

NEW YORK ZEN DO SHO BO JI

8 June 1972

Dear Sangha:

What can be written of the excellence of food, the importance of eating to our studies? It is said that to grasp completely what eating really is is to solve one of the major problems of Buddhism (at least one kensho has occurred in our Sangha while eating); but to do that can be very difficult.

Those of us who remember the time before formal, communal meals were served at the Rohastsu sesshins as well as our week-end sesshins have not forgotten the jarring breaks the every-man-for-himself meal periods caused in the continuity of our zazen, nor the precipitate drops in our concentration level and the difficult struggle to reestablish it in the sittings after meals. Now, with our present arrangement, the calm control of sitting zazen is maintained through eating zazen.

Unfortunately, however, this ideal situation is now endangered. When the Sho Bo Ji was planned, the phenomenal growth of the Sangha in the last few years was not anticipated. The third floor of the building was designed as an apartment for Tai-San and Yasuko, and its kitchen was adequate for their needs. However, the Sangha's growing need for space obliged them to find other quarters, and the family-sized kitchen was pressed into service as the preparation area for eight meals each sesshin for up to fifty or sixty people. But in the present space there is no room in icebox and cupboards to store the piles of raw materials needed for the sesshin meals; and the stove and sink are hopelessly inadequate for "institutional" cooking; work space doesn't exist. Intimidated by the great heat in that area both in Summer and Winter; frightened by the immense cauldrons of soup balanced precariously on ledges; irritated by the constant jostling of other bodies in the cramped space, many volunteer cooks and assistant cooks came one time but were so discouraged by conditions there that they rarely volunteered again. This has meant that month after month two or three people again and again assume the formidable task of providing our food, but it is unfair to expect, or even to permit, them to continue this indefinitely. In a new and workable kitchen it will be possible for many brothers and sisters to experience cooking zazen.

So this crisis arises. There is no question that the kitchen must be replaced. If you have not been in the third-floor kitchen, please ask to be taken up there. You will immediately see the urgency of the matter. And, because of sky-rocketing costs caused by ever -continuing inflation, it must be done at once. An architect has already been consulted, preliminary drawings have been made, and estimates from two contractors have been obtained. To re-design and enlarge the present area to the minimum kitchen which will serve the Sangha's needs, including the necessary storage receptacles, cabinets, heavy-duty stoves and refrigerators, will cost approximately nine thousand dollars; the architect's fee will be an added ten percent of the total sum. By the Sangha's doing a certain amount of the demolition work, carrying appliances up the two long flights of stairs, etc., it is estimated that this total may be reduced by five percent. Because of the need to draw up final

plans, Soen Roshi's arrival, the two late Summer sesshins, and because time is necessary to raise money for this project, it has been decided to aim at early October of this year as the beginning date for construction. This means that money for payment of contractors, suppliers, and architect, must be in hand by the first of October. With something added for contingencies, this means \$10,000.00 must be raised by us in the next four months.

Tai-San has asked the five of us whose names appear below to coordinate the Sangha's efforts to raise this sum. This will not be an easy thing to do. Perhaps the largest obstacle to overcome is the notion that the Zendo's funds are inexhaustible; that it is really of no consequence whether we members of the Sangha contribute or not. This is a very grave misconception. There exists an endowment fund for the Zen Studies Society sufficient to begin construction of the Dai Bosatsu Zendo next year. The Sho Bo Ji is offered to the Sangha rent free by the Zen Studies Society, but it is the responsibility, and pleasure, of the Sangha not only to maintain the Sho Bo Ji, but also to take care of renovations and repairs when the need arises. However, at the present dues and contributions are barely accomplishing the maintenance. Therefore the cost of the remodeling of the kitchen will have to be covered by a special subscription.

It is, then, to one another that we must turn to accomplish this renovation. To help do this we will employ a traditional Buddhist means: a Kanjincho, a subscription list. This list, with the name of each member of the Sangha and the amount he has subscribed to this project will be posted in the ante-room of the Zendo. When the project is completed it will be placed on the altar of the Zendo for a time and then become part of the archives of the Sho Bo Ji. It is important to remember that the actual amount given by each member of the Sangha is not the significant thing. What is important is that he has stretched himself and his resources in order to make his offering. Only the person himself will know if this has been done, but because he knows a whole universe knows - there are no secrets.

Where to find the money for his subscription is each person's challenge. Conscious of the Zendo's need for funds, and conscientiously trying to help, one of the Sangha in recent months found himself deeply pondering the phrase we say before meals: "Let us reflect on our own work...." Although this is usually taken to mean our work of zazen sitting, he extended it into his day-to-day zazen, and using this principle he has been able to present an additional gift to the Zendo. This auspicious contribution will be entered as the first in the Kitchen Fund. Nyogen Zenji Dai Osho, the First Patriarch of Zen in America, supported himself and the Dharma for seventeen long years as a dishwasher. By this action he became our example and once again demonstrated that no work of itself is ignoble or to be despised; that done with awareness, and Mu, all work is Bodhisattva action.

Two-thirds of the present Sangha have joined the Sho Bo Ji since January of 1969. For over three and a half years there have been no opportunities for the Sangha to express their gratitude for their practice. This is the first time since the opening of the Sho Bo Ji that all the Sangha can actively be involved in the practical aspects of our communal Zen life.

If, despite all, you find that money for a contribution will not be available before October, remember that pledges will be gladly accepted. A form is enclosed. A kind Dharma friend has agreed to advance cash against such pledges, but they should be redeemed before the end of the year.

Sylvan Busch
Sylvan Busch

Five deep gasshos from
Kosha
Marsha Feinhandler

Wade
Vicky Gerdy

Aiko
Yasuko Shimano

Jo Chi
George Zournas
Chairman