

Coronavirus: A Message from Roshi

I regret to inform you that we feel compelled to cancel the upcoming sesshin of March 21-28. This decision is based on growing concerns for the safety of sesshin participants and the larger community.

My primary concern is what we *don't know*. Due to the still acute lack of coronavirus testing capacity, we don't know how many of us could be going into sesshin feeling healthy but unaware that we are carrying the virus. Without knowing that, the Center would have to take extraordinary hygienic measures during sesshin, on a daily basis, to prevent contagion, placing heavy demands on the kitchen and housekeeping staff.

And then there is what we *do* know: the conditions of sesshin are ideal for breeding contagion. Seating in the zendo and at meals is snug (especially for this sesshin, one of the largest we've had in years with about 20 people over the age of 70)--the very opposite of the "social distancing" that health officials are now calling for. We know, too, that any outbreak of the virus in sesshin would require two weeks of quarantining of all participants, either at Chapin Mill or at home.

As Zen Buddhists our primary responsibility is to the larger community: to do our part to slow the spread of this pandemic--"flatten the curve"--in order to prevent hospitals from being overrun. It is clear to my consultants and me that carrying on with the sesshin would involve too much risk in that regard. To paraphrase Eldridge Cleaver, we want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Please stay tuned for further word about the spring and summer sesshins.