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Fall 1999

KNOWING MIND

by Nonín Chowaney

L n an ancient Buddhist sutra, a student asks: "O Master of the Secret, what is Enlightenment?" The Master replies, "It means knowing your own mind as it really is. This is unexcelled, complete, perfect enlightenment, in which there is nothing at all that can be attained."

So this is what it's all about: "knowing the mind as it really is." But what is it, really? We come to Zen practice because our minds are troubled; we seek peace; we want to *know*. We are intrigued by enlightenment, to which Zen meditation is supposed to lead, and we hope to attain it, to experience it. Hopefully, we will, and afterwards everything will be unceasingly okay.

But the Master says that there is nothing to be attained, that enlightenment is "knowing the mind." Most of us, however, are left with a nagging question: "Exactly how do I accomplish this?"

This question is the basis for many well-known teaching stories. The following is one of my favorites. It concerns the Indian Zen Master Bodhidharma and his Chinese disciple, Hui-k'o:



Moonlight — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

Hui-k'o said, "My mind is not yet at peace. Please set it at peace for me, Master!" Bodhidharma responded, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you." Hui-k'o answered, "I have searched for it, but I cannot find it." The Master responded, "your mind has been set at peace."

Hui-k'o was a Chinese monk who, after many years of practice, came to study with the Indian master Bodhid-

POEMS

in the middle of the circle

Above the River

Old monk bowing two leaves flapping rain ends the summer

Sky watch

Wind-filled cloud morning butterflies on early plums four mountains stand open

Holly Spaulding

Leaving Home

I tear up fistfuls of young tomato plants, small clumps of dirt clinging to tiny roots

exposed to the cold air.

Gary Kuhlman

silence

sun slants through an open window

wind tosses slender bamboo

passing through

deer mostly an occasional coyote sometimes fox wild turkey

dog tracks say big and small Badger and Li'l Red my boys

and big man tracks mine from last week

Nonin Chowaney

this Buddha stuff

and no striving to become

'one more <u>ism</u>'

same breath same breath

don't stop don't start

vajra and bell mute snow plummets through the porous air

Philip Boatright



Letter from Píttsburgh

by Kyokí Roberts

 ${\cal D}_{ ext{ear}}$ Dharma Friends,

Last winter, After leaving Nebraska Zen Center to do some travelling and decide what I was going to do next, I went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where I was born and raised, to visit my family. My parents are both in their eighties and were happy to have me there. I'd spent nearly 30 years away from home -- first at college, then working, farming in Nebraska, and eventually, practicing Zen in Omaha, California, and Japan. Both my mom and dad kept encouraging me to stay longer, at least till Thanksgiving, so I did. Then, they said that I might as well stay through Christmas, so I did that, too! My sister lobbied for an even longer stay. One day she said, "Really, as a Buddhist priest, you should be open to anything, even staying for good." She encouraged me to look into the opportunities for Buddhist practice around Pittsburgh. When I followed her advice, I had three experiences that led me to seriously consider staying in the area.

The first was a visit to Pittsburgh by the Dalai Lama. Thousands of people came to see him. I had no idea that there were so many people in the area interested in Buddhism.

The second was connecting with a woman named Rhonda. She had actually had a dream about my coming and was so excited about the possibility of my staying that she introduced me to many people in the area interested in Buddhism and Zen. From them, I received a number of invitations to sit with various groups. I was also asked to visit the Buddhist Society of Pittsburgh, a group that serves as a clearinghouse for all the different traditions. I discovered that there was not only a lot of interest in Buddhism around Pittsburgh but also no other Buddhist priests living nearby. There seemed to be a need here that I could help fill.

The third experience was being requested by a federal prison outside Pittsburgh to serve as spiritual leader for a group of about twenty men who are Buddhist practitioners. They had been doing some sitting and reading, but they had no one to guide them. I met with them and was impressed by their sincerity.

Last January, I returned to Nebraska and talked to Nonin about the possibility of opening a center in the Pittsburgh area. He gave me his complete support. When I returned home, I took on the daunting task of starting a Zen Center from scratch. The next five months were spent setting up a non-profit corporation, writing by-laws and ethics statements, buying cushions, a computer, and other necessities. I also began actively looking for a place.

In June, I returned to Nebraska to participate in Eido Bruce Espe's priest ordination and to attend a one-month practice period with Nonin and two of my dharma brothers, Eido and Tesshin Paul Lehmberg. During the month, both they and Nonin helped me sort out the details and examine the issues around starting a temple. Eido and Tesshin also spent many hours with me going through my prospective by-laws.

Before I came to Nebraska in June, I had been looking for a suitable space to either rent or buy for use as a center. Three times, places that I thought I had rented on the strength of a handshake fell through. So much for handshakes! One place I had tried to buy was an eight-acre hide-away with a two– acre pond fed by a stream that ran over a waterfall. On it was a post-

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

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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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and-beam-constructed house, and although it was in the country, it was only twenty

SANGHA NOTES

Eido Bruce Espe, a long-term student of Nonin's who recently moved to Atlanta, Georgia, was **priest-ordained** at NZC early in June. His full dharma-name is **Ko-un Eido**, which means "Expansive Cloud, Reflecting the Way." **Congratulations to him!**

Nonin and three of the four priests he has ordained, Kyoki Roberts, Tesshin Lehmberg, and Eido Espe, carried on a one-month practice period during June at NZC. Tetsugen Heintz was too ill to attend and remained in Des Moines, where he lives. During the month, Nonin formed the Order of the Prairie Wind (OPW), a religious order of ordained priests, and he and the other four priests became founding members. Nonin will serve as the first Head of the Order. The OPW will gather each June for a one-month practice period.



Founding Members of the Order of the Prairie Wind (l to r) Tetsugen, Kyoki, Nonin, Tesshin, Eido

Shindo Mike Gillespie has returned from Seattle to teach the fall semester at the University of Nebraska — Omaha and is practicing with us again. We welcome him back!

Thanks to **Jeff Graef** for spearheading the **upstairs bathroom remodling**. Hopefully, we'll have that done and the Buddha Hall painted by the time you read this!

Nonin's car has 170,000 miles on it. It's a Honda and he's hoping for a lot more, but who knows? **We eventually need to help him get a replacement**. His income is well below the poverty level, and he needs a car not only personally but also for NZC business. If you have any ideas, or if you have a vehicle that you would consider donating or selling at a moderate price in the next year or so, please let us know.



SESSHIN

There will be two sesshins at NZC this Fall, a **One-day Retreat** on **Sunday**, **October 24th**, and a **Two-day Sesshin** on **September 18th and 19th**. Our suggested donations will apply: \$40 per day for non-members and \$30 for members. Lower rates may be arranged for those with limited income. Please write NZC or call **(402) 551-9035**.

NEWCOMER'S RETREAT

The **One-day retreat** on **Sunday**, **October 24th** will be of special interest to **newcomers** and those who've been sitting for a while but have never done an all-day sitting. It'll also be a **solid day of practice for those more experienced**. We'll sit from **6:00 a.m. till 8:30 p.m.**, with formal meals and an afternoon work practice. **Participants may stay at the temple on Saturday night**. For further information, write NZC or call (**402**) **551-9035**.

SPECIAL FALL EVENTS

We are offering three **Special Events** this Fall: an **Introductory Meditation Workshop** beginning on **Thursday**, **September 16th**, a **Brush Calligraphy Workshop** on **Saturday**, **October 9th**, and a **Basic Buddhism Class** beginning **Thursday**, **October 28th**. All will be taught by **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**. For further details, please see the enclosed brochure or call us at (402) 551-9035

Sep	5	World Peace Ceremony		
		Group Discussion		
	12	Board Meeting		
	24	Ryaku Fusatsu		
Oct	4	World Peace Ceremony		
		Group Discussion		
	22	Ryaku Fusatsu		
Nov	7	World Peace Ceremony		
		Group Discussion		
	26	Ryaku Fusatsu		

OTHER FALL EVENTS

Knowing Mind

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harma, the first Zen ancestor in China. Bodhidharma, however, turned him away. Hui-k'o, after standing outside all night in the snow and being turned away again in the morning, cut off his arm to show Bodhidharma the depth of his desire to study with him. He was then accepted as Bodhidharma's disciple and eventually became his dharma heir. Huik'o serves in Zen lore as the quintessential example of total commitment!

The exchange between Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o cited above, however, occurred *after* Hui-k'o had been studying with the Indian master for some time. After finally finding a true master, convincing him of his deep commitment, and studying with him intimately, Hui-k'o was *still* not at peace. He must have been deeply discouraged when he asked, "My mind is not yet at peace. Please set it at peace for me, Master."

Don't we all know this feeling? We certainly did when we began to practice Zen, because lack of peace and contentment drove us to this path. As soon as we started to sit zazen regularly, our lives smoothed out a little. We became more stable. Things that once annoyed us no longer did, and as it became clear that Zen was our path, zazen became a bigger and bigger part of our lives.

However, no spiritual path is without disappointments and pitfalls. Perhaps we've practiced and studied for many months, or even years, yet we seem to be making no progress. Or maybe we lose a loved one, or a job, and we find ourselves falling into despair. Maybe we've been treated badly, and anger comes up. Then it builds and builds as we keep chewing on it for hours (or even weeks or months), unable to let it go. How many times have we re-cycled ourselves in these situations? Perhaps those of us who've practiced for some time begin to brood over our lack of spiritual progress and become profoundly discouraged. Haven't we then longed for the same

peace that Hui-k'o is seeking?

Bodhidharma's response to Hui-k'o's longing is, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you." He directs Hui-k'o back into himself. for Bodhidharma knows that the answers to our difficulties are always found by looking within. Hui-k'o must understand what mind is and what is causing his pain, and he must know it directly, for himself, before he can be at peace. All Buddhist teachers know this; they know that a teacher's understanding cannot settle a student's doubt or ease their pain. Shakyamuni Buddha, when asked by his disciples what they needed to do to awaken, pointed in front of him and said, "These are forests: these are roots of trees; sit and meditate." Similarly, Bodhidharma directs Hui'k'o inward to find the answer to his difficulty.

Hui-k'o responds to Bodhidharma's "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you" by saying: "I have searched for it, but I cannot find it." I sometimes wonder how much time elapsed between Bodhidharma's injunction to find the mind and Huik'o's giving up and saying, "I cannot find it." Maybe this whole exchange took place in a few moments during morning tea, but Hui'k'o had been examining the nature of mind through sitting zazen ever since he became Bodhidharma's disciple. Maybe he went back to his cushion and searched for the mind for months before he gave up, went back to the master, and said, "I cannot find it." In any case, this "giving up" came as a result of long, serious inquiry, and is crucial, for Bodhidharma then says: "Your mind has been set at peace." With this "not finding," the search ends. If there's nothing to find, there's nothing to fix, so everything must be okay as it is. In this moment of realization, everything manifests as perfect and complete as it is, deep understanding arises, and

LINCOLN ZEN GROUP

A group affiliated with NZC meets weekly on **Sunday evenings**, 7:00 p.m. at the **Lincoln Women's Club**, 407 **South 14th St.** Zazen instruction is available for newcomers. For further information, call **Kido Albert Lickei** at (402) 466-7597 or **Seishin Larry Pelter** at (402) 483-1755.

LAKE SUPERIOR ZENDO

Lake Superior Zendo is located at 407 E. Arch St. in Marquette, Michigan. It is affiliated with NZC and offers daily sitting, special ceremonies, and retreats. Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers. Call Rev.Tesshin Paul Lehmberg, OPW at (906) 226-6407 for information.

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH

Zen Center of Pittsburgh is located on Little Sewickley Creek Road, in Sewickley, PA 15143. It is affiliated with NZC and offers daily sitting, classes, special ceremonies, and retreats. Zazen Instruction is available. For information, contact Rev. Kyoki Roberts, OPW at (412) 741-1262.

peace manifests.

This same issue is addressed by the following exchange in a Chinese Zen text called *A Dialogue on the Contemplation Extinguished*:

Knowing Mind

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The Disciple asks: 'What is it that is called 'mind'? How do we put the mind at ease?' The Master answers: 'You need not suppose a mind, nor need you particularly endeavor to put one at ease. That can be spoken of as putting the mind at ease.'

To know the mind in this way is to know it as it is, as "no mind," as we say in Zen. What does this mean? It means that what we call mind is not a fixed, permanent entity that we can isolate, purify, and heal. What we call "mind" is an impermanent, constantly changing process. Hui'k'o found nothing when he searched for mind; he experienced only thoughts arising and passing away. Viewed in this way, what is there to heal? Thoughts arise. Thoughts pass away. This is the nature of thoughts, both negative and positive. Even if we fall into a persistent, negative state of mind, it, too, will pass away. In the words of Zen Master Dogen:

No matter how bad a state of mind you get into, if you hold out over the long run, the clouds will disappear and the autumn winds will cease.

Liberation -- and in Buddhism, the only liberation is liberation from suffering – manifests when we deeply understand the nature of what we call mind. Thoughts -or mental states, or whatever we want to call them -- arise and pass away because it is their nature to do so. This process is occurring moment by moment. The practice of zazen puts us on intimate terms with "mind as it truly is" moment by moment. Allowing this process to happen with as little interference as possible, allowing thoughts to come and go, is sometimes called, "according with the natural condition of mind." When we don't accord with this natural condition, we create great suffering for ourselves.

Let me use the following as an example. When I was studying with my master, Dainin Katagiri, in Minneapolis years ago, I supported myself by painting houses. One day, I was coming home from work on a Friday afternoon in a

If you use mind to study reality, you won't understand either mind or reality. If you study reality without using mind, you'll understand both.

Bodhidharma

particularly good mood. I had left early and had plenty of time to take a leisurely shower, have a nice dinner, and relax with the paper before I went to the zendo for evening sitting. Life was good!

As I drove into the alleyway behind my apartment building, however, I found the way blocked by a large truck with its back-end open. I glanced over to the nearest garage and saw three men sitting on boxes smoking cigarettes. I looked over at them, raised my hands questioningly, and asked, "Hey, could you guys move the truck so I can get through?" They looked through me, as if I didn't exist, and then turned back toward each other and continued smoking.

This is not right, I thought. In Minneapolis, most of the streets are separated by alleys; garage-doors face toward them. Everyone knows not to block the alleys. It quickly became clear that, however, that these guys had no intention of moving, and I got angry. Or, as the early Buddhist texts say: Anger arose in me! I put my car in reverse and pulled back into the street, wishing I had a big, armorplated truck that I could ram into the back of theirs and push the damn thing all the way to the other end of the alley! I visualized the three of them running out between their truck and mine and smashing them, too. In a few seconds, I was hopping mad, jamming my car into first gear and squealing away down to the corner. I'd have to go around the block and get to my garage from the other end of the alley.

Normally, I would have continued raging, pulling into my garage with a screech and carrying that anger into the house, maybe even slamming the back door, stomping up the stairs, and bitching at my roommate because he hadn't vacuumed the apartment as he said he would!

But this time, I didn't. After I screeched away from the alley, I thought, "Wow, are you angry. Here you were in a great mood coming home from work early, and all it took was a couple of guys blocking the alley to send you into a rage, on a tire-screeching tear down the street. Isn't that silly?" As soon as I said this to myself, the anger dissolved. I started chuckling and calmly drove down the street to the other end of the alley. I thought about how quickly anger came up and how quickly it went away. Once I acknowledged it, it dissolved. "How wonderful," I thought; "I don't have to be a slave to this." Anger is amazingly brief, if you let it be. I thought of the many Buddhist teachings I'd read, such as. "It is the nature of all mental states to arise and pass away; they are empty of own-being and have no substance in and of themselves." As I drove down the street, I thought, "So this is what that means."

Knowing Mind

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That moment was pivotal for me, for in it, I realized the nature of anger, and by extension, all mental states. It is their nature to arise and pass away. What is behind them? Nothing. Who is thinking them? No one. They are just thoughts arising and passing away. As I drove into the other end of the alley and saw the truck still sitting at the far end, the anger was gone. I pulled into my garage and thought, "How quickly that played out, and now, I'm free of it."

In yet another ancient teaching story, the third Zen ancestor in China, Seng Ts'an, addresses the issue in this way:

A monk asked Seng ts'an, "Master, show me the way to liberation." Seng ts'an replied, "Who binds you? The monk responded, "No one binds me." Seng ts'an said, "Then why do you seek liberation?"

I love these ancient koans. They are concrete examples of the means used by Zen masters to bring their disciples to moments of insight into the nature of their difficulty and the way out of it. When we say "Ah!" to ourselves after reading or hearing one of these stories, we are responding to their "rightness" from deep within.

When we begin Zen practice, we regard enlightenment, or awakening, or realization – whatever we want to call it – as something outside of our selves, some mental state or condition that we need to attain. We want to get something we don't have, to acquire something we think we lack. But this is not the case, and these ancient stories point us toward this understanding. I heard Katagiri-Roshi say on many different occasions, "You are perfect exactly the way you are." But then he would always add, "But there's plenty of room for improvement!" For me, the greatest "room for improvement" lies in cultivating an understanding of what keeps us from realizing that we are perfect exactly the way we are. This means knowing the nature of mind and how it functions. According to this understanding, awakening means stripping away delusion, not acquiring someintellectual inquiry or trying to puzzle things out but by just sitting zazen. If we practice diligently in this way, we come to know mind "as it really is" by just sitting still in the middle of it, right in the middle of thoughts arising and passing away. We begin to "know the inside



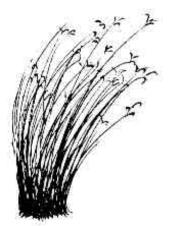
Sangha members in the kitchen after sesshin

thing special. As the sutra says, "there is nothing at all that can be attained."

How do we cultivate knowing the mind? The Fukanzazengi (Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen) is our basic instruction for zazen (sitting meditation). In it, Zen Master Dogen says,

Put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing phrases, and learn to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will manifest. If you want such a thing, get to work on such a thing immediately.

"Getting to work on such a thing" means to sit down and practice zazen. Turning the light and shining it inward means to let things unfold, not by carrying on an from the inside," and gradually our understanding of *who* we are and *how* we are deepens and our true nature is revealed.



Letter from Pittsburgh

from page 3

minutes from downtown Pittsburgh. This would make the perfect country retreat center. However, we couldn't agree on a price. and he wouldn't rent it. So, one more deal fell through, and I resumed my search. Shortly before going to Nebraska, I found a suitable place to rent and planned on signing a lease and moving in when I got back. However, once again, the owner pulled out of the deal, and when I returned, I discovered that the house I thought I had rented was not for rent after all! On a whim, I e-mailed the owner of the house by the pond and he agree to rent it to me. My lease begins on August 1st.

Now, I'm flooded with details and decisions. What time should we have zazen? Should we have one or two sesshins this fall? What kind of weekly schedule should we have? I'm very clear that rather than move into a place where a sitting-group is already established, I want to set-up a new Zen Center, where the schedule, the organization, and even the arrangement of the furniture is based on the understanding of my teacher, my dharma brothers, and myself. I hope to be able to offer a Zen practice place that reflects the training we've received at a variety of Zen Centers here in America and that Nonin and I received at Shogoji and Zuioji monasteries in Japan. Along with offering a daily sitting schedule, I also hope to make personal and group retreats available.

In addition to all of the above activity, I have also visited the prison group regularly and set up a regular schedule for them. The prison was once a monastery, so they have a beautiful chapel in which to gather. Some of the men are Chinese and Mexican, and they speak little English, so I've had to collect sutras and ceremonies in Chinese and Spanish for them. They already had some cushions and a few books but were very happy to finally have a priest come. One man had tears in his eyes when he came with his translator to thank me for coming.



Our most recent lay ordinee, Myoko Erin Walter, and our most recent priest ordinee, Eido Bruce Espe, after Eido's ordination.

This kind of gratitude made the decision to stay here much easier, as did the welcoming attitude of the many practitioners I've met throughout the area. In fact, The Buddhist Society of Pittsburgh is planning a reception the first weekend of August to formally welcome me. Things like this make me realize that I've made a good choice in settling here.

My June trip to Nebraska reminded me of how much I owe to the Sangha in Nebraska and the larger Sangha throughout the Midwest. Many of you have sent your love and support. I hope that I can, in some small way, justify your efforts on my behalf. Nonin has offered space in *Prairie Wind* for me to send word about Zen Center of Pittsburgh, but if you wish, you can request to be on our mailing list. Please don't hesitate to call, write, e-mail, or best of all, visit. We'd love to have you practice with us.

Hands palm-to-palm,

Kyoki

Kyoki and ZCP may be reached at: Zen Center of Pittsburgh, Barberry Road, Sewickley, PA 15143. Phone: (412) 741-1262. E-mail: kyoki@stargate.net.



Eli Criffield, Jisen Caryl Dumaine, Kido Albert Lickei, Win Finegan, and Rosen Julie Garside having fun in the kitchen.

BRIGHT MOON

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MEMBERSHIP

Membership in Nebraska Zen Center represents a commitment to the Sangha and its support. One becomes a member by participating and by filling out a membership form.

We encourage members to commit to monthly donations. The Board of Directors has adopted the following membership categories:

A **Full Member** pledges at least \$40 per month; An **Out-of town** or **Student Member**, \$15 per month.

NZC's Website Address is: www.geocities.com/Tokyo/temple/7228/

Our E-mail address is: nzc@aol.com

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**.

WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE

Morning

Even	ina
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Tuesday — Sunday		Tuesday — Wednesday			
6:00 - 7:00	— Sitting Meditation	7:00 - 8:30	— Sitting Meditation		
	(Walking as Needed)		(Walking as needed)		
7:00 - 7:30	— Service				
7:30 - 7:45	— Cleaning	Thursday			
		7:00 - 8:30	— Zazen Instruction		
Sunday Only			(by appointment; call 551-9035)		
9:00 - 9:25	— Sitting Meditation				
9:25 - 9:35	— Walking Meditation	Friday			
9:35 - 10:00	— Sitting Meditation	7:00 - 8:30	— Sitting Meditation		
10:00 - 10:10	— Service		(Walking as needed)		
10:10 - 11:00	— Dharma Talk		, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,		
We are closed on Monday					

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