

Prairie Wind

Volume 13, Issue 4

Published by the Order of the Prairie Wind for Nebraska Zen Center/Heartland Temple and
Zen Center of Pittsburgh/Deep Spring Temple

Winter 2004

GUTEI'S ONE FINGER

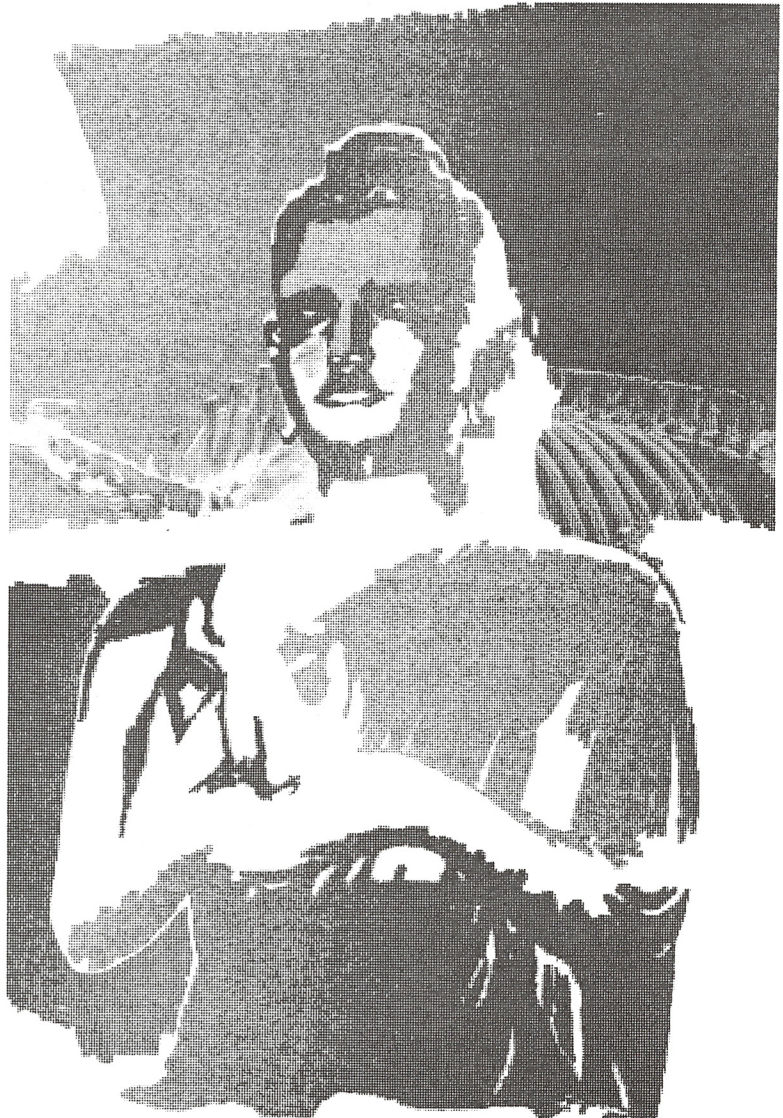
by Susan Ji-on Postal

Usually, each issue of *Prairie Wind* begins with an article I have written, but occasionally, we feature different voices. The following article is a transcription of a dharma talk by Susan Ji-on Postal, who leads the Empty Hand Zendo in Westchester County, New York. Susan studied with Maureen Myon-on Stuart, is currently studying with Darlene Cohen, and has been practicing in the Buddhist tradition for nearly thirty years. On page three, we offer perspectives on prison dharma by two members of the White Lotus Sangha, which meets at three maximum security prisons in Nebraska. We are pleased to present these voices in *Prairie Wind*.

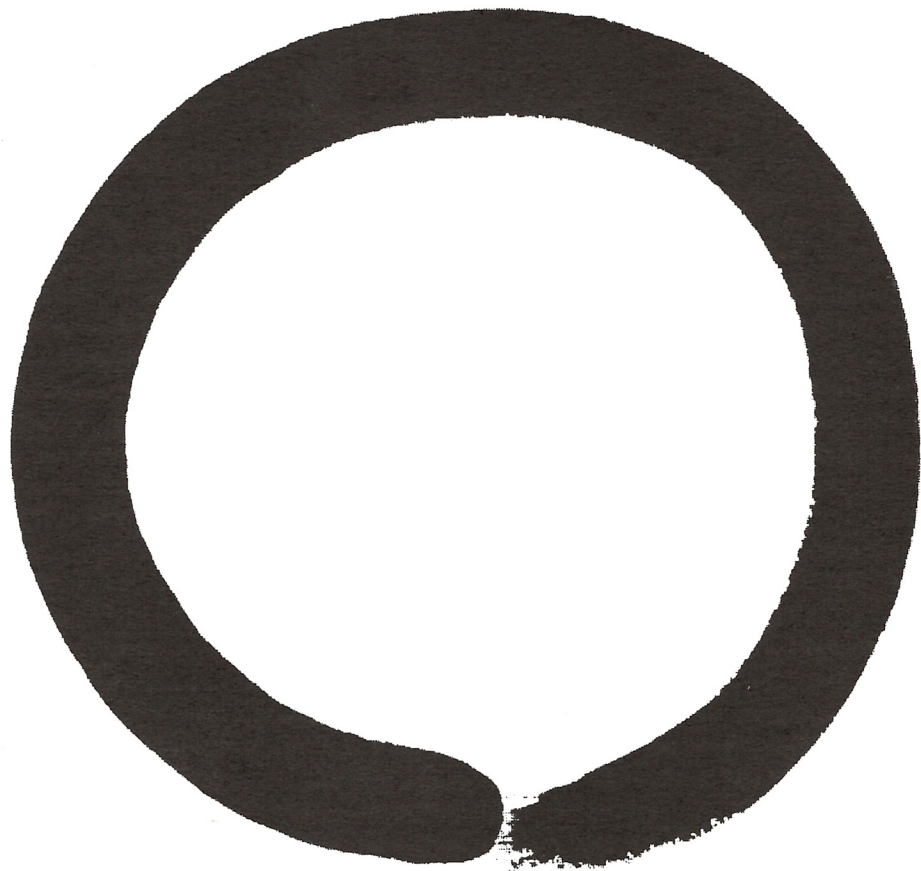
Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW
Abbot, Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple

Since the early days of Zen, the teacher traditionally offers a *teisho* to the students who have gathered for an intensive period of practice. A *teisho* isn't exactly a lecture or a talk, but a more direct and immediate expression. It has been my intent over these years to embed *teisho* within what we call a Dharma Talk. Some of what happens in such a talk might be explanatory, or may involve some study of Buddhist principles and teachings, but somewhere embedded in that is, I hope, something with the liveliness of *teisho*, which was described to me, I think by Maezumi Roshi, as "the sending out of sparks." This does not come from the head, from intellectual understanding; it comes from a deeper

continued on page 6



Buddha — by Peggy Jones



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死

Enso — No birth, No death
Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

PRISON DHARMA

by Doc and Anthony

NOWHERE TO GO

by Doc

I awake at 5:30 am, as usual. Outside, dawn has almost shown up.

My right hip is hurting. My left hand is stiff and sore. My lower back is contantorous. Arthritis encourages me, having reached a certain age, to view painkiller commercials with the same intense enthusiasm with which I previously viewed ads for hot cars. I'm also learning to let go of this attachment, something easier to do after the ibuprofen kicks in.

I'm not liking my life much this morning. I'm in Tecumseh State Correctional Institution, not London or Tokyo or San Francisco. (Martha, I feel your pain.)

What is Tecumseh State Correctional Institution? It's a prison — three years old. It's also pretty much a warehouse — few non-menial inmate jobs, valiant but stretched-transparent educational programs, transitory staff. Beyond this, however, it's a place where there is little room for pretense, which is good for learning humility. If you are new, your crime and most of its details will be known on the yard before you get unpacked. This does not take long, for you are limited to 4.2 cubic feet of personal property.

Moreover, what is not known as a matter of fact will be manufactured as a matter of gossip. If you bluff or posture about much of anything, someone, sometime, someplace will call you on it. Being real and reserved is a preferred lifestyle. No one makes a perfect score at this. Some do better than others.

Delusions, on the other hand, find fertile ground. From what I recall, view on TV, and read, this state of affairs is not much different from the officially non-imprisoned world. In here, delusions are

just more concentrated, in-your-face, and — here's the really annoying part — inescapable. On the bright side, they are usually not subtle and are easy to spot, especially in others.

None of this moaning and groaning provides an excuse, which is all it can be, for not sitting zazen this morning. Luckily, I tell myself as I'm preparing to assume my customary half-lotus posture, a meadowlark further distracts me by swooping down and perching on an arc of razor wire outside my window. He looks at me, then at the ground, then at me, then dives down and adroitly plucks a beetle from the grass. Back on his perch, he eats and looks around.

I envy him his freedom. To him, the razor wire is a vantage point from which to dive-bomb breakfast. To me, it's a reminder that I am just another number living in a correctional institution where "privatization (read: prisons for profit) is the wave of the future" and shame, fear, or apathy seem the system-preferred inmate states of mind. I allow myself a few more minutes of whining, then consider what I did to get here.

I can't alter the past, and the future hasn't arrived. That leaves the here-and-now in which to lighten my karmic load.

I glance up and see the meadowlark looking at me. Suddenly, something below catches his eye, and he powers toward the grass, flares out, stabs another beetle and flies to a tree outside the prison kill perimeter [if an inmate strays beyond this fenceline, a guard will shoot to kill — ed.]

I still do not want to sit zazen, so I idly flip open my copy of Dainin Katagiri's *You Have to Say Some-*

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

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Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW Abbot



Nebraska Zen Center is a Soto Zen Buddhist Temple established for Zen practice. The center follows the tradition established in Japan by Zen Master Eihei Dogen in the 13th century and transmitted in this century by two Masters, Rev. Shunryu Suzuki, founder of San Francisco Zen Center and author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and Rev. Dainin Katagiri, who assisted Rev. Suzuki in San Francisco and later founded Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis. Rev. Katagiri was instrumental in establishing Nebraska Zen Center in 1975.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, an American Zen Master, is NZC's Head Priest and Teacher. He trained with Rev. Katagiri and was ordained by him. Rev. Chowaney also trained at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California and in Japan at Zuiji and Shogo-ji monasteries. He received formal Dharma Transmission from Rev. Katagiri and has been certified to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan.

thing, which I was reading last night. Page 28 reads in part: "Wherever you may go, everything is the same . . . But no matter how long we discuss the question 'What should I do?' there is no conclusion. You

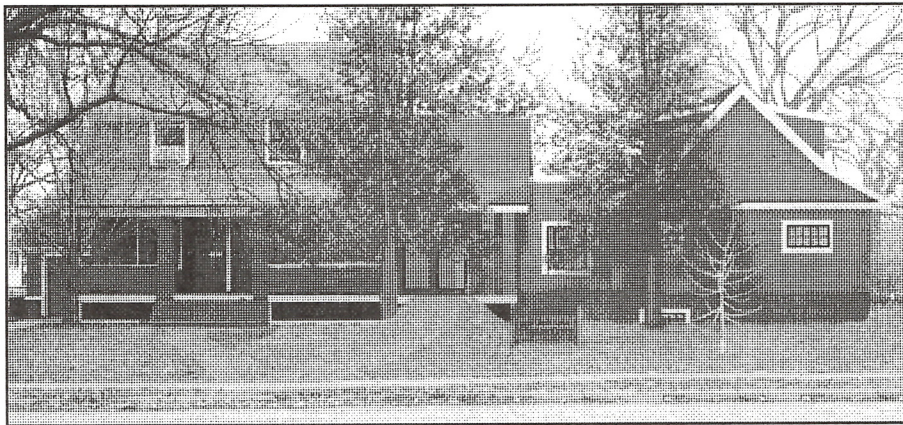
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NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

ANNUAL FUND-RAISING BEGINS. By now, you should have received our annual fund-raising appeal. We do a lot at NZC, and we do it with limited funds. Please consider helping us with a donation. We will be grateful for any support you can give. All donations to NZC are tax deductible.

HEARTLAND TEMPLE WILL BE CLOSED FROM SATURDAY, JANUARY 1ST THROUGH SATURDAY, JANUARY 15TH. WE WILL RE-OPEN SUNDAY JANUARY 16TH WITH OUR REGULAR SUNDAY SCHEDULE.

Our Annual Sangha Meeting will be held Saturday, February 5th at 10:00 am. We will be replacing Board Members whose terms have expired and electing Officers for 2005. We will also be reviewing and finishing business from 2004. We encourage all who practice at Heartland Temple to attend this meeting. A communal lunch will be provided afterwards.



Architectural Rendering of the Proposed Addition to Heartland Temple
Computerized new addition rendering by John Knapp
Current building digital photo and composite final photo by Randy Putnam

We've begun fund-raising efforts for our proposed temple addition, and so far, we've received \$13,000 in cash donations and \$42,750 in pledges from Board Members and others closely connected with the temple. That adds up to \$55,750 raised for our Building Fund, so we're well on our way to our goal of \$170,000! When we raise \$30,000 more, we'll be halfway there, and if we do so by in the next few months, we should be able to break ground late next Summer. We plan on launching a full-scale Building Fund Drive next February.

Many thanks to Kanho Doug Dittman for helping finance our new back porch and for doing much of the carpentry work on it. Thanks also to all sangha members who've helped with various projects, provided for temple needs, and kept things running smoothly by keeping up with their temple jobs!

Sangha member Gary Carlson, who left for Australia early in October and has been enjoying an extended vacation there, sends word that all is well and that he'll be returning the first week of January.

SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC this Winter. A Seven-day sesshin from December 1-7 (Rohatsu), a Two-day Sesshin on February 12th - 13th and a One-day Sesshin on March 12th. Fees are: \$30 per day for members; \$40 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. Call (402) 551-9035 or e-mail heartand@prairiewindzen.org to register.

LAY INITIATION RECEIVING THE PRECEPTS

A Precept Ceremony signifying Lay Initiation will be offered at Heartland Temple next March. Anyone interested in participating should talk to Nonin. He suggests the following guidelines for considering this step: a commitment to zazen, a commitment to study with a teacher, a commitment to sangha, and a commitment to dharma study. Rakusu sewing begins January 23rd

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will lead a dharma study class at the temple this Winter. It will meet on three successive Saturday mornings from 10 am till noon, on February 26th and March 5th and 12th.

The class will focus on sections from a newly published version of Zen Master Dogen's Eihei Koroku and is free to members. The fee for non-members is \$15 per class.

OTHER WINTER EVENTS

Dec 29	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jan 26	Ryaku Fusatsu
Feb 6	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
23	Ryaku Fusatsu

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH — SANGHA NOTES

ZCP FALL EVENTS

DECEMBER

31 — New Year's Eve Open House

JANUARY

1 — Closed

2 — World Peace Ceremony

7 — Intro to Zen

14-16 — Sesshin***

20 — Sitting at Mt Alvernia**

25 — Ryaku Fusatsu*

Buddhist Studies Class Begins

FEBRUARY

4 — Intro to Zen

6 — World Peace Ceremony

17 — Sitting at Mt Alvernia**

18-20 — Precept Sesshin***

22 — Ryaku Fusatsu*

25 — Intro to Zen

MARCH

5 — Rakusu Sewing Begins

6 — World Peace Ceremony
Annual Sangha Meeting

20 — Beginners One-day Sitting***

21 — Ryaku Fusatsu; Study Class Begins

*after evening zazen

**There is no evening sitting at ZCP on the
nights we sit at Mt. Alvernia Monastery

***Please Register for this event

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

AM

Tuesday

7:00 a.m. - Zazen at the Mattress Factory

Wednesday - Saturday

5:30 a.m. - Zazen

6:45 a.m. - Morning Service

PM

Tuesday - Friday

6:00 - 7:15 p.m. - Zazen

Sunday

10:00 a.m. - Zazen

10:40 a.m. - Work Practice

11:15 a.m. - Service/Dharma Talk

12:30 p.m. - Lunch

Closed Mondays

Many thanks to all who've made donations over the past months, especially to **Kay and John Ott** for the computer monitor, to **Joe Roberts** for truck repairs and a copier, and to **all those** who participated in Sangha work day and to **Ryushin John Ott** for serving as work leader.

Our boiler went out a few weeks ago, and we were able to replace it due to an a most generous anonymous donor, to whom goes our **deepest gratitude**.

This Fall, ZCP again hosted a **twenty-four hour retreat** for **Indiana University of Pennsylvania students**. This is their fourth year with us.

Head Priest Kyoki Roberts has been traveling a lot lately. Last July, She attended the annual meeting of the **American Zen Teachers Association** at Great Vow Monastery in Oregon and now serves on the AZTA Program Committee. Kyoki returned to Great Vow Monastery in September for the first National Meeting of the **Soto Zen Buddhist Association** and was elected to the SZBA Board of Directors. Kyoki also traveled to **Bay Zen Center** in Oakland, California this Fall to facilitate discussion on finding a new home for the Center, and she'll be traveling to **Austin Zen Center** in Texas this Winter to lead a Communication Workshop.



At the Soto Zen Buddhist Association meeting:

Nonin Chowaney, of Nebraska Zen Center; Kyogen Carlson, of Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland Oregon, Kyoki Roberts of Zen Center of Pittsburgh, and Seirin Barbara Kohn, of Austin Zen Center in Austin, Texas.

All are invited to attend ZCP's New Year's Eve Open House, from 6 pm till 1 am. There'll be a potluck dinner, music, zazen, and the ringing of 108 bells. For further info, call or e-mail us at either of the addresses below.

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple, Rev. Kyoki Roberts, OPW — Head Priest
124 Willow Ridge Road, Sewickley, PA 15143 tel: (412) 741-1262 e-mail: kyoki@prairiewindzen.org website: www.prairiewindzen.org

Gutei's One Finger

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place, and it's a sending out of sparks that hopefully will ignite your aspiration or your deepening insight and clarity. *Teisho* is about the sending forth and the receiving of something that isn't in the realm of conceptual explanation and understanding.

Using traditional texts, such as *koans*, or teaching stories, is customary in *teisho*. We should regard these as parables, as poetic representations of our own situation, not just as some historical incident that happened once to ancient practitioners. Maybe these incidents happened and maybe they didn't; a lot of this may just be legendary. But these koans are about *our* practice, even the most dramatic ones. As Robert Aitken Roshi reminds us in his commentary on the case I'm using today, "Gutei's One Finger," legends and fairy tales can be graphic. Remember "Jack and the Beanstalk? In that tale, the giant says of Jack, "I'll grind his bones to make my bread!" We read that to our children! It's gruesome, but because of this statement, we get a vivid picture of the hugeness and strength of the giant. In that spirit of parable, we're going to sit this morning with "Gutei's One Finger," Case Three of the *Mumonkan*, or, *The Gateless Gate*:

THE CASE: *Whatever he was asked about Zen, Master Gutei simply stuck up one finger. He had a boy attendant whom a visitor asked, "What kind of teaching does your master give?" The boy held up one finger too. Hearing of this, Gutei cut off the boy's finger with a knife. As the boy ran away screaming with pain, Gutei called to him. When the boy turned his head, Gutei stuck up one finger. The boy was suddenly enlightened. When Gutei was about to die, he said to the assembled monks, "I received this one-finger Zen from Tenryu; I've used it all my life, but I have not exhausted it." Having said this, he entered nirvana.*

MUMON'S COMMENTARY: *The en-*

lightenment of Gutei and the boy have nothing to do with the tip of a finger. If you realize this, Tenryu, Gutei, the boy, and you yourself are all run through with one skewer.

Gutei's story is in three parts. The first occurs before the koan opens, and it's about how Gutei received the one-finger teaching from his master, Tenryu. The second part is the boy's imitation of his teacher's one-finger Zen and the consequences of this imitation. The third part is Gutei's comment when he was about to die. These are the three areas we'll look at, but we'll focus on the first two, because there are two wonderful enlightenment stories presented there that vividly illuminate a pivotal moment in the relationship between master and disciple. This moment is as important to us as teachers and students in twenty-first century America as was to those in ninth century China.

What was Gutei's teaching, this raising of a finger? Pointing directly to what is real, beyond conceptions, beyond judgments, pointing to suchness, to one body, with one finger. In his commentary on this koan, the Japanese master Zenkei Shibayama says, "Is there anybody who doesn't have a finger? Is there anybody who doesn't have Buddha Nature, or Truth?" Gutei's teaching was the teaching of "just this." He happened to express this with of one finger, but it's everything; it's the whole universe in this one finger.

How Gutei came to be awakened by his teacher's one-finger Zen and how he was able to let it serve as his own fresh expression is an interesting story. Gutei lived in China in the ninth century, about the same time as Rinzai (Ch. Linchi). I think he was a second cousin in the dharma to Rinzai. When Gutei was a monk in training, he lived alone in the mountains and concentrated on zazen as his main practice. Apparently, he also had a strong mantra or *dharani* prac-

LINCOLN ZEN GROUP

A group affiliated with NZC meets in Lincoln weekly on **Thursday evenings** at 7:00 pm at the **Unitarian Universalist Church, 6300 A St.** For further information, e-mail or call **Seishin Larry Pelter** at lpelter@alltel.net (402-483-1755) or **Koken Greg Pettito** at gppetito@hotmail.com (402-477-0558). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

The **White Lotus Sangha**, a group affiliated with NZC, meets in three Nebraska prisons, **Nebraska State Penitentiary and Lincoln Correctional Center** in Lincoln and **Tecumseh State Correctional Institute** in Tecumseh. For further information, call (402) 551-9035, e-mail heartland@prairiewindzen.org, or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363.**

tice. He was known as "Gutei" because this word was part of his mantra, which others heard him frequently reciting. We can guess that this combination of silent sitting and devotional chanting served as a strong foundation. He was, to use a frequently-used phrase, a monk who practiced in all earnestness. He tried very hard; his efforts were strong, steady, and deeply committed.

One day a nun came to visit Gutei in his hermitage. It was customary in those days to take off your big straw traveling hat and exchange greetings with the person you're visiting. There was also a custom of circumambulating a monk or a master. This

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Gutei's One Finger

from page 6

nun, however, came in and didn't take her hat off or say a word to introduce herself; she just started circumambulating Gutei, who was sitting in zazen. She walked around him three times, and then said, "If you can say a word of Zen, I'll take off my hat." Well, we can see that she is very confident. She is testing, probing. Gutei, however, couldn't speak; he was dumbfounded. The nun repeated her question, and for the second time, Gutei couldn't speak. Finally, she started to leave. As it was getting late, he said, "Well, it's getting dark; why don't you stay the night; I can find a place for you here." The nun said, "If you say a word of Zen, I'll stay." For the third time, Gutei couldn't say anything, so she left.

Gutei was deeply ashamed; his confidence was shattered; he was embarrassed and disappointed in himself. He saw that he really didn't have a word of Zen to say because his eye was not opened; his heart was not open; he didn't get it; he hadn't realized what is true. Gutei had been sincerely sitting zazen and repeating his mantra for years probably, all for nothing. Shibayama suggests that there grew in him a state of "extremity." Tortured by his failure, he was determined to give up his solitary practice and leave his hermitage. He packed up his things and decided to leave in the morning and search for a teacher who could help. That night, he fell asleep in great despair and was blessed with a dream. A local deity came in the dream and said, "Don't leave; your teacher will arrive shortly."

Sometime later – some versions of this koan say the next day; some say ten days later – an old master, Tenryu, came knocking at Gutei's hermitage door. Gutei told him all about the nun's visit and how profoundly embarrassed and discouraged he was. Then Gutei pleaded, "What is the fundamental word of Zen? Tell me!" Tenryu held up one finger. Gutei's dark despair was split open; he completely got it; the whole universe was expressed in Tenryu's raising one finger.

It's important to emphasize Gutei's readiness to see the one finger. He was ripe. He had been practicing for a long time, was struggling and suffering, had seen the depths of his own inadequacy, and was ready for the cracking. Otherwise, a teacher holding up a finger would do nothing. This opening had very much to do with Gutei's situation, with his struggle, intensified by the provocative visit of the traveling nun.

Zen teachings sometimes describe this kind of interchange between Master and disciple like that of a mother hen and a chick. Apparently, the mother hen can hear the chick pecking from the inside of the egg, and then she'll peck back. But she doesn't peck until she hears, because if she pecks prematurely, she'll break the shell and kill the chick. Tenryu heard Gutei's readiness, his ripeness, in the desperate expression of his question, "What is the fundamental word of Zen?" Tenryu was then able to respond wholeheartedly with exactly what Gutei needed.

The teacher-student relationship is like this. Something, a request, has to come from the inside first; I hope you can understand that. We do a disservice to students if we try prodding prematurely and try to help them open up when there isn't the readiness, because then it's nothing, or it's halfway. And if it's a halfway or half-cooked insight, then people get really attached to it, and it ends up causing more trouble. This "pecking and chicking," as it's called in Zen, has to be a call and response at exactly the right moment. This story is a perfect example of that; complete readiness; complete response.

That's Gutei's story, but it's not so different from our story. We need to be embarrassed by the equivalent of nuns with "chutzpah" who ask us to say a word. We need to rub up against our lack of clarity before we are motivated

SANGHA MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH

Membership

While no one needs to formally join either temple to share in our practices, we invite you to become a member of either Nebraska Zen Center or Zen Center of Pittsburgh. Members are people who feel that Zen Buddhism is an important part of their lives and who wish to express that feeling by joining a community of practitioners.

If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak with the appropriate person at either temple after Sunday services.

Financial Support

Buddhist communities have always relied on the generosity of their supporters. For income, we depend on those who believe in the good of what we do and wish to nourish it.

No one is refused temple membership due to an inability to pay. We do, however, encourage members to commit to our financial support through monthly pledges. We also encourage members to exhibit this support through participation in work projects.

The amount of your pledge is your personal decision. We ask you to support the temple at a level appropriate to your means. For those who participate regularly, we suggest a monthly pledge that reflects one hour of your earnings per week, or four hours per month. Because we are non-profit religious corporations, all donations are tax deductible.

Gutei's One Finger

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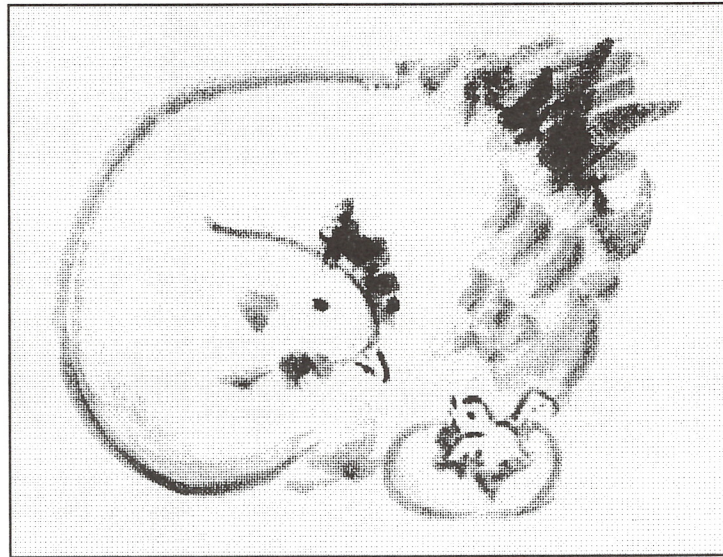
and ripened.

Now we come to the koan itself. Gutei has become a teacher. Apparently, he never gave talks at all; he only stuck up one finger, with great power. His attendant was a young lay disciple; he wasn't yet ordained but was studying the sutras and serving his teacher. Sometimes people came and asked the young man, "What does your teacher have to say about the dharma?" The boy would hold up his finger, but he held it up kind of casually because he himself hadn't had the whole-body experience of awakening. The boy's finger didn't represent true reality; it was a mere copy of his teacher's gesture. Some commentaries on this koan say that the boy's imitation was "dead;" it was "like a corpse;" it "didn't have life."

Clearly, the first lesson here concerns the dangers of imitation. This is our lesson too. I can't tell you how many people come to the zendo and repeat some catch phrase they've read in a sutra or heard somewhere. It immediately strikes me as not coming completely from their own experience. It is not fully alive, but something adopted or borrowed. We often do that, particularly at the beginning of practice, because we're trying to understand the dharma. We've got these dharma phrases in our minds, and we quite naturally pull them out as if they are our own answer. To imitate and borrow, however, is just creating more obstacles for ourselves. We carry around something dead and it doesn't leave room for our own live expression. Zen study is not like graduate school, where you learn the vocabulary of your chosen field and then wield the terms with expertise. Response to a teacher's question about your practice must be fresh, alive, honest, and completely yours. Dead phrases must be cut off, sometimes sharply. The pain we feel when rejected that way is a powerful wake-up call; it helps us see our sticking places.

Imitation, however, is not the whole lesson of this koan. Let's look further. The boy was screaming; he was probably bleeding; he was running away. Gutei then called to him, "Attendant!" The boy stopped and turned back. Gutei held up that wonderful finger; he gave that full of life, complete gesture. The young man got the whole thing; he got what had been wrong with his imitation. He also saw the finger probably for the first time as representing one body, or the whole universe, or whatever words we want to use.

happen, and it's life-giving. As in the story of the hen and chick, there was a call and a response. In this story, before the call and the response, there was a cutting, so there was a probe, or demand, by the teacher. Often it's a shout, like the famous "You country bumpkin!" Another example of this are Bodhidharma's words as he shouted at Taiso Eka standing there in the snow: *The highest subtle way of Buddha cannot be attained without an immeasurably long training and almost unbearable effort. It can never be achieved by puny virtue, shallow wisdom, faint inspiration,*



Hen and Chick — drawing by Tsugen Narasaki

In my view, Gutei's calling to the boy while he was in agony is pivotal in our being nourished by this case. I'm not satisfied by the commentaries that say it's only about imitation, learning not to copy or mimic. It seems to me that this support from the teacher when the boy was suffering greatly is what made possible the boy's enlightenment. It could have happened that he just ran away screaming, never to be seen again. Had Gutei not called to him, all could have been lost. Because the young man was a fine attendant, he turned to his teacher. That call and response in an extreme situation is not so common, but it does

or self conceit!"

That's a deep cutting. It's more common to have records of teachers cutting verbally, but in our koan, the teacher actually uses a knife. The boy was suffering deeply. Then, the teacher did something else; he called right in the middle of suffering. The Buddha told us a lot about suffering; he said that it's from our place of suffering that we can begin to awaken. So it seems to me most appropriate that it's in the middle of profound pain that something most precious happens.

It's so tricky, this student/teacher thing, and yet so vital for all of us. I know for

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Nebraska Zen Center 2005 Practice Schedule

Jan	19	Dainin Katagiri's Birthday*
	25	Rakusu Sewing Begins
	26	Zen Master Dogen's Birthday*
		Ryaku Fusatsu
Feb	6	World Peace Ceremony
	12-13	Two-day Sesshin Winter Practice Period Begins
	15	Buddha's Parinirvana*
	23	Ryaku Fusatsu
Mar	1	Dainin Katagiri's Memorial Day*
	1-6	Lay Ordination Week
	6	Lay Ordination
	12	One-day Sesshin
	13	World Peace Ceremony
	23	Ryaku Fusatsu
Apr	3	World Peace Ceremony
	8	Buddha's Birthday*
	16-17	Two-day Sesshin
	27	Ryaku Fusatsu
May	1	World Peace Ceremony
	15	Remembrance Day
	25	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jun	1	OPW Practice Period Begins (at ZCP)
	4-5	Two-day Sesshin (at ZCP)
	5	World Peace Ceremony
	22	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jul	3	World Peace Ceremony
	20	Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day*
		Ryaku Fusatsu
Aug	7	World Peace Ceremony
	17	Ryaku Fusatsu
Sep	4	World Peace Ceremony
	10-11	Two-day Sesshin Fall Practice Period Begins
	14	Ryaku Fusatsu
	29	Zen Master Dogen's Parinirvana*
Oct	2	World Peace Ceremony
	18	Bodhidharma Day*
	19	Ryaku Fusatsu
	22	One-day Sesshin
Nov	6	World Peace Ceremony
	16	Ryaku Fusatsu
Dec	1-7	Rohatsu Sesshin
	8	Buddha's Enlightenment Day*
	16	Ryaku Fusatsu

*Services commemorating these days will be held before dharma talk on the Sunday nearest the date indicated.

Ryaku Fusatsu follows a shortened evening zazen.
World Peace Ceremony precedes Monthly Group Discussion

Calligraphy For Sale



Suchness

Nonin's calligraphy can be purchased through our website, at www.prairiewindzen.org. Click on Nebraska Zen Center and go to Nonin's calligraphy pages.

There are over fifty items for sale, one and two-character pieces, longer phrases, and specialty items. All are signed and stamped originals and are written on high-quality paper, either Canson watercolor paper, Rives BFK, or archival matboard.

We sell and ship the calligraphy unframed. Each piece can be mounted and framed using traditional methods by any good framer.

All profits from website calligraphy sales go directly to Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple.

Winter Practice Period at Nebraska Zen Center

Winter Practice Period will begin with February Sesshin on the 12th and 13th and end with April Sesshin on the 16th and 17th.

Practice Period is designed to provide structure for those who wish to intensify their practice and their Sangha connections for a specific period of time. Practice Period students commit to intensifying practice in three areas: (1) daily practice at home (sitting and devotional services), (2) regular involvement at the temple (e.g. on Sunday mornings and for work practice), and (3) special events (e.g. sesshins, study groups, and ryaku fusatsu). Students also commit to keeping a daily practice journal and to periodic Practice Period Group meetings.

Interested students should write up their Practice Period commitments and turn them in to Nonin before February 9th. If this is your first Practice Period, speak with Nonin before turning in your commitments.

Prison Dharma

from page 3

must just be here. 'Here' means right now . . . There is nowhere to go. This is liberation. It's very simple. Too simple . . . Freedom is very intimate."

Intimate? What is it Nonin says about non-romantic intimacy? It's developed through doing, through training. He says, "We shape ourselves by what we do and how we do it."

These words lead me to realize that I am not defined by my crime, but by what I do and how I do it. There are two people who have asked me to help them with their writing. I need to send out two revisions and write a letter of thanks for a kindness from a friend. I need to apologize to a sangha member toward whom I was callous. I need to clean the cell. I need to . . .

In my life, remorse is fitting. Shame is paralyzing. Awareness is necessary. Practice is required. I cross my legs, form the mudra, and begin lowering my gaze. The meadowlark returns. I follow my breath.

I am here, now. there is nowhere to go.

Doc practices with the White Lotus Sangha at Tecumseh State Correctional Institute in Nebraska.

JUMPING OF THE HUNDRED FOOT POLE

by Anthony Sharper, Sr.

We are all living and dying each moment. Moment by moment. We all have the choice whether or not to bring with us the baggage and issues of our perceptions and judgements. If we choose to let go, we begin to free ourselves of the delusions we create. I, like everyone else, have great difficulty doing this.

Recently, Nonin gave a dharma talk at

TSCI, in which he discussed "stepping off the hundred-foot pole." I believe this to mean that we each need to trust the universe to support us as we take the necessary steps in learning to let go of our delusions. This means we also must trust our own ability. This profound trust allows us to take the first scary steps without knowing the outcome.

I have a great deal of trouble doing this. I grow comfortable with where I am at any given point and do not want to change. I know that change is possible, and necessary, but I fight it. I delude myself by thinking that because something that happened was "good," it should continue. I also think that when I have denied myself the illusion of control in some aspect of my life, I should be able to reward myself the next time the situation arises by taking control, which is not only another delusion but also more fear of "stepping of the hundred-foot pole."

In *Not Always So*, Shunryu Suzuki speaks of stepping off the pole in this way: "Things are continuously growing or changing into something else. Nothing exists in its own form or color. When you think that "Here is the top," then you will have the problem of whether or not to jump off." We often hear people who have had near-death experiences talk about living their lives as though today were their last day. These people "get it." They are living in the moment and are not afraid of jumping off the pole.

I believe that we should have goals toward which we strive. This helps keep us alive and aware. We must be diligent, however, that we do not pre-assign values to the steps we take but rather see things as they are as we go. We also must be willing to change our goals if they run contrary to the buddha dharma. This too is part of living in the moment.

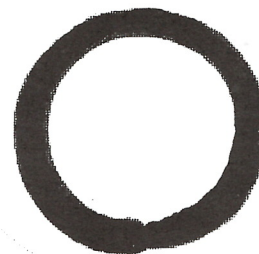
Now, after much practice, when I sit

zazen, I usually approach the moment without the expectations I have during other activities. I return to center and let be what is going to be while watching my breath. To carry this attitude through one's day takes a good amount of determination. We are bombarded with so many choices and restrictions that it is easy for us to lose our way and forego practice. This is the most difficult aspect of practice for me, even in prison, where our choices are much less than on the outside.

I am fortunate, however. I live in a place and at a time that allows me to strive toward enlightenment. I also share a cell with another White Lotus Sangha member, and we remind each other to practice wholeheartedly.

It's sometimes difficult to practice here at the prison because we are limited in what we can do by many restrictions. Many times, Nonin has referred to life in prison as "involuntary incarceration" and life in a monastery as "voluntary incarceration." Whatever the place, my job remains to maintain my practice, wherever I am, and step off the hundred-foot pole into my life at every moment.

Anthony Sharper, Sr. practices with the White Lotus Sangha at Tecumseh State Correctional Institute in Nebraska.



Gutei's One Finger

from page 8

myself, having been in both roles, that true connection is easily missed. Maybe, figuratively speaking, the egg rolls away and the student doesn't hear the teacher "pecking" due to distraction or lack of attention. Maybe, as could have happened in this story, the wounded disciple just keeps on running, never looking back. Maybe a teacher, for his own reasons, chooses to play "hardball," demanding a great sacrifice of the student. If there is no response or support of the student as he or she makes the effort to obey, it is as if the ball goes over the fence and they no longer have a game, much less a relationship. There may well be good will on both sides and no wish to cause harm. I know there have been times when I've failed to support a student who was suffering. It's really tricky; I don't always know when to reach out. If someone doesn't come, are they really in trouble? It's their choice not to come for practice. I'm not going to call people up and say, "Why weren't you at zazen?" I'll never do that; that's harmful to people. People have to come to sit with us because they

want to come. But sometimes people have really been in darkness, and I didn't pick it up. I didn't reach out. I deeply regret not doing so. Sometimes, because we're human, the teacher doesn't always respond. Please understand that this kind of dramatic confrontation, or this missing of each other, didn't happen only in ancient China. Not so; it also happens right now.

What is actually happening in the student/teacher interaction, what is this "pecking and chicking?" What do teachers listen for before they dare respond? Fundamentally, a teacher is there to help students see themselves, to help them see where they are stuck and blocked by clinging and aversion, and, most importantly, to help them see their own aspiration, their own maturing ripeness, their readiness to open up. Teachers, in some sense, can give us nothing. And yet, there is this call and response, so that's not nothing; it's life-giving.

This kind of exchange isn't about a teacher advising you what to do or what to study; that's different. This is about some deep inner exchange from the heart. It's about those sparks. Our Zen tradition is full of wonderful stories about just this – about cutting, about calling, and most beautifully, as in Gutei's case, about never exhausting one-finger Zen. He never exhausted it because it wasn't his; it wasn't Gutei's idiosyncratic personality being made visible. It was the whole universe being expressed. How could it be exhausted? This vital living connection demonstrated in this *koan* isn't a philosophical discussion of Buddhist thought or a psychological analysis of behavior. It is truly about being skewered with the sharp inexhaustible blade of "just this," the whole universe fully manifest and the mind set free.



NEW YEAR'S EVE AT NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

All are welcome to join us for New Year's Eve Services. We'll begin at 6:00 pm with a Pot-luck Supper followed by Services at 8:00. We'll then sit zazen from 9:30 till midnight, with walking meditation when needed. During sitting, we'll ring the temple bell 108 times to mark the turning of the year. Refreshments will be served at midnight.

You may attend during any part of the evening. Come when you like and leave whenever you need to.

From the editor:

We always need material. Send us articles, drawings, poems, photos, cartoons, letters, etc. The deadline for publication in our Spring issue is February 1st.

Websites for Nebraska Zen Center and Zen Center of Pittsburgh may be accessed at: www.prairiewindzen.org

Nebraska Zen Center's e-mail address is: heartland@prairiewindzen.org

Zen Center of Pittsburgh's e-mail address is: kyoki@prairiewindzen.org

WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE — NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

Morning

Tuesday — Sunday

6:00 - 7:00 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as Needed)

7:00 - 7:30 — Service

7:30 - 7:45 — Cleaning

Sunday Only

8:30 — Zazen Instruction

9:00 - 9:25 — Sitting Meditation

9:25 - 9:35 — Walking Meditation

9:35 - 10:00 — Sitting Meditation

10:00 - 10:10 — Service

10:10 - 11:00 — Dharma Talk

Evening

Tuesday — Wednesday

7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as needed)

Thursday

6:00 - 8:30 — Classes as scheduled

Friday

7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as needed)

We are closed on Monday

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