



Prairie Wind

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SITTING AND PAIN

During Zen meditation (*zazen*), it's important to sit upright and still. Body and mind are not two, so if body is not stable, mind is not stable. To concentrate the mind on the issue at hand – whether following the breath, koan work, or “just sitting (*shikan taza*)” – proper posture must be assumed and maintained. Therefore, Zen teachers encourage their students to assume a stable posture and sit still. Fidgeting, scratching, or stretching is counter-productive and is discouraged.

However, moving as a result of physical pain is a different matter. Everyone who sits *zazen* has to deal with pain, for we sit for long periods of time, from thirty to forty minutes a session, sometimes longer.

Whenever the body is held in *any* position for long periods of time, something is going to hurt. Given that reality and also given that it's important to sit upright and still, the question that arises for all of us who sit is: What should I do when the pain comes?

Answers to this question vary from temple to temple and from teacher to teacher. I've sat in temples where if anyone moves during *zazen*, the teacher will shout “SIT STILL!” or “DON'T MOVE!” In those temples, once you assume a posture, no movement is allowed for the duration of the sitting period. If anyone moves, they'll get hollered at. However, I've also sat in temples where the teacher says nothing when someone moves. In those temples, moving to change posture is okay if our original posture becomes too uncomfortable. If



Sumi-e by Tsugen Narasaki



Dharma — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

MORE ON PAIN

from Various Teachers

The following comments, printed here by permission, were gathered from an on-line discussion on sitting and pain by members of the American Zen Teachers Association (AZTA). The discussion led to my writing the article that began on page one of this issue of *Prairie Wind*.

Nonin Chowaney

from Barry Magid
Teacher, Ordinary Mind Zendo:

I recently came across a little book, *Zen Buddhist English Sutras* published in 1948 by the Hawaii Soto Mission Association. In the section on zazen instruction, originally written in Japanese by Rev. Kurebayashi, Prof. of Zen Buddhism at Komazawa Buddhist University & distributed by the Soto Sect Headquarters (so it was not just intended for Westerners), I came across these lines: "In all the Zen books, we find a passage: 'Zazen is an easy and comfortable practice of the Buddha-law.' [from Dogen's *Fukanzazengi* — ed] It must not be such a way that gives us bodily pain. If we are to perform it forcibly enduring the pain, it cannot be an easy practice, but a sort of self-mortification." I wonder if anyone can give me any other reference that so clearly states zazen should be pain-free? Needless to say, this was not exactly my experience growing up [in American Zen] and I've never come across anyone's description of their stay in a Japanese monastery (Rinzai or Soto) where the words "easy & comfortable" featured prominently.

from Seirin Barbara Kohn
Head Priest, Austin Zen Center:

An "easy and comfortable" practice? This is interesting. In 1948, I know that the Japanese didn't think Westerners could do zazen and the contact with the West was "missionary" in its intent. I do know that some Japanese teachers think that we Westerners take the "never move" too seriously. My guess is that despite the Japanese propensity to non-individualistic

teaching, there are strict teachers and not so strict. I certainly teach people to move when necessary, but I teach it in a context of "be still."

from Taigen Dan Leighton,
Zen Teacher and Scholar:

In *Fukanzazengi* (Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen), one of his first writings, Dogen says that zazen is "the dharma gate of repose and bliss," or it could be translated as "joyful ease." I believe he meant it. There are similar references to zazen as pleasurable, or at least joyous, in his *Eihei Koroku*. For example, in his very last *jodo*, or Dharma Hall Discourse, perhaps his last recorded teaching, Dogen said, "Smiling on our sitting cushion, there is nothing lacking."

from Barry Magid:

I naturally thought Dogen would be the source, but his instructions don't specifically address physical pain, and the one word of those instructions that seems to have gotten emphasized in America was "immovable!" I was surprised that this Soto-sect text so specifically said "It must not be such a way that gives us bodily pain." Nobody ever told ME that! So much of my instruction - in Yasutani's line - was filled with martial imagery and the cultivation of endurance and intensity. It's an unconscious legacy that I'm constantly trying to purge from the way I practice and especially from sesshin. That's why I was so intrigued to come across something — especially something Japanese! — that emphasized such a different attitude. No doubt "the dharma gate of enjoyment and ease" requires us to let anything life brings come through that gate,

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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 Zuio-ji 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.

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including pain, but I'm grateful to have gotten as far away as I can from that old

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NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

FALL PRACTICE PERIOD will begin with a **Two-day sesshin** on **September 14th & 15th** and will end with **Rohatsu Sesshin**, from **December 1st through 8th**. Practice Period is designed to **provide structure for people 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., specific morning or evening sittings, Sunday mornings, or work practice, and (3) attendance at special events (e.g., sesshins, study groups, or ryaku fusatsu).**

If you're interested in participating in **Fall Practice Period**, submit a list of your practice commitments in these three areas by **September 10th**. If this is our first practice period or if you're unclear about anything, speak with Nonin and submit the list of commitments afterwards. **Practice Period students will also keep a daily practice journal and will meet with Nonin as a group two or three times during the period. Times for these meetings will be announced.**



Greg, Sarah, and Nonin after the Wedding

Augustana Lutheran Church has agreed to sell us the lot next door. The **Board of Directors** will be meeting on **Saturday, September 21st** with our architect, **John Albers**, to begin seriously planning an addition to the temple that will create a twenty-five to thirty seat zendo. The meeting will be at **10:00 a.m.** at the temple. **All those interested are invited to attend.**

Sangha members **Koken Greg Petitto** and **Sarah Chapman** were married on July 6th. **Nonin** performed the ceremony. **Congratulations to you both!**

Rohatsu Sesshin, which commemorates **Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment**, will be held at the traditional time this year, from **December 1st through 8th**. All are encouraged to sit at least part of this sesshin if you can't do it all. Please **discuss with Nonin** how you would like to participate.

SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC this Fall, a **Two-day Sesshin** on **September 14th and 15th**, a **One-day Sitting** on **October 19th**, and **Rohatsu Sesshin** from **December 1st through 8th**. Fees: \$30 per day for members; \$40 for non-members. Lower rates may be arranged for those with limited income. Call (402) 551-9Nonin will lead a **dharma study class** at the temple this Fall. It will meet on four succes-

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will lead a **dharma study class** at the temple this Fall. It will meet on four successive **Saturday mornings** from **10 am till noon**, on **November 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th**. The class will focus on fascicles from **Zen Master Dogen's Shobogenzo**.

The class is **free to members**. The fee for **non-members** is **\$10 per class**.

OTHER FALL EVENTS

Sept 18	Ryaku Fusatsu
Oct 10	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
23	Ryaku Fusatsu
Nov 3	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
20	Ryaku Fusatsu



ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

ZCP FALL EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

- 1 — World Peace Ceremony
- 8 — Sangha Meeting (1 -5 pm)
- 10 — No pm zazen. 9/11 Memorial Service at East Liberty Presbyterian.
- 24 — Ryaku Fusatsu (Precept Service)*
- 26 — Dogen's Memorial Day**
- 27-29 — Sesshin (7 pm Fri - 5 pm Sun)

OCTOBER

- 6 — World Peace Ceremony
- 18-20 — Sesshin w/ Rev. Dosho Port
- 22 — Bodhidharma Day**
Ryaku Fusatsu (Precept Service)*

NOVEMBER

- 2 — World Peace Ceremony
- 15-17 — Sesshin w/Rev. Cathleen Williams
- 19 — Ryaku Fusatsu (Precept Service)*
- 26-30 — ZCP Closed

DECEMBER

- 1-8 — Rohatsu Sesshin (at Nebraska Zen Center). ZCP closed.

*after evening zazen

**special morning service

The annual month-long **Prairie Wind Retreat** was again held at **Deep Spring Temple** during June. Our **Deep appreciation** goes to **Rev. Nonin Chowaney** for leading the practice. During the retreat, we were able to **overhaul the compost bins, re-paint the porch, and re-organize the garage.** The back hillside was also **cleared and seeded to native grasses and wildflowers.**

Special thanks for training period donations go to **Mrs. Helen Roberts** for giving pie-making lessons, to **Mr. Joe Roberts** for lending us tools, to **Wiltrud Fassbinder** for a tea ceremony demonstration, to **Jane Harter** for plantings, to **Mark Shefsiek** for creating to new flower beds, to **Mimi Jong** and her sister **Annie** for cooking meals, to **Kevin Coghlan** for the use of his sander, to **Alice Greller** for donating many items to the temple, and finally to



Kyoki, Patricia, Jane, Cressida, Wiltrud, and Leslie after Ordination

Kyoki for for planning **Monks' Day Out** on the Youghiogheny River.

Five people participated in the first **Lay Ordination** at **Deep Spring Temple** this past June: **Patricia Carpenter, Jane Harter, Cressida Magaro, Wiltrud Fassbinder, and Leslie Hospodar.** Their dharma names are: Patricia — **Jyakunen** (Serene As-it-is); Jane — **Dainei** (Great Peace) ; Cressida — **Jigen** (Compassion Source); Wiltrud — **Myoho** (Wondrous Phoenix); Leslie — **Hoetsu** (Dharma Joy). **Congratulations to you all!**

Special thanks to **Tom Persinger** for maintaining our website and for solving our many computer problems.

Congratulations to **Keith Hale** on his new job as **Director of Theater** at Doane College in Crete, Nebraska.

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Monday - Zen Center Closed

Tuesday - Saturday Mornings

5:30 a.m. - Zazen

6:45 a.m. - Morning Service

Tuesday - Friday evenings*

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

*We no longer sit Saturday evenings.

Sunday

9:00 a.m. - Zazen Instruction

10:00 a.m. - Zazen

10:40 a.m. - Work Practice

11:30 a.m. - Service/Lecture

12:30 p.m. - Tea

1:00 p.m. - Closed till Tuesday a.m.

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple is located at 124 Willow Ridge Road, Sewickley, PA 15143
tel: (412) 741-1262 e-mail: kyoki@prairiewindzen.org website: www.prairiewindzen.org

Sitting and Pain

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SOMEONE moves repeatedly, those in charge will later find out why and deal with each situation case by case.

As at all Zen temples, we at Heartland Temple in Omaha teach people to sit upright and still, without fidgeting, stretching, or scratching. We also encourage them to handle pain individually, for we are all different. Some are limber; some are not. No one can determine how much pain another person is feeling or can tolerate because no one else can feel that person's pain. When I give zazen instruction, therefore, I tell people to sit with an attitude somewhere between "wimp" and "macho." In other words, don't switch postures immediately when the pain comes. If we do, we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to stretch ourselves not only physically but also mentally so that we can subsequently sit for longer periods. If we move too soon, we also deprive ourselves of the opportunity to sit with the pain instead of running away from it. If we learn to sit with pain, we may be surprised at how much pain we can sit with. This can be a help in learning to live with physical and mental pain in other areas of our lives instead of running away and escaping through things like alcohol, drugs, exercise, food, and television.

However, we must also learn to move when the pain is too much, when it makes it impossible to sit well, and when if we don't move, we could injure ourselves. We also need make sure that we don't make zazen an endurance contest or a competition between ourselves and other practitioners to prove who's the best or the toughest. This is the "macho" side of zazen practice. This attitude contributes to a "culture of toughness" that we sometimes experience at Zen practice centers.

I mentioned before that at our temple in Omaha, we encourage people to determine for themselves how much pain is too much and when to move. Before we can clearly determine what to do when

pain comes, however, it helps to be clear about what kind of pain it is. Soft tissue pain is usually temporary and goes away quickly when we get up. We can sit through this kind of pain for a while and then change postures when it gets too uncomfortable without doing any permanent damage. Joint pain, ligament pain, or nerve pain and numbness is another matter. It's not a good idea to try to sit through this kind of pain. If you damage a nerve, it takes a long time to heal, up to six months per one-eighth of an inch of damage. If you seriously damage a nerve, it may never heal.

During my first sesshin with my master, Dainin Katagiri, I was sitting in a kneeling posture (Jap. *seiza*) and numbness developed in a heel that lasted well after the last zazen period of the evening. I talked to Katagiri-roshi about it the next day. He told me to sit in a different posture and if necessary, to use more cushions to prop myself up. He was very clear that I shouldn't sit in the posture I was using if this type of problem persisted.

Ligament or joint pain should also not be overdone. American Zen lore contains more than a few stories about practitioners who overdid it sitting cross-legged or in *seiza* and ended up having arthroscopic surgery on a knee, which doesn't always solve the problem. Rev. Kyoki Roberts, Head Priest at Deep Spring Temple near Pittsburgh, has had two knee surgeries to repair injuries that she attributes to overdoing it when she trained at a temple on the West Coast. She was sitting in a kneeling posture during a sesshin, and whenever anyone moved in the zendo, a sharp "DON'T MOVE" came from the teacher's seat. She was relatively new to practice at the time and had only entered this temple a few days before, so she felt that she had to follow instructions. She ended up sitting through more pain than she should have and had her first surgery for a torn meniscus shortly after she returned to Omaha.

Roshi Jiyou Kennett, a British Zen

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**.

Master who founded Shasta Abbey in California, used to recall that while in Japan, an old monk in charge of zazen guidance at Sojiji monastery told her that zazen was not an endurance test and that people new to sitting should not learn to dread it. He said to sit for as long as one can do it in reasonable comfort then push a little further. After that, change positions. This way you stretch your capacity without injury and don't lose the desire to keep sitting.

This is good advice, and I pass it on to all who sit, especially to beginners

I've been sitting zazen daily for nearly twenty-five years. For me, zazen is not, never was, and never will be pain-free. Early on, my personal experience with pain during zazen was, well, painful! I began sitting with Katagiri-roshi at Minnesota Zen Center in the late 1970's. At that time, we sat for forty minutes a period. I was thirty-eight years old when I began sitting. I'd never been very limber, and I'd suffered a variety of sports injuries to my knees and ankles over the years. At the start, cross-legged postures were impossible for me, so I began by sitting in *seiza*, the kneeling posture in which the sitting cushion is straddled and the feet are extended out behind it. Sitting through a forty minute period of zazen without moving was agony for me at first, but I didn't dare move. Why? Because no one sitting around me

Sitting and Pain

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was moving. No one had told me *not* to move, but I assumed that you weren't supposed to move because no one was moving.

One evening, I sat next to someone who, in the middle of zazen, put his hands together, bowed, and changed his posture. No one said anything. Later, I asked someone about this, and they said that changing postures in the middle of zazen was okay. Unfortunately, the person who gave me zazen instruction neglected to mention this. Later still, I realized that when I first came to the temple, I'd been sitting near more limber, experienced students who didn't need to move much!

However, even after I found out that changing posture in the middle of a sitting period was okay, it was still problematic for me. For one thing, Katagiri-roshi never moved, and I wanted to be like him. Of course the thrust of his teaching was to guide me toward being completely *me*, stiff, injured legs and all, but early on, I didn't realize this. I also wanted to be like the older students, who all sat nice and straight for long periods of time. I wanted to be something other than I was, which was creating lots of problems for me. The biggest problem was excruciating pain in my knees and ankles as I stubbornly tried to cling to the idea that because others weren't moving, I shouldn't move either. Of course others weren't me, but this realization didn't dawn on me until later in my sitting career.

I laugh at all this now, but it wasn't funny then. I realize now that the pain was inevitable, but the suffering I created by not moving when I should have was optional. I chose to suffer with the pain because of the problem I created by wanting to be something different than what I was. I wanted people to look at me and see an experienced practitioner, which I wasn't. Fortunately, I never permanently injured myself by my stupid

behavior. I was lucky.

Of course, after I finally gave in and began to change my posture when the pain got to be more than I could easily bear, other problems arose. One was guilt. I felt guilty for moving. I also felt like a failure. These ego problems were sometimes harder to deal with than the pain, so I still continued sitting without moving longer than I should have even though I knew I could and should move. Then, at the end of the period, I at least felt triumphant instead of defeated. I had prevailed! Sore knees, yes, but they were easier for me to handle at that time than a sore ego.

in my inability to sit very long without moving. I had this notion that because I held a position of responsibility, I should serve as an example to others and moving a lot really wasn't a good example.

While I was sitting there feeling like a failure, Joen Snyder (now Snyder-O'Neal, a Zen teacher in Minneapolis) came in. She noticed my glumness and asked what was the matter. I explained myself, and her response was, "Oh, Nonin, you just had to move, that's all; why add all this extra *stuff*?"

Her response rang like an alarm clock. Yes, I thought, I just had to move. It's okay to

Pain when sitting is unavoidable; sooner or later it's going to hurt. What I tell myself is: Don't move too early; don't move too late. Don't do yourself damage, but don't sell yourself short. When you have to move, move, but don't add anything extra, like guilt. Suffering because you moved is optional.

After I'd been practicing with Katagiri-roshi a couple of years, a pivotal moment occurred during a seven-day sesshin. Since cross-legged postures were as yet beyond me, I was still sitting seiza at the time, and sesshins were particularly grueling. On the second day, I found myself unable to sit for more than twenty minutes or a half-hour without changing my posture, which meant splaying my feet out to the side for a while and then putting them back pointing behind me when the pain in my ankles and knees subsided. (If you can't sit cross-legged, it severely limits the postures you can change *to*.) During the break after lunch, I was sitting glumly in the downstairs office having coffee. I was *Ino* (practice coordinator) at the time, and I was particularly disappointed

move. All this extra stuff – guilt, disappointment, despair – was unnecessary. I returned to the zendo in the afternoon, moved when I had to move, and then let it go without creating all the suffering. How liberating that was! I was so grateful to Joen for what she had said to me in the office.

After four years of practice in Minnesota, I spent two years at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California and then went on to practice in Japan. There, at Shogoji Monastery, we experimented with free walking meditation. Morning and evening sittings were about two hours long, and we could walk when we wanted to in the hallway outside the zendo. Some research indicates that this is how Dogen and his disciples practiced.

Free walking meditation was another liberating experience for me. I found that I

Sitting and Pain

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could shorten or lengthen my sitting periods according to the condition of my body, and I found myself listening to my body more and more. I noticed that when my legs were in good shape, I was sitting longer than the forty minute periods I used to struggle to get through. I also found myself looking forward to zazen, even when I was experiencing physical problems. Since I could walk whenever I needed to, I no longer felt uneasy before sesshins, which also became less stressful.

After practicing this way for a while, I finally came to understand what Zen Master Dogen meant when he said that zazen is the “dharma gate of joyful ease” and that “smiling on our sitting cushion, there is nothing lacking.” And I also understood what Shakyamuni Buddha meant when he said that “meditation is returning home to sit in peace.”

When I established the practice at Heartland Temple eleven years ago, free walking meditation became a part of it. Our policy now is this: we encourage people to sit upright and still, without fidgeting, for as long as they can. When sitting becomes too uncomfortable, there are three options. The first is to quietly change posture. The second is to sit with both knees up or in the “royal ease” posture at our places for a time. The third is to do walking meditation in the buddha hall. This procedure is also followed at Deep Spring Temple in Pittsburgh, where Kyoki Roberts is now Head Priest.

After twenty-five years, zazen for me is still not pain free, but I’m no longer

troubled by it. Sometimes, I welcome it, for it certainly keeps me in the present moment! I’ve learned over the years to just be with the pain and sit with it. This experience has helped me live through physical ailments and the emotional pain

injure myself. I now do this without even an instant of guilt or recrimination.

Pain when sitting is unavoidable; sooner or later it’s going to hurt. What I tell myself is: Don’t move too early; don’t move too late. Don’t do yourself damage, but don’t sell yourself short. When you have to move, move, but don’t add anything extra, like guilt. Suffering because you moved is optional. We already suffer enough in our lives as human beings. Why add more?

Child at the Mill Pond

*I’ll go the the pond,
to its crumbling bank,
to the blackberries
and the reddening pear.*

*As the switch-grass cuts,
as the woodsmoke curls,
as the cricket chants abstractions,
I will come to the edge,*

*and the waterbug, too, skittering,
will etch the surface with its legs.
The maple will drop
a generous orange leaf.*

Dana Delibovi

of sadness, grief, and loss with some measure of equanimity as I grow older. However, I’ve also come to learn that when it gets to be too much, when I find myself straining, to just move before I



Communication Workshop

Rev. Kyoki Roberts, Head Priest of Zen Center of Pittsburgh/Deep Spring Temple, has developed a **Communication Workshop** especially for **Buddhist Sanghas**. In it, she leads participants through **skill development** in **Active Listening, Speaking Up, and Managing Difficult Conversations and Conflict**.

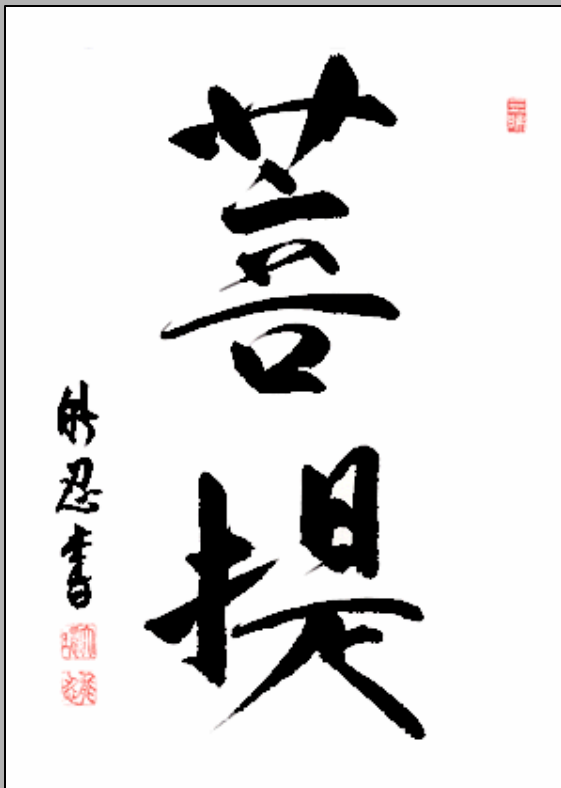
This **one or two-day workshop** begins and ends with **zazen** and has as its foundation the **Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts** and the recognition that **each of us is Buddha**.

Kyoki has over **ten years** of hands-on mediation experience and was formerly a **mediation trainer** for the State of Nebraska. She has also worked professionally as a mediator with **church and sangha groups**.

Kyoki also can provide this workshop to facilitate **visioning** and **decision-making** processes for the Sangha.

If you or your sangha are interested in these workshops, **call (412) 741-1262** or **e-mail kyoki@prairiewindzen.org** for details.

Rev. Kyoki Roberts



Enlightenment (Bodhi)

Calligraphy For Sale

Nonin's calligraphy is for sale over the Internet.

All are originals signed and stamped by him and are written on high quality paper, either Canson watercolor paper or Rives BFK printmaking paper.

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

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

More on Pain

from page 3

Samurai Zen mentality, though no doubt some of those old teachers would say Zen without pain is just Zen Lite!

**from Kyoki Roberts,
Head Priest, Zen Center of Pittsburgh:**

Ah yes, Every time I go to the zendo, I still remember that "DON'T MOVE!" I didn't. Sweat poured off me, and then I got up and went to have my first surgery to repair a torn meniscus.

**from Shosan Vicki Austin,
President, San Francisco Zen Center**

I agree with Taigen. I think this [the phrase in the 1948 book] is an informal translation of the phrase from the *Fukanzazengi*, "the Dharma gate of joyful ease." This phrase actually has a venerable history, dating back to yoga instructions. The definition of "asana" is "easy, comfortable pose." My practice for many years has been to treat this as a sacred mystery. After my first ten years of practice I had many injuries from forcing the pose. The next ten years were about healing those injuries, and these past ten years I have been fortunate enough to begin to address some of the causes and conditions that led to their arising in the first place. I became a yoga teacher to address these issues, and I give workshops on yoga to help others address them. It is a fundamental part of zazen practice. . . . I don't think Buddha carried the preconception that physical issues don't count, that only perceptual and emotional issues do. A yogi himself, he transcended yoga; he did not reject it. Otherwise he would not have taught the Middle Way.

**from Kyogen Carlson,
Abbot, Dharma Rain Zen Center:**

My teacher, Jiyu Kennett, always told us that the reason we use the lotus postures is because they are so comfortable. I remember thinking, "What sadist came up with that expansion?" She said that the zazen expert at Sojiji, an old monk who gave her personal instruction, told her that

it should not cause pain. Her experience with the young monitors in the Zendo was a different matter. Based on the old monk's teaching, she told us to sit as long as it was comfortable, push through the pain for a bit, and then change positions quietly. Over months of practice, the posture would get easier. It took me several months to get reasonably comfortable in the Burmese position, then after another year or so, the half lotus became easy. What was really amazing to me was how effortless it was to remain upright and still. I was astonished to discover great comfort and ease in the posture. It was wonderful to discover the truth of that instruction.

**from Nonin Chowaney,
Abbot, Nebraska Zen Center:**

When I practiced in Japan, we experimented with free walking meditation. Our morning and evening sittings were about two hours long, and we could walk when we wanted outside the zendo. Some research indicates that this is how Dogen did it. I've never been very limber and have had a lot of problems with my knees and ankles due to old sports injuries. Early on in Zen practice, long sittings were agonizing. So, I came to love free walking meditation and have continued the practice here in Nebraska. Long sittings, especially during sesshins, are much less stressful (and painful) than I experienced early on. I'll continue this way of practice until I die!

**from Taitaku Pat Phelan,
Abbot, Chapel Hill Zen Center:**

I have found that by being still with and opening to physical pain, trying to be intimate with it, working with it, getting to know its nature has been a good model for opening to emotional pain, becoming intimate with it, working with it and getting to know its nature. In this way, sitting with pain has been useful for me, but of course there are limits. Rather than bullying myself, forcing myself, or holding my body, I think of non-moving

as joining my body in stillness and listening to it. Sometimes this means responding by moving. But the process works better by encouraging myself to settle and meet this moment rather than by forcing myself.

Last year, Berkeley Zen Center published this piece about not moving:

A monk asked Sojun, "What is hard practice?"
Sojun replied, "Not moving."
The monk said, "What is this not moving?"

Sojun said, "In zazen it means don't move. When your leg hurts, let the leg practice with its pain. If an impulse to get rid of the intensity occurs, notice this impulse but don't react. However, if a sharp pain in the knee alerts you to danger, you may decide to adjust your posture. If so, simply mobilize awareness; adjust your posture carefully; do not indulge in justification or recrimination. This is not moving. In everyday life, meet each situation on its own terms, freshly, wholeheartedly. Refrain from judging, rejecting, demanding, or reacting. For example, when a powerful emotion such as fear presents itself, do not deflect it, analyze it, excuse it, amplify it, suppress it, dismiss it or identify with it. Don't cut yourself off. If necessary, take a deep breath, relax your abdomen and smooth your brow; but don't bother to congratulate or console yourself. This is not moving. Thus, the not moving of zazen is continuous with the not moving of everyday life. A river flows; a mountain is still. The mountain's stillness is its flowing. The river's flowing is its stillness. What is your stillness? Don't move!

A verse says, 'Encountering spring for many years, the heart does not change.' Master Bokusan said, 'To sprout in spring is the heart that does not change. To bloom in spring is to abide at ease immovably.' The heart is originally open. Zazen is the ceremony of everyday life, of being-as-is. Performing this ceremony, how could you move? How could you bind yourself?"

**from Zuiko Redding,
Head Priest, Cedar Rapids Zen Center:**

One place where you can find reference to zazen as a comfortable practice is Keizen Jokin's "Zazen Yojinki" (Things We Should Be Careful About in Doing Zazen). Keizan says, "The Buddha said, 'Listening and thinking are like being outside of the gate; zazen is returning home and sitting in peace.' How true this is! When we are listening and thinking, the various views have not been put to rest and the mind is still clogged up. Other activities are therefore like being outside the gate. Zazen alone brings everything to rest and, flowing freely, reaches everywhere. Zazen is thus like returning home and sitting in peace." Keizan does not mention anywhere in the essay that peace comes from enduring excruciating pain and one suspects that "coming home" does not refer to one's home in military training. . . .

When I practiced at Shogoji in Japan, . . . We were told to be still in our zazen, and half-lotus or full-lotus were the standards for posture. No one yelled if we moved, though, and I don't remember being told to sit through pain no matter what. The main emphasis was on not disturbing others by making noise or creating confusion.

from Barry Magid:

I think the issue comes to whether one stays with a certain amount of pain as a matter of non-avoidance, noticing one's reactions and expectations, or whether the zendo subtly or not so subtly cultivates an atmosphere of mastery and endurance. The sin in this as far as I'm concerned is that it perverts zazen into a means rather than an end in itself. Rather than focused, embodied being, sitting becomes something we do well or badly, pain something we learn to master rather than experience. I remember when G. Gordon Liddy used to go around and do his candle "trick." At a party of well-dressed, well-heeled Washington movers and shakers, he'd hold his hand over a candle

flame until the smell of burning flesh appalled the assembled guests. They'd ask, "what's the trick?" He'd reply, "There's no trick. Just let the candle burn you." This story, I recall, was much admired in some Zen circles, as if "Just let it burn you" was another version of "In the summer, the heat kills the monk." I never want to train anyone in that way of thinking.

**from Roko Sherry Chayat,
Abbot, Zen Center of Syracuse:**

What an interesting exchange. It seems to me that the phrase "easy and comfortable" is our American mantra, and our biggest impediment to knowing true ease and true comfort. If we practice seeking comfort, we invite all manner of mental/physical delusions to take up residence. But we have to find that out for ourselves, through commitment to the Six Paramitas, particularly patience and diligence. One day, the barrier between "easy" and "difficult" dissolves, and the understanding of true "ease" as "repose and bliss" — Dogen's reference to enlightened mind as practice, practice as enlightened mind — is joyfully confirmed.

I think the great challenge to us as teachers is to meet each student's physical/emotional condition (ever-changing) with perspicacity, to know how to encourage/challenge each one according to the circumstances, to look at resistance not as an opportunity for "overcoming" but as a chance to understand the root of that resistance. To see how the body manifests the mind's inner mantra (I can't, I won't, I need, I should) and to soften into the condition of no-I. No-I, deep repose. Pragmatically? For some of my students, those who suffer from chronic illness or painful injuries, I let them sit with one leg out on the floor, or on a chair with a footstool, or even lying down in the rear of the zendo. For others, I encourage half-or full-lotus, watching how pain can be an indicator of wandering mind; return to the breath! For everyone, and myself included, to avoid

physical injury and to pay attention to the ways in which competitive mind can take over. Know where the edge is, and don't force anything. I remind students that willful zazen is dangerous. Willing zazen is entering into the great ease. Rinzai — yes, Rinzai — said, "Take it EASY and DO nothing."



From the editor:

We **always** need material. Send us articles, drawings, poems, photos, cartoons, letters, etc. The deadline for publication in our **Winter** issue is **November 15th**.

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WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE

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

**7:00 - 8:30 — Zazen Instruction
(by appointment; call 551-9035)
— Classes as scheduled**

Friday

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

We are closed on Monday