additional detail in terms of materials. We hope you'll agree that it's looking beautiful!





# PREPARING THE GROUND

ZCD members gathered on Aug. 6 for an unofficial groundbreaking at the Columbine property, cleaning up the property and removing some trees prior to the start of construction (which will most likely begin late this year or early 2018). We thank all who participated for their hard work!



# SANGHA PICNIC

On Sunday, Aug. 27, we again met at Columbine, this time for our annual sangha picnic. Shortly beforehand, some volunteers staked out the outline of the new temple, allowing us to get a clearer notion of its dimensions and layout. Toward the end of the picnic, we all stood in the back of our imaginary zendo (above), much as we so often do for the traditional end-of-sesshin photo.





## Zazenkai

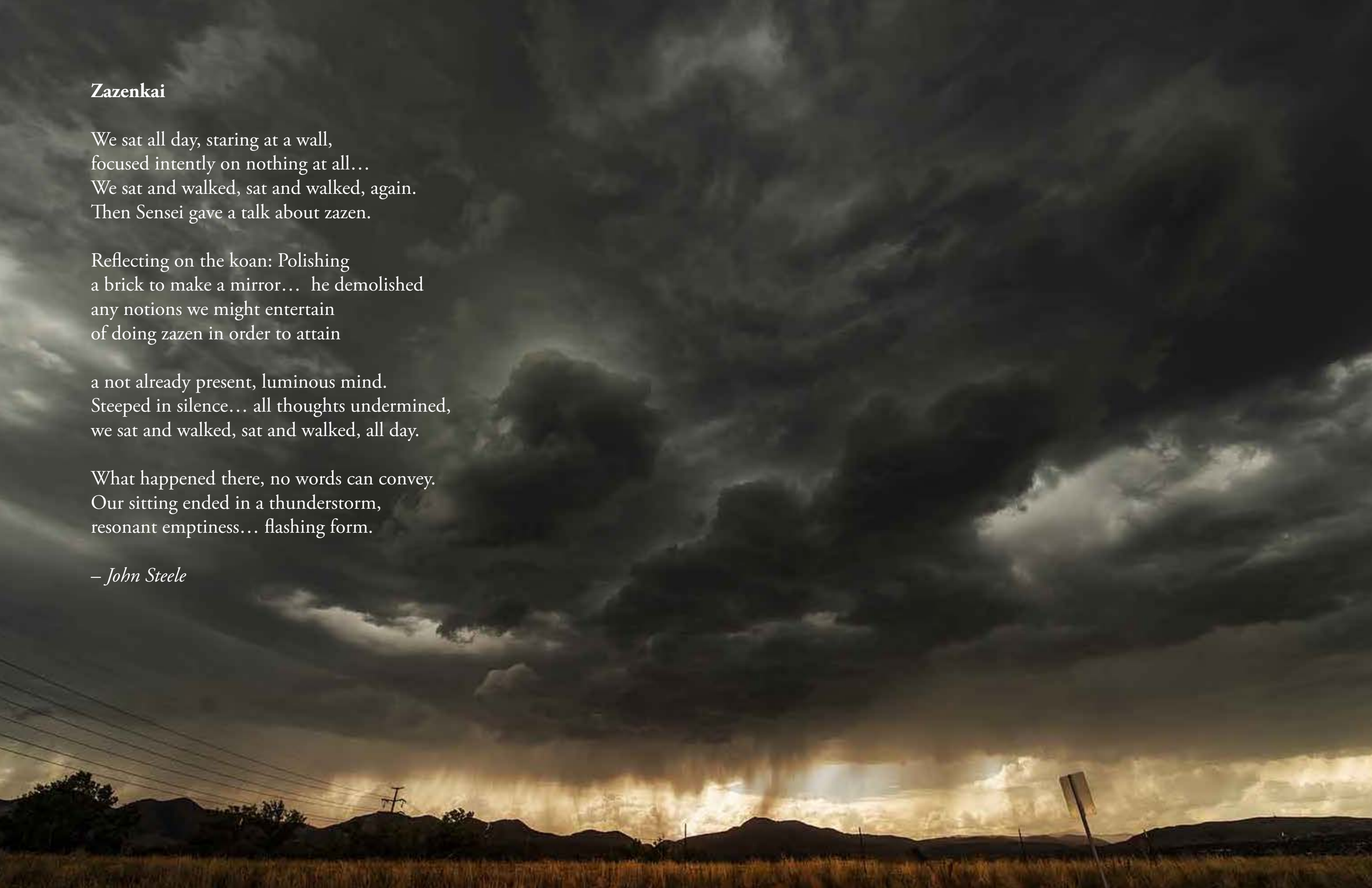
We sat all day, staring at a wall,  
focused intently on nothing at all...  
We sat and walked, sat and walked, again.  
Then Sensei gave a talk about zazen.

Reflecting on the koan: Polishing  
a brick to make a mirror... he demolished  
any notions we might entertain  
of doing zazen in order to attain

a not already present, luminous mind.  
Steeped in silence... all thoughts undermined,  
we sat and walked, sat and walked, all day.

What happened there, no words can convey.  
Our sitting ended in a thunderstorm,  
resonant emptiness... flashing form.

— *John Steele*







## ZEN PEACEMAKERS AT DENVER HOSPICE

Greg Fellman

The Zen Peacemakers Order continues to take their practice and compassion out into the community. On Saturday, September 30, we had the pleasure of cooking and serving lunch and dinner to the families of residents of the Denver Hospice's inpatient care facility.

The Denver Hospice is a nonprofit organization providing hospice services to families throughout the metro region since 1978. Six years ago they built an inpatient facility for those patients who were too ill to remain at home. As we learned on our tour by volunteer coordinator Ebony Baines, they did a great deal of fundraising in order to build a state-of-the-art facility. The overall feeling there is one of peaceful comfort to aid the difficult transition of passing from this world. I found it to be a great honor to be able to serve these folks in such a difficult and emotional time.

One traditional Buddhist practice in India is to sit and witness the burning of bodies in the charnel grounds. While I have never personally experienced that, I imagined that this experience was similar, a lesson in the impermanence of life and a chance to practice

open-heartedness in the face of that impermanence.

In the facility they have a small kitchen and dining area for the families. It was there that we set up and offered our food to the families. While some folks came to get food and then returned to their loved one's room, some stayed and shared some of their experience with us. We spoke with one woman whose husband of 65 years was in his final hours of life after a long struggle with dementia. Despite the grief she was experiencing, she shared with us many touching and laughter-inducing stories of what a character he had been over the course of their long, loving marriage.

Deep bows of gratitude to Dennis Sienko, Bob Knott, and Fred and Lois Becker for preparing most of the food we offered; and to Peggy Metta Sensei, Ken Tet-suzan Sensei, Francine Campone, Amy Strickland, Mary Mich and Hana Hispa for serving the families.

If you are interested in learning more about the Zen Peacemakers Order or would like to participate in an upcoming event, you can find more information by searching for Zen Peacemakers Order Colorado on Meetup.

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ing it. Open your fist, breathe in and open some space, into anything that is tight, clenched, or conceptual. Simply notice the limitations when the mind is caught in concepts or beliefs. Notice – what do you experience in your body, mind, heart? Can you sense the subtle contraction? Feel it, now, give yourself over to the breath, and open your fist. Let go, gently, kindly, patiently again and again. Soften into the fullness of Being. It is not hidden. It's here in broad daylight. "Master!" "Yes!"

You already are, what you are. Yes.

In Anne Lamont's new book titled *Hallelujah Anyway*, she writes about mercy, and this particular sentence moved me: "When we lose something important we begin by retracing our steps. When I realized I was losing mercy for much of my life, like air from a tire, and that this damaged my sense of welcome and immediacy, I began to retrace my steps."

You are what you are and have always been. We've just forgotten, so begin by retracing your steps. This is the practice of sitting quietly, questioning, and listening deeply. Don't be deceived by others. No. Look underneath those beliefs, opinions, ideas. Follow the thread back to your Original One, before any beliefs about practice and enlightenment, about life, yourself and others. Retrace your steps by continually opening your fist and dropping in to your one and only practice. Mu, this breath. What is clear from the very beginning? "Master!" "Yes!"

Wu-men's comment: *Old Jui-yen buys himself and sells himself. He brings forth lots of angel faces and demon masks and plays with them. Why? Look! One kind calls, one kind answers, one kind is aware, one kind will not be deceived by others. If you cling to understanding you are in trouble. If you try to imitate Jui-yen, your discernment is altogether that of a fox.*

What's it like to be completely you? Are there masks or no masks when you are completely you? Well, obviously we all have masks; what are some of yours? Mother or father, son or daughter, teacher, Zen student, doctor, lawyer, musician, smart or dull, old or young, sick or

well? And are any at odds with being completely you?

Tai-Hui writes (and please listen carefully):

*If your eyes aren't empty, how can you see forms? If your ears aren't empty, how can you hear sounds? If your nose isn't empty, how can you smell scents? If your tongue isn't empty, how can you taste flavors? If your body isn't empty, how can you feel contact? If your intellect isn't empty, how can you distinguish the myriad phenomena?*

It is precisely because you are completely empty that you can put on any masks. And yet if you cling to understanding them you are in trouble. These masks are not you and they are not not you. There is only one

**Nothing fancy, special or unique is required, but you must get up and do your dance wholeheartedly.**

way to see this and it is to embody your life, learn from your life, practice into your life. Funny – it seems it can take awhile to be completely you, and yet how silly, ridiculous even; who else could you be?

As tempting and habitual as it is to want to be different, to be more of this or less of that, to

imitate someone you admire or who inspires you, even if that's the Buddha himself, it will be of no avail and will lead you astray.

This is why we practice, this is why you come to sit for a day. To touch and convey the simple joy of being, being you.

Jui-Yen remembers every day and offers his teaching. And in his teaching he includes, "Don't be deceived by others (including Buddhas), any time, any day. No. No" Take heart in this; for the whole of you, of Jui-yen, is not just the light, the easy and pleasant, the balanced and wise. It is equally the sad and lonely, the uncertain and confused. As Jui-yen calls out and responds, "No, no" – can you drop into the fullness and clarity of that? "No, no."

Galway Kinnell has a way of expressing this, with the help of Saint Francis and the Sow:

*The bud [the master] stands for all things, even for those things that don't flower,*





Geoff Keeton

*for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;  
 though sometimes it is necessary  
 to reteach a thing its loveliness,  
 to put a hand on its brow  
 of the flower  
 and retell it in words and in touch  
 it is lovely  
 until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;  
 as Saint Francis  
 put his hand on the creased forehead  
 of the sow, and told her in words and in touch  
 blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow  
 began remembering all down her thick length,  
 from the earthen snout all the way  
 through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the  
 tail,  
 from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine  
 down through the great broken heart  
 to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shud-  
 dering  
 from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking  
 and blowing beneath them:  
 the long, perfect loveliness of sow.*

Master! Yes! Nothing is left out.

There is another koan which is a sequel to this koan. Once a monk came to see Master Gensha, who asked the newcomer, “Where have you been recently?” “With Master Jui-yen, sir,” replied the monk. “I see. In what manner does Master Jui-yen instruct his disciples?” asked Gensha. The monk reported in detail how Jui-yen would every day call out, “Oh Master!” and would answer himself. Listening to the monk, Gensha asked again, “Why didn’t you stay longer with Jui-yen to continue your training?” The monk said, “Master Jui-yen died.” At this reply, Gensha asked the monk an unexpected question, “If you call out to him now, Oh Master! will he answer?”

Will he?!

Did you hear?

Together with all beings, we realize the Way. ☸

## Gassho Corner

We once again thank Todd Afflerbaugh of Semple Brown Design for giving up his Sunday morning to present new designs and renderings for our planned temple at Columbine. Thanks also to those who participated in the sangha workday, clearing the ground at the property.

## Colorado Gives Day

We are pleased that the Zen Center of Denver has been included in this year’s Colorado Gives campaign. Support from members of the sangha, along with members of their networks and others in the community, is essential if we are to meet our goal and build a place of refuge for our practice. This campaign offers each of us the opportunity to offer dana as a gift to our community.

Colorado Gives Day, on Tuesday, Dec. 5, is a valuable opportunity to amplify every contribution to the capital campaign to build our new home. This 24-hour event is a chance to increase the value of your donation, thanks to the \$1 Million Incentive Fund. Created by Community First Foundation and FirstBank, the fund increases the value of every dollar donated proportionally. For example, if we receive 10 percent of the total donations made on Colorado Gives Day, we will receive 10 percent of the \$1 Million Incentive Fund. As the Zen Center also has a donor willing to match up to \$300,000 in contributions, every such contribution on Colorado Gives Day is further amplified.

To donate to us on Colorado Gives Day, go to <https://www.coloradogives.org/ZenCenterofDenver/overview>.

Or, beginning November 1, schedule your donation early!



## Comings and Goings

We bid a fond farewell to Melanie Ritter, who is retiring to Taos, New Mexico. For many years Melanie has been a vibrant and active presence in the sangha, bringing an indelible New Jersey grit and humor to every activity. We wish her the best, and hope to see her again soon for a visit or sesshin!

We also welcome Yosi Lutwak. Yosi says his present occupation is “resting,” which is curious, because his interests include hauling water, chopping wood, engineering and handyman work. It seems he’s learned the secret of resting in activity – perhaps not surprising, since he comes to us by way of the Kanzeon Sangha and the Zen Center of Los Angeles. Welcome Yosi!

## In the Marketplace

*In the Marketplace allows ZCD members to reach 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).*

**Photography by Geoff Keeton:** Family pictures and portraits, picture editing, or if you wanted to combine a picture and Zen saying or koan together I can do that as well. Contact [gkeeoft@gmail.com](mailto:gkeeoft@gmail.com) or 720-227-2997.

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A close-up photograph of tree bark, showing various shades of brown and tan with intricate, wavy patterns and small holes. A white rectangular box is overlaid at the bottom of the image, containing contact information for the Zen Center of Denver.

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