



# Prairie Wind

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## BUSYNESS

by Nonin Chowaney

The following poem by Mary Oliver is one of my recent favorites. It appears in *Why I Wake Early*, her latest book:

### *The Old Poets of China*

*Wherever I am, the world comes after me.  
It offers me its busyness. It does not believe  
that I do not want it. Now I understand  
why the old poets of China went so far and high  
into the mountains, then crept into the pale mist.*

I also understand why, for like most people these days, I lead a busy life. Sometimes, it gets much too busy, and I feel like chucking it all and heading for the mountains.

Today, for instance, the temple gardens need tending, but first, I need to work on my article for *Prairie Wind*. I'll get to that after I hang a load of laundry on the outside line. Sometime today, however, I need to start preparing for an upcoming dharma study group and to begin planning the seminar I'm leading in New York this Fall, so it looks like the garden work will have to wait. There are also phone calls to return and e-mail messages to answer, and I hope to get those done before I meet with a new temple member at ten o'clock this morning to discuss practice. After the meeting, I need to pack up two calligraphy orders. By the time that's done, the morning will be about over. Hopefully, I can get the orders in the mail this afternoon.

After lunch, I'll start to prepare for a Fundraising Committee meeting this Saturday morning and for the Board Meeting that follows. I might be able to squeeze in some more time on the *Prairie Wind* article after I pick up my car at the garage and before I go out for a hike with Sammy, my dog. We missed our walk

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Inner (Spiritual) Life  
Calligraphy by Nonin

# MORE BUSYNESS

On average, Americans work 350 hours more per year than Europeans. For many people, the 37-hour workweek has become a fond memory. The average workweek for professionals in the United States is now 47 hours. Over 25 million Americans work more than 50 hours per week, and another 11 million spend more than 60 hours on the Job.



A Gallup Poll reports that 44 percent of Americans call themselves "workaholics," many of whom willingly put in insanely long hours — and often brag about it.

Busyness has become a sign of success and importance. In fact, I have met all too many people who try to impress me with their busyness. When they tell me that their day is a complete zoo and there is still too much to do at the close of business, I know there's a fire somewhere because I'm smelling smoke. We all cry out for relief from overwhelming schedules, but the truth is that if someone provided a way out, we wouldn't know how to respond. The tyranny of the urgent keeps us so busy that we can't give attention to the truly important matters.

Sue McMillin

Stress accounts for almost 90 percent of all primary-care physician visits.

The feeling of being hurried is not usually the result of living a full life and having no time. It is on the contrary born of a vague fear that we are wasting our life. When we do not do the one thing we ought to do, we have no time for anything else — we are the busiest people in the world.

Eric Hoffer

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist destroys the fruitfulness of her/his own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Thomas Merton

We have a well-kept yard with a lovely gazebo. I find sitting in the gazebo very calming, soothing to my spirit, and a great chance to reflect on many things. Sometimes I do that. Yet almost every time I go out there, I start scanning to see the weediness of the nearby gardens or the lawn's length (does it need cutting now?) or the cleanliness of the gazebo furniture. All of those things could wait for 20-30 minutes, but I immediately jump up and start to take care of them. Why? Is it habit? Am I afraid to examine my life?

Lynn Kirby

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

by Bob Schenck

In America, Zen practitioners are frequently asked questions about Buddhism and meditation. Heartland Temple sangha member Koshin Bob Schenck belongs to an e-mail discussion group at work in which another group member brought up some of these questions, which follow, as do Bob's answers.

Q: Could you fill me in on Buddhism? What are its basic tenets?

A: The law of the universe is impermanence. Every instant the universe dies and is reborn. Suffering (or discontent, our vague sense that life is somehow not entirely satisfactory) is the result of our desire for, our attachment to, and our clinging to the impermanent. Meditation is a discipline that allows us to see, experience, understand, and accept this truth.

The universe is perfect, sacred, just as it is, but we know it only through the distorting, warping lens of ego, the "I," the separate self. This is delusion. Because of ego and dualism — our false inference that we are separate from the world and from others — we are pushed and pulled around by desire, by competing and coveting pleasure, comfort, and security. We are also pulled by aversion — by fear, hate, and anger. We want to avoid pain, discomfort, and death. To wake up from the delusion of a separate self, moment by moment, breath by breath, is the fundamental precept.

Q: What does Buddhism teach?

A: Be compassionate and kind. Do no harm. Do good. Seek truth. Wake up. Practice, practice, practice.

Q: Why would one want to choose the Buddhist path?

A: Because of feeling discontented, dissatisfied, confused, unhappy, insecure, unfulfilled, and incomplete. Also, wanting to know the truth.

Q: Is one chosen or does one choose?

A: I don't quite understand this question.

One comes to Buddhism because one wants to understand oneself and the mystery of life. It's not like Christianity. One is not "called."

One difference between Christianity and Buddhism is that in Christianity, the emphasis is upon the next life, and in Buddhism, the emphasis is on the here and now.

Q: How are prayer and meditation different? Alike?

A: In prayer, one makes an effort to communicate with god — to make a request or to thank him for his gifts. In Zen meditation, one makes an effort to observe how one's mind works.

Q: When you meditate, what is going through your mind?

A: Whatever comes up. One attends to the present by following the breath. Thoughts come up and pass. When you catch yourself riding a thought, or a "story line" about "me," that is waking up from ego. We then attend to the present by returning to the breath.

Q: What does Buddha have to do with Buddhism?

A: "Buddha" refers to the man who "woke up" and taught others what he learned. The word also refers to the enlightened mind within each of us, our potential for awakening. The word "buddha" is related to the English word "bud."

Q: Was/is Buddha connected with Hinduism?

A: Hinduism is an imprecise word that refers very broadly and loosely to the religious myths and practices of the people of India. Buddha, the man, practiced asceticism and meditation under several teachers. When he finally sat down under a tree and awoke on his own, others

## 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 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.

saw that he was changed and asked him to teach them what he had learned.

Q: What does Buddhism say about where I go after I die?

A: There is no "I"

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# NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

**FALL PRACTICE PERIOD** will begin with a **Two-day sesshin** on **September 11th and 12th** and will end with **Rohatsu Sesshin**, from **December 1st through 7th**.

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 precept ceremonies)**.

If you're interested in participating in Fall Practice Period, **submit a list** of your practice commitments in these three areas **by Tuesday, September 8th**. If this is your 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.



**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 have begun **fund-raising** for the **proposed new addition** to Heartland Temple. Our target is **\$170,000**, and **NZC Board Members** have already pledged nearly **\$30,000** to our Building Fund over the next two years. This pledged amount plus the **\$14,000** already donated to the Building Fund brings us to **\$44,000**. **WE'RE OVER HALF-WAY TO HALF-WAY THERE!** The Fundraising Committee — **Nonin, Jean Bailey, Keith Hale, and Randy Putnam** — plans to solicit pledges from members and regular donors over the next few weeks. **Please help us realize our vision for the future by contributing to the Building Fund**. All donations are tax deductible.

Long-time sangha and Board member **Kido Albert Lickei** has moved to Arizona and has resigned from our Board of Directors. We offer him **many thanks** for his years of service to the sangha and **wish him the best!**

**Special thanks** to all sangha members, too many to mention by name, who serve on our Board and on Committees, who perform temple jobs and maintenance work, who work on special projects, and who maintain our practices and our building and grounds. **All of you are sangha treasures, and we can't thank you enough!**

## SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC this Fall. A **Two-day Sesshin** on **September 11th and 12th**, a **One-day Sitting** on **October 23rd**, and **Rohatsu Sesshin**, from **December 1st through 7th**. Fees: \$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 heartland@prairiewindzen.org to register.**

## DHARMA STUDY CLASS

**Nonin** will lead a **dharma study class** at the temple this Fall. It will meet on three successive **Saturday mornings** from **10 am till noon**, on **October 16th, 23rd, and 30th**.

The class will focus on **Zen in Ancient Chinese Poetry**, and will examine the dharma in poems by Han Shan, Wang Wei, Chia Tao, Liu Dzung-yuan and others. The class is **free to members**. The fee for **non-members** is **\$15 per class**.

## OTHER FALL EVENTS

Sep 1	Ryaku Fusatsu
5	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
29	Ryaku Fusatsu
Oct 3	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
27	Ryaku Fusatsu
Nov 7	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
24	Ryaku Fusatsu

# ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

## ZCP FALL EVENTS

### SEPTEMBER

- 1 —Ryaku Fusatsu(Precept Ceremony)\*
- 5 —World Peace Ceremony
- 7 —Buddhist Studies Class I begins
- 11 —Intro to Zen (9am-12 noon)
- 16 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia (7:30 pm)\*\*
- 17-19 —Communication Workshop\*\*\*

### OCTOBER

- 3 —World Peace Ceremony
- 8 —Intro to Zen (6pm)
- 19 —Buddhist Studies Class II begins
- 21 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia (7:30pm)\*\*
- 22-24 —Two-day Sesshin\*\*\*
- 27 —Ryaku Fusatsu(Precept Ceremony)\*

### NOVEMBER

- 5 —Intro to Zen (6pm)
- 7 —World Peace Ceremony
- 18 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia (7:30pm)\*\*
- 20 —Beginner's Retreat (5:30am-pm)\*\*
- 24 —Ryaku Fusatsu(Precept Ceremony)
- 25-26 —ZCP Closed

### DECEMBER

- 1-8 —Rohatsu Sesshin (in Nebraska)\*\*\*
- \*after evening zazen  
\*\*There is no evening sitting at ZCP on the nights we sit at Mt. Alvernia Monastery  
\*\*\*Please Register for this event

This past June, Deep Spring Temple again hosted the month-long **Prairie Wind Practice Period**, led by **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, Abbot of Nebraska Zen Center. Practitioners came from Iowa, Nebraska, and Maryland to join our Western Pennsylvania sangha. **Many thanks** to **Nonin**, especially for his class on Dogen's Tenzo Kyokun and for his Calligraphy Workshop. **Thanks also** to Deep Spring Temple Abbess **Rev. Kyoki Roberts** for her class on the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Ancestor. During work periods, we **completed the new window project** and **glazed, scraped and painted all the temple windows** inside and out.

**Many thanks** to **Joe Roberts** for cutting the grass this Summer, to **John Ott** for serving as Ino and Gardener, to **Patricia Tomkins** for gardening, and to **Meghan O'Donnell** for painting the bathroom.

Groups from **LaRoche College** and **United Religions Initiative** visited Deep Spring Temple this Summer, as did **Trekkers** (a busload of junior high students from Maine who came twice!)

## COMMUNICATION WORKSHOP

September 17th - 19th

at Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple

Lead by temple abbess **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**

Kyoki brings **twenty years of mediation and facilitation experience** to this weekend class designed to give participants an understanding of the **process** and **skills** needed for those **difficult conversations** with family, friends, and co-workers. Participants will learn the arts of **active listening** and **speaking up for yourself**.

Suggested Donation: **\$100** (includes meals and overnight dormitory space)

This workshop is open to both **ZCP members** and **non-members**. For **further information**, or to **register**, contact **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** at any of the addresses listed below.

## 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



## Busyness

from page 1

yesterday, and we both need regular exercise. Fortunately, I can drop off the calligraphy order at the Post Office on our way to go hiking, but I'll have to make sure that I get back to the temple in time for a little supper and to take the clothes off the line, fold them, and put them away before evening zazen.

Sometimes, the busyness continues day after day. It feels as if I'm juggling ten balls with two hands, and it becomes increasingly difficult to keep them all in the air. At those times, I feel like letting them all drop, getting in my car, heading West, and just driving on! This wish, and the accompanying intestinal cramps are signs that I'm too busy, that I'm not handling the stress accompanying the busyness well, and that I need to slow down, breathe deeply, and take a good look at what I'm doing.

Whenever I do take that good look, I find that I need to pay attention to three things. I need (1) to simplify my life, (2) to maintain daily practice, and (3) to take vacations. I've been working on these three things very seriously lately.

The first, simplifying, is not so simple. When I go over my work as a Zen teacher and temple abbot, I find that everything I'm doing has value, or it wouldn't have found its way onto my schedule in the first place. It's taken me some time to accept the fact that I can't do everything, however, and to learn to prioritize, but I'm getting better at it. I begin by asking myself, "What's most important?" Following the daily practice schedule is way up there, as is helping others with their practice. Giving talks, leading retreats, and educating newcomers and outside groups are also high priorities, as is maintaining the temple. Just thinking about these things, as I am now, helps me to prioritize. When I keep in mind what's most important, I can begin to focus on those things, and if other things keep getting shoved down to the bottom of my list of things to do, I can eventually let them go or drop them altogether.

I've also learned to prioritize within

specific tasks. Every day, I begin my work practice by checking phone and e-mail messages. I ask myself, "Do I have to respond to this one?" If the answer is "Yes," I then ask: "Do I have to do it or can someone else take care of it?" If the answer to that one is "I do," the next question is, "Do I have to do it now or can I let it go until I have more space in my schedule?" This procedure has helped me greatly in managing the many requests that come into the temple daily.

I've found that it also helps to remember that work is never done. My "to-do" list is never fully accomplished, and I doubt if anyone's ever is. I've learned to accept this without guilt. A couple of years ago, I went back to my hometown to help move my mother into an assisted living facility. I noticed that one corner of the back porch on her house was drooping a bit, and I remembered that my father had noticed it and had mentioned to me that he was planning to shore it up. That was about ten years before he died. My father's been dead now for thirty-five years; my mother lived in the house since he died; and the porch corner is *still* not shored up. I wonder if the person who bought the house last year ever fixed it?

I kept a "to-do" list when I was maintenance person for two years while a resident at Tassajara Monastery. I prioritized by moving less important tasks down to the bottom of the list while first taking care of more important tasks, like clearing a fallen tree off the road or fixing a broken water pipe. When I was finally transferred to the kitchen, I was going over the "to-do" list with the person who was replacing me in the shop. I had recently completed all high priority items and was going through the long list of secondary jobs I'd left undone when I noticed that my successor had a funny look on his face. I could tell that he was losing interest, so I crumpled up the list, threw it in the waste basket, and said, "Ah, start your own list." He smiled, and we started walking down to the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. Boy, was that liberating!

## 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 Petitto** at **gppetto@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**.

I've also found it very helpful to understand that I have control over how busy I am. Rev. Kyoki Roberts has been a big help to me in realizing this. Kyoki is the Head Priest at Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple. She is my oldest disciple, and we completed dharma transmission a few years ago. Kyoki now teaches on her own, but we still maintain a close working relationship and a deep friendship. We not only talk on the phone regularly but also teach at each other's practice places.

I've been on the phone with Kyoki many times and found myself complaining about how busy I am and how little help I get. She

## **Busyness**

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usually listens for a while – as time goes on the “while” gets shorter and shorter – and then asks, “Who makes your schedule?” I reply, “I do.” Her response to this is, “Well . . . ?” It took a few times, but I finally got the point and began to actively work toward simplifying my life instead of just complaining about how busy I am and expecting the person I’m speaking with to commiserate.

When I’m bouncing through a particularly busy day and things aren’t flowing smoothly, I pay close attention to my mental and physical condition. Stress is mental, but because body and mind are not two, it manifests through the body. If I feel my intestines start to cramp, or if I start cursing because I dropped something and cleaning it up will cause me to lose valuable time, I stop, take a deep breath, and just quit for a while. I’ll go make myself a cup of coffee and sit out on the porch, quietly drinking and watching the grass grow. Or, I’ll put on my hiking boots, rustle up Sammy, and go out for a nice long walk in the woods. I find it therapeutic to sometimes just stop and say, “the hell with it.” The Buddhist technical term for this is “letting go.”

Because I have to constantly remind myself to simplify my life, I’m particularly sensitive to this issue when advising new students at Heartland Temple. People frequently come to Zen practice looking for something, usually mediation, that will make their busy lives more bearable. I tell them that this won’t work. If we try to cram daily sitting at home and regular temple attendance into an already packed schedule, it’ll only add more pressure and stress to an already stressful life. Before we can carry on a serious Zen practice, we have to make space in our lives for it. Something, or things, will have to go. We also have to realize that simplifying our lives is an ongoing process. If we don’t pay attention, we’ll eventually end up like the person in the following poem, for as Mary Oliver pointed out earlier, the world has a way of coming after us and offering us its busyness:

### **Picnic on the Shore**

Shore grass growing  
among the big rocks  
enduring year after year.  
This is the way to live.  
A simple life,  
the proper arrangement  
of a few elements.  
But here you are  
standing on slippery stone,  
trying to balance  
a full plate and a cup.  
What with the wrappers,  
the flies and the wind,  
already things have gotten out of hand.

Louis Jenkins

One of the ways we can keep things from getting out of hand is to maintain a solid, daily Zen practice. This is the second thing I constantly pay attention to. I’m very fortunate because I live in a temple, so following the daily, weekly, and monthly schedule of zazen, services, and work is something I not only want to do but have to do. I also attend (and usually lead) all special events, like sesshins, study groups, and monthly ceremonies. I never allow a busy work schedule to interfere with other aspects of practice, for I know that without the grounding zazen practice cultivates, my life would be busily spinning out of control.

In the poem that began this article, Mary Oliver refers to ancient Chinese poets going far and high into the mountains, then creeping into the pale mist. One of those poets was Chia Tao. His most famous poem is the following:

### **Seeking, but Not Finding the Recluse**

Under pines,  
I ask the boy;  
  
he says, “My Master’s gone  
to gather herbs.  
  
I only know  
he’s on this mountain,

## **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.

## **Busyness**

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but the clouds are too deep  
to know where.”

trans. Mike O’Connor

This poem is regarded as the quintessential expression of the Chinese mountain-hermit tradition, which has begun to be re-established now that the Cultural Revolution is over and Marxism is losing its hold on the population. In *Road to Heaven; Encounters with Chinese Hermits*, Bill Porter writes:

Throughout Chinese history, there have always been people who preferred to spend their lives in the mountains, getting by on less, sleeping under thatch, wearing old clothes, working the higher slopes, not talking much, writing even less – maybe a few poems, a recipe or two. Out of touch with the times but not with the seasons, they cultivated roots of the spirit, trading flatland dust for mountain mist. Distant and insignificant, they were the most respected men and women in the world’s oldest society.

Many of these people were Buddhist practitioners, and they went to the mountains, sometimes to monasteries, to escape the “red dust” of the cities, the life of dollars and cents, the busy life. They were spiritual seekers who turned their lives toward contemplation and spiritual cultivation, and they went to the mountains for quiet and anonymity, so they could practice the Way without disturbance.

Turning away from the ways of the busy world and turning toward the spiritual life is not only a respected Chinese tradition. It also has a place in European culture. Rainer Marie Rilke, the German poet, expresses it this way:

### **Sometimes a man stands up**

Sometimes a man stands up during  
supper  
and walks outdoors, and keeps on  
walking,  
because of a church that stands some-

where in the East.

And his children say blessings on him  
as if he were dead.

And another man, who remains inside  
his own house,  
stays there, inside the dishes and in the  
glasses,  
so that his children have to go far out  
into the world  
toward that same church, which he  
forgot.

trans. Robert Bly

Sometimes, this “creeping into the pale mist” is a physical reality, as Rilke’s poem indicates. People do say “the hell with it all” and go off into the woods or into monasteries for extended periods of time. I did. Beginning in my early forties, I spent eight years in Buddhist monasteries in America and in Japan.

One of the ways I’ve been “creeping into the pale mist” lately is by going to Deep Spring Temple near Pittsburgh and participating in the one-month Practice Period Kyoki and I conduct there each June. Because Kyoki is Abbess at Deep Spring, she takes care of that function, and although I function as Senior Teacher and give talks and classes, I am also able just to be one of the monks for much of the time. This month of intensive practice provides me with the opportunity to deepen my life in a way that only monastic practice can provide. I always return from Deep Spring settled and centered, ready to resume my work at the temple in Omaha from a stable and peaceful place.

There is also a metaphorical aspect to “creeping into the pale mist.” It can mean going to our cushions and sitting quietly at home or going to the temple and sitting in the zendo. It can also mean cultivating a quiet daily practice as a refuge from the busy world of everyday life and then living from this quiet place when we return to the busy world. At this point in my life, it means grounding my life in zazen and living from this

place when I get up from my cushion and return to my work as a Zen teacher and temple abbot.

When I become so used to moving from task to task — whether outside or inside the temple — that my life becomes merely “hustle and bustle,” it helps to remember this old Zen saying, “Don’t just do something; sit there.” And I do. It also helps me to remember something the Taoist Master Chuang Tzu said, “Everyone knows how useful it is to be useful; only the wise person knows how useful it is to be useless.” This usefulness applies not only to the world we live in but also to ourselves.

The third element in my “busyness plan” is taking more vacations. At an American Zen Teachers Association meeting a while back, we were talking about taking care of ourselves. One of the group, the abbot of a very large temple back East, spoke about how he hadn’t been sleeping well. He’d been waking up in the middle of the night and thinking about what he was going to do with a substantial property that had been donated to his temple for development as a country retreat center. We all told him that he’d probably been working too hard, that the stress build-up around the property had been getting to him, and that he needed to take some time off.

We discussed this issue for some time, and I talked about a session I’d had with my therapist some time ago. I’d been seeing him to help clarify some issues that had been coming up for me around the way I was functioning at the temple in Omaha. Many of those issues had to do with my relationship with my master, Katagiri-roshi, who had been dead for many years but still greatly influenced my life. I tended to do things the same way he did, even if they didn’t work so well in my situation. Instead of changing things, I would stubbornly press on doing things the same way he, and I, had always done them, for example, never taking any time off.

In the course of one particular therapy session, I was talking about how alone I felt in Omaha, and how I would have liked to have my master around to consult with

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Harmony

## Calligraphy Pages Re-done!

Nonin's calligraphy pages on our website have been **completely re-done**. There are now **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 them unframed. **Each piece can be mounted and framed using traditional methods** by any good framer.

The calligraphy can be viewed at and purchased through our website, at [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://www.prairiewindzen.org). Click on **Nebraska Zen Center** and go to Nonin's **calligraphy pages**.

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

## ZEN MEDITATION WORKSHOP

A **three-hour workshop** in Zen Meditation for the beginner, including **instruction in sitting and walking meditation** that harmonizes body, mind, and breath.

Taught by **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, abbot of  
Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple

at **Nebraska Zen Center**

On **Saturday, November 20th**, from **10:00 am till 1:00 pm**

**Cost: \$20**

For further information or to register contact  
Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave, Omaha, NE 68131-1363  
(402) 551-9035  
[heartland @prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org)



*Lilacs — peeling stucco — vines  
I take out garbage  
Old cans and bottles to the curb*

*I pack my daughter's lunch  
In the pink lunch box  
Not sure*

*If these actions are mundane  
Or part of the endless  
Preservation of the world*

*Zen teacher Ikkyu  
Is under the bridge again  
With bag ladies and the girls in spandex*

*I don't know  
If I should invite him home  
Or leave my key in the mailbox  
And move in with him*

*Miriam Sagan*

*from Essential Zen  
HarperSan Francisco, 1984*

## OUTSIDE EVENTS

In the past few months, Nonin or senior sangha members have given talks and/or lead retreats at the following places:

**Iowa Western Community College**  
**Skutt Catholic High School**  
**Clouds in Water Zen Center**  
**Empty Hand Zendo**  
**Millard West High School**  
**Unitarian Church — Lincoln**  
**St. Patrick's Catholic Church**  
**Zen Buddhist Temple — Ann Arbor**  
**Lincoln Zen Group**  
**Millard North High School**  
**Dana College**  
**St. Andrew's Methodist Church**

**Zen Center of Pittsburgh**  
**Doane College**  
**University of Nebraska — Omaha**

Groups from the following places have visited NZC for talks and zazen instruction:

**Bellevue East High School**  
**Bellevue Tai Chi Group**  
**Bellevue West High School**  
**Iowa Western Community College**  
**Creighton University**  
**Bellevue University**  
**University of Nebraska — Omaha**

## Questions and

from page 3

and no place to “go.” The “I,” the concept of a “self” separate from others and from the universe, is the mental construct of ego. To wonder and worry about “me,” about the self, and about where “I” may go after death is ego worrying about ego.

Q: How do I know when I am “awake?”

A: It doesn't take very much meditation to learn what is meant by waking up from the reveries of self to the breath and to the present.



## ***Busyness***

from page 8

about my work here. Much of what I was feeling had to do with honoring what I'd learned from my teacher but yet becoming my own person. At a pivotal moment, my therapist asked me, "If you had your teacher here with you now, what would you say to him?" I blurted out, "Take more vacations!" My therapist responded, "Maybe you should consider taking that advice yourself."

My master worked very hard bringing Zen practice to the Midwest, probably too hard, for he died relatively young. I've always felt that the difficulties he encountered and his inability to break away from his Japanese cultural conditioning made things hard for him and probably shortened his life. For instance, ever since the World War II, Japan has been a nation of workaholics. The prevailing attitude has been, "We lost the war, so we have to work harder." Katagiri-roshi grew up in a culture in which taking vacations was not done, because if you took a vacation, you would let others down. Consequently, he never took a vacation.

My blurring out, "Take more vacations" came out of a profound sense of loss and also out of deep longing to be able to speak with my master about how to function as a Zen teacher. After my therapist said that I should consider taking that advice myself, he added that my own students would probably like to have me around for as long as they could.

Ever since that therapy session, I've been taking more vacations. Each day, I try to do something relaxing just for myself, like sitting out on the porch and quietly drinking a cup of tea, taking Sammy for a walk, or listening to music, which I dearly love, especially opera. Each week, I get out of the temple for a movie or for a longer drive and hike with Sammy out West of town or in the Loess Hills over in Iowa. And each year, I've added a bit more vacation time. We close the temple for the first two weeks of January, and I either take a trip somewhere to cross-country ski or stay at home and do whatever I feel like doing. This past

January, I stayed in Omaha, and fortunately, we had a lot of snow. I was able to ski almost every day. I also did a lot of calligraphy, saw some movies, read a lot, and, most importantly, slept late every morning! It was wonderful. I felt like the ancient Chinese poet Yao Ho in the following poem:

### **Reclusion, Late Summer**

To this place of retreat,  
the world does not follow;  
but many old ailments  
heal here.

I polish words  
Of old poems;  
view mountains  
And sleep outside my hut.

Colored clouds  
cross the setting sun;  
cicadas ring  
in the leaves of trees.

With this  
my heart again knows happiness;  
and who would have thought it,  
without wine or money.

trans. Mike O'Connor

We also close Heartland Temple over Memorial Day weekend for five days, and that has become a treasured vacation time to me. Right now, I'm working on scheduling a few more vacation days in the Fall.

Over the years, I've learned how important it is to simplify my life, to maintain daily practice, and to take vacations. I've learned to recognize the signs of too much busyness and usually quit before I get too off-kilter. I say "usually," for it's an ongoing process with me. I'm constantly trying to strike a balance between working hard and taking it easy. I love daily practice at the temple, and I make sure that above all else, I keep that up. And, I've learned to take and to love vacations. I highly recommend them.



### ***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 1st**.

Websites for **Nebraska Zen Center** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** may be accessed at: [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://www.prairiewindzen.org)

**Nebraska Zen Center's** e-mail address is: [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org)

**Zen Center of Pittsburgh's** e-mail address is: [kyoki@prairiewindzen.org](mailto: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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