

November 10, 2014

To the Board of Directors, Bodhi Manda Zen Center

I've been thinking about the Healing and Envisioning Retreat for some while. It is now only about two weeks away, so I guess it is time to put some of those thoughts into words. For starters, it is important to make some distinctions:

First, "healing" refers to suffering experienced in the past while "envisioning" involves imagining or visualizing a future without suffering. Presumably the retreat will cover them equally.

Second, two kinds of suffering are mentioned (or at least implied). One involves the suffering and trauma experienced by people abused by Roshi. Another, referred to less directly, is the suffering of the sangha as we have been wrenched around by the turmoil caused by the first kind of suffering. This started with the first exodus from Bodhi in the '80's and culminated with all the schisms and power plays that have taken place since the first postings on sasakiarchive.com two years ago this month. The first kind is awful and needs to be treated as fully and compassionately as possible. The second has also been deep and raw. I know people who experienced both kinds of suffering and say that, today, the second is more painful than the first.

So let me, in my systematic way, apply "healing" and "envisioning" in turn to the two kinds of suffering.

1. Healing the suffering from sexual abuse. That seems to be the major focus of the retreat. As a male what is proposed sounds fine to me. Women may want to contribute their own comments.

2. Envisioning a future free from sexual abuse. The invitation to the retreat states that "the leadership is committed to ensuring that inappropriate behavior is never allowed in our future," and I'm sure that is true. However, there is a matter which should be addressed more directly. After participants "share their experiences, trauma and suffering," comes the phrase "which all of us may acknowledge and, as appropriate, accept responsibility for." While all of us who were members of the sangha should probably accept passive responsibility (whether we knew what was going on or not), we all know that the present BMZC leadership was *actively* involved in covering up Roshi's abuse and allowing it to continue. It would be much healthier to have a public apology for that past behavior. I can only speak for myself here, but you are my friends and only you know why you acted the way you did. I would like to forgive and move forward, but first I need you to ask for forgiveness.

3. Healing the suffering caused by fracturing the sangha. The best way to deal with this is to correct the conditions that have caused the problems. The specific, proximal cause, of course, was Roshi's sexual abuse. Conflicts of one kind or another will always happen in communities, but some mechanisms for resolving them work better than others. It has been part of the legacy of Rinzei-ji to have autocratic leadership, which makes any kind of compromise or movement toward shared understanding difficult. So any real healing of the sangha is going to have to include a clear resolve to put an end to autocratic leadership. A good start toward this would be for the leadership to not only admit their past mistakes but also offer to resign their current positions of leadership. I personally would be in favor of keeping them in office. But a public offer to resign would signify a

clear break with the past. It would also be ideal preparation for the next topic, envisioning the future.

4. Envisioning the future of the New Mexico sangha. One obvious problem with accepting the resignations of the present leadership is that there is no mechanism for replacing them. If we are going to have any sort of democratic process, we need to be able to identify an electorate. Big topic for discussion! My suggestion is to open membership in Bodhi to those who pay annual fees, let them elect the Board, let the Board choose the Director/Abbot. Something like that. It will take awhile to work out the details, but the retreat should provide a commitment to starting the process.

I've talked with a few people about this, and the feeling seems to be that once the BMZC leadership agrees to these points, then a serious healing and envisioning process can begin. Some people feel that it should be held on neutral ground, or least that any remaining relationship with Rinzai-ji should have been explicitly terminated.

Finally, I should note how painful it has been for me to write this letter (there are all kinds of suffering). I first set foot on Bodhi ground November 1973 – Michelle had told me she was thinking of buying it to be a Zen center, and asked me to take a look. Since then I've put in major amounts of time working on construction, sitting sesshins and in the hot pools, playing volleyball, being with dharma friends. I met my wife at Bodhi, and married her there. The suffering began with the '80's exodus – I've never felt comfortable at Bodhi since. My hope and dream is that Bodhi can survive all that we put it through, and in the future contribute its full potential to helping Buddhism grow and prosper in northern New Mexico.

Yours in deepest gassho,
Dick Boyle