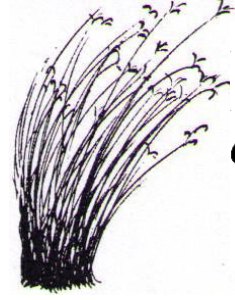


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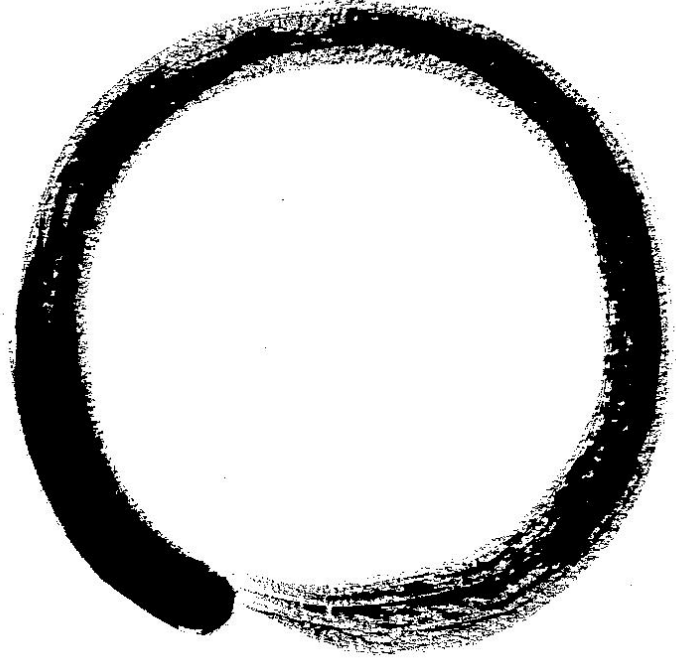
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Prairie Wind



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Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple 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, OPW, is NZC's Head Priest. 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 authorized to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan. Rev. Chowaney is the founder of the Order of the Prairie Wind.

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple is NZC's sister temple. ZCP also follows the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition established by Zen Master Dogen..

Rev. Kyoki Roberts, OPW, is ZCP's Head Priest and a founding member of the Order of the Prairie Wind. She is the senior ordained student of Rev. Nonin Chowaney and has trained at Hokyoji Monastery in Minnesota, San Francisco Zen Center and Green Gulch Farm in California, and Zuioji and Shogoji monasteries in Japan. Rev. Roberts received Dharma Transmission from Rev. Chowaney and was authorized to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan. She was appointed to serve as ZCP's Head Priest in 2001

Prairie Wind (© 2010 Nebraska Zen Center) is the newsletter for both **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple**.

Cover Calligraphy: Enso by Nonin Chowaney

We **always** need material for *Prairie Wind*. Send us articles, drawings, poems, photos, cartoons, etc. The deadline for publication in our Summer issue is **May 1st**.

Websites for **Nebraska Zen Center** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** are at: www.prairiewindzen.org.

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

MUSO SOSEKI

by *Nonin Chowaney*

Muso Soseki (1275-1351) was one of the most interesting and accomplished of the early Japanese Zen Masters. I know of him through his poetry, and I'd like to share some of that with you, but first, let's start with some biography.

Muso's mother died when he was three, and in the year afterwards, he started reciting sutras and saying prayers before the family altar. It was predicted that the precocious little boy would probably enter the religious life at one time or another, and when he was nine, his father took him to a Shingon temple and turned him over to the monks there to raise. When he was eighteen, he took monk's vows and shaved his head.

When he was twenty, he left the Shingon school and became a Zen monk, studying at first at Enkaku-ji. Eventually, he spent twenty years at remote temples in Japan, and he became known as a person of great ability and deep understanding. His reputation grew, and he was eventually appointed by the emperor as abbot at Nanzen-ji in Kyoto and later at Engaku-ji, two famous Rin-zai Zen temples. Records show that he had thousands of students -- monks, nuns, and lay people, including seven emperors. He became the most famous Zen Master of his time, and he approved fifty-two successors, some of whom also became renowned teachers.

Muso was also an accomplished calligrapher, painter, poet, and gardener. He

is known as the father of the Japanese Zen garden, and his exquisite gardens were part of the fourteen temples he founded.

Muso's poetry has survived almost intact over the centuries and has been translated into English by W.S. Merwin and Soiku Shigematsu in a book titled *Sun at Midnight, Poems and Sermons by Muso Soseki*. All of Muso's poetry in this article come from that book. Here's one of his most famous poems:

*In the real world
the pure world
no separation exists*

*why wait
for another time
and another meeting*

*the teaching
on Vulture Peak
is here today*

*who else
are you looking for
to preserve the Way?*

This poem is one of my favorites. It was Zen Master Muso's last poem, written two days before he died, and its theme is an important one for us today. Vulture Peak was a location in present-day southern Nepal where Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples gathered to hear dharma talks

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Muso Soseki

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by him and ask questions. Buddhism, however, is not merely something someone said in the past, something written down in a book somewhere, or a matter for discussion. It's something that we practice, or *do*, and this poem is a last admonition by a great teacher for us to get on with it and *do* it, thereby giving it life through our living of it.

Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching is available to us today not only through scripture but also through the teaching of awakened

persons who have realized it their own lives. Anywhere a Buddha's (awakened person's) teaching is expounded becomes the ancient Vulture peak, and those listening become Buddha's disciples. Muso Soseki asks, "who else are you looking for to preserve the Way?" That can only be accomplished through the practice of it, and who can accomplish that but we ourselves?

Here's another famous poem:

Incomparable Verse Valley

*The sounds of the stream
splash out
the Buddha's sermon*

*Don't say
that the deepest meaning
comes only from one's mouth*

*Day and night
eighty thousand poems
arise one after the other*

*and in fact
not a single word
has ever been spoken*

Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching is available to us today not only through scripture but also through the teaching of awakened persons who have realized it their own lives. Anywhere a Buddha's (awakened person's) teaching is expounded becomes the ancient Vulture peak, and those listening become Buddha's disciples.

In this poem, Zen Master Muso echoes the old definition of Zen Buddhism as being "beyond words and letters." Zen practitioners are encouraged to see into their own true nature and into the true nature of all beings: all things around us, both sentient and non-sentient. This cannot be fully understood by reading or discussion; it must be experienced directly, and that can only come through understanding cultivated through looking deeply into ourselves and our relationship with the

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Muso Soseki

from page 4

world around us. We are not separate from all other beings. Their lives are our lives; the circumstances of their lives are the circumstances of ours. What is the sermon preached by the sounds of the stream splashing? The ever-flowing nature of all existence? The ability of water (and our own ability) to negotiate around obstacles and continue on its path to the sea? If we closely observe ourselves and the world around us and accept all beings as Buddhas preaching Buddha's sermons, we can learn from all beings and accept the truth of existence where we find it, which can be everywhere and anywhere. For example, falling leaves teach us the truth of impermanence, which is a condition of all existence; the leaves and us are not two.

Zen Master Muso's "Incomparable Verse Valley" is echoed by Zen Master Dogen in "Self-fulfilling Samadhi," where he speaks of "the land, the trees and grasses, fences, walls, tiles and pebbles, all the various things in the ten directions" performing the work of Buddhas, which is saving all beings from suffering by illuminating things as they are and guiding us toward the practices that lead to awareness.

The Chinese poet and lay practitioner Su Tung-po also presents the same theme in the following poem, which was written after he experienced a deep awakening while viewing a waterfall near his teacher's temple:

*The roaring waterfall is Buddha's
golden mouth,
The mountains in the distance are
his pure and luminous body.
How many thousands of poems
float through me tonight?
And tomorrow I won't be able to
repeat even one word.*

The next poem by Muso is very personal, and it deeply resonates with me at this stage of my life:

Old Man in Retirement

*I stop worrying about anything
I give up activities
I'm full of my life*

*I no longer
go to the temple
evening and morning*

*If they ask me
"What are you doing
In your old age?"*

*I smile and tell them
"I'm letting my white hair
fall free."*

Given his many talents and responsibilities, Zen Master Muso must have been a very busy man once he became abbot of both Nanzen-ji and Engaku-ji. As this poem shows, he was very happy to be relieved of that responsibility.

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NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SANGHA NOTES

Winter Practice Period began with a **Two-day sesshin** on **February 13th and 14th**. Practice Period is designed to provide structure for people who wish to intensify their practice and their sangha connections for a specific. Practice Period will end with a **Two-day sesshin** on **April 24th and 25th**.

Sangha members **Kendra Neel** and **Tom DiNaro** are **sewing rakus** in preparation for a **Precept Ceremony** signifying **Lay Initiation** on **March 21**. **All are invited to attend the ceremony**.

Lincoln Zen Group is now meeting every **Thursday evening** at Kanho Doug and Krista Dittman's **Branched Oak Farm** north of Lincoln. E-mail Doug at dougd@windstream.net or call 402-783-2124 for information and directions.



Nonin and Sammy at Deep Spring — photo by Bill Allen

Comings and Goings: **Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer** has completed a three-month practice period at Shasta Abbey in California and is back with us at the temple. **Welcome back, Valdene!** **Eisai Elizabeth Muia** has returned to Pennsylvania, and **Kanze Greg McLawsen** has returned to the Pacific Northwest after finishing law school and passing the bar exam. **Our best to you both!**

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER EVENTS EVENTS

SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC coming up, a **Two-day sesshin** on **Feb. 13th & 14th**, a **One-day sesshin** on **March 13th**, and a **Two-day sesshin** on **April 24th and 25th**. Fees; \$40 per day for members; \$50 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. call **402-551-9035** or e-mail us at heartland@prairiewindzen.org to register.

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will lead a **Dharma Study Class** at the temple beginning in late February. It will meet on four successive **Saturday mornings** from **10 a.m. till noon**, on **Feb. 27th** and **Mar. 6th, 13th, and 20th**. The text for study will be announced later. The class is **free to members**. The fee for non-members is **\$15 per class**. For further info, call **402-551-9035** or e-mail heartland@prairiewindzen.org.

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

We'll celebrate **Buddha's Birthday** with a special service on **Sunday, April 11th**, at **10:00 a.m.** Afterwards, there'll be a **dharma talk** and a **pot-luck lunch** with **birthday cake** and **ice-cream**. **Everyone is invited to attend**.

Heartland Temple will be closed over **Memorial Day Weekend**. There'll be **no sitting** on **Thurs., May 27th**. The temple will re-open in the evening on **Tues., June 1st**.

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.

If you are new to the temple, you must have zazen instruction before joining us. Please arrive by 8:30 on Sunday morning for instruction.

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH SANGHA NOTES

If you want to receive monthly schedule updates and last-minute changes to events, join our e-mail list. Go to <http://www.prairiewindzen.org/zcp/list.htm> and register. Or, e-mail ZCP at kyoki@prairiewindzen.org.

Last November, three sangha members sewed a rakusu and received the 16 Bodhisattvas precepts and a Buddhist name in a formal Lay Initiation Ceremony. They are: **Jokai Dustin Misosky**, **Kakuon Rick Lohmeyer**, and **Kigestsu Kaethejean Bleicher**. Also, three young members received the Three Refuges, Three Pure Precepts, a Buddhist name, and a wagesa in the same ceremony. They are: **Kyoshin Damon Moore**, **Joki Gillian Moore**, and **Shinki Molly Bend**. Congratulations to you all.



Deep Spring in the Snow — Photo by Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar

Kyoki, Jisen, Dustin Misosky, and Debra Callahan sat **Rohatsu Sesshin** last December with our sister sangha at Heartland Temple in Omaha, Nebraska.

We've said good-bye to the Moore family and to **Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar**. They've all left the Pittsburgh area to care for family members. **Our best to you all!** And **many thanks** to **Kyoki** and **Dennis Moran** for organizing and hosting the **12-step Retreat** and to **Kisei Tony Roscoe** and **Kakuon Rick Lohmeyer** for putting out our **E-newsletter** each month, which now reaches **over 1,000 people!**

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

ZCP EVENTS EVENTS

FEBRUARY

12-14—Sesshin**
20—Buddhist Studies Class
27—Buddhist Studies Class
28—Dainin Katagiri's Memorial Day
Annual Sangha Meeting

27—Precept Renewal Ceremony

MAY

2—World Peace Ceremony
10—Remembrance Day
25—Precept Renewal Ceremony

MARCH

2—Precept Renewal Ceremony
6—Buddhist Studies Class**
7—World Peace Ceremony
12-14—Sesshin**
30—Precept Renewal Ceremony

JUNE

1-20—Practice Period**
3-6—Sesshin**
6—World Peace Ceremony
21-25—ZCP Closed

APRIL

4—Buddha's Birthday
24—Drawing Class with Dan Kendgia**

**Please register for this event

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Closed Mondays

Tuesday — 7-7:40 a.m. MFM
6-7:15 p.m. DST
Wednesday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. FMH
Thursday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. DST
Friday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. DST
Saturday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
Sunday — 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. DST

MFM — Mattress Factory Museum, Northside
FMH — Friends Meeting House, Oakland
DST — Deep Spring Temple, Bell Acres

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA NOTES

In the last issue of *Prairie Wind*, we mentioned that two inmates at Nebraska State Penitentiary (NSP) **sewed rakus** and participated in **Lay Initiation**. We inadvertently neglected to thank **Mrs. Dehning**, the Religion Coordinator at NSP who facilitated the rakusu sewing and allowed the men the flexibility to sew at the Religion Center during the week. We could not have done this without her.

In addition to the regular attendees, four inmates participated in an **Intro to Zen Workshop** held last Fall at Tecumseh State Correctional Institute.

Prison Volunteers **Zenryu Vicki Grunwald** and **Kanho Doug Dittman** facilitated a One-day sesshin at NSP last Fall and participated along with four prison inmates. The group at NSP, the oldest White Lotus Sangha Group, meets twice a week, on Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons. Prison Volunteers attend Sunday services with the inmates in the chapel.

Many thanks to the **Nebraska Department of Corrections** for welcoming volunteers from a variety of religious traditions into the prisons and for supporting inmates in their desire to deepen their religious practices while incarcerated. White Lotus Sangha groups in four Nebraska prisons have been supported

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

The **White Lotus Sangha**, a group affiliated with NZC, meets on Friday evenings in four Nebraska prisons, **Nebraska State Penitentiary** and **Lincoln Correctional Center** in Lincoln, **Tecumseh State Correctional Institute** in Tecumseh, and **Omaha Correctional Center** in Omaha. For further information, see **the Religious Coordinator** at either of the above institutions, e-mail **heartland@prairiewindzen.org**, call **(402) 551-9035**, or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363**.

wholeheartedly by prison administrators, and **we thank them for it**.

Joe White (aka “**Bama**”) visited the temple last Fall and participated in Sunday services. He was in town to testify before the legislature at the request of the **Nebraska Innocence Project**. Joe was a White Lotus Sangha member at NSP and was released from prison a few years ago after DNA evidence proved him innocent of the crime for which he was wrongly incarcerated for twenty years. Joe is now living in his home town in Alabama, working steady, and enjoying life with family and friends. **Our best to him**.



Muso Soseki

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Earlier in his life, Muso practiced at remote temples in Japan. It must have been a great change for him to lead two of the most important and well-attended temples in Kyoto and also travel and establish other temples. When I read the above poem, I am envious of the joy he feels in finally “letting his white hair fall free.” I spent nearly eight years in monasteries in the US and Japan, and I’ve been abbot of our temple in Omaha for over eighteen years. My life was much simpler in my monastery years, and even though that kind of practice can be difficult, I look at it now with deep nostalgia. In fact, when I visited Shasta Abbey, a Soto Zen monastery in California last Spring, I felt as if I’d come home, even though I’d only been there once before, many years ago. Also, I dreamt the other night of returning to Zuio-ji monastery in Japan, and I felt the same way, comfortable and at home in an environment where administrative responsibilities were fulfilled by others and I was just one of the monks!

I have no plans to retire at this point, but I’ll be 69 this year and have had severe health problems over the past four years that I’ve been fortunate to have overcome. However, I’m not able to work at the level that I’ve worked in the past and have had to curtail traveling to teach in other places. When I read a poem like Muso’s I think, “Oh, how nice it would be to give up all my administrative duties, not have to go to the zendo

early every morning, sit whenever I got up, and not have to do any more office work!”

The next poem by Muso is a mini-treatise on the direction of Zen practice:

No Gain

*Virtue and compassion
together make up
each one’s integrity*

*Nothing that comes through
the gate
from outside
can be the family treasure*

*Throwing away
the whole pile
in your heart*

*with empty hands
you come
bringing salvation*

The key phrase in this poem is “Nothing that comes through the gate from outside can be the family treasure.” The family is the sangha, the buddha family, and we are its members. Our treasure is awakening, and it is not accomplished by looking without but by looking within. If we look outside of ourselves we are looking in the wrong place, for our true nature is realized by stripping away, not by accumulating. By “throwing away the whole pile” in our hearts – all the conditioning, the opinions, and

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Muso Soseki

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the views that we have accumulated – and approaching life with “empty hands,” we save ourselves and others from suffering, for the cessation of suffering lies in letting go.

The following poem is another of my favorites:

The Human Route

Coming empty-handed, going empty handed, that is human.

When you are born, where do you come from?

When you die, where do you go?

Life is like a floating cloud that disappears.

The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.

Life and death, coming and going, are also like that.

But there is one thing which always remains clear.

It is pure and clear, not depending on life and death.

Then what is the one pure and clear thing?

Anonymous — T'ang Dynasty

tioners. It arises when we truly realize that the world is one of infinite possibilities and that essentially there are no boundaries between ourselves and other beings. Zen Master Dogen asks us to "consider the beginning and end of the body." I have done this many times in terms of time and space and

have determined for myself that there is no one place where or moment when this body begins or ends. Our lives are huge, they encompass the whole universe, unlimited by space or time. Direct experience of this leads to the understanding that Muso speaks of in the above poem, and it is an understanding that affords great peace.

In his later years, Muso lived at Rinsen-

ji, a small temple on the outskirts of Kyoto. He died there in 1351 at the age of 77. In the introduction to *Sun at Midnight*, W.S. Merwin writes:

Cremation was not then the invariable rule for the disposal of bodies, and Muso was buried at the end of the main hall of worship. The slabs of rock covering his tomb, which can be seen from outside the building, lie under the floor of the shrine; a rock formation beside

All worries and troubles

*All worries and troubles
have gone from my breast
and I play joyfully
far from the world
For a person of Zen
no limits exist
The blue sky must feel
ashamed to be so small*

Direct realization of spaciousness is frequently experienced by Zen practi-

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.

LINCOLN ZEN GROUP

A group affiliated with NZC meets in weekly on **Thursday evenings at 7:00 pm at Branched Oak Farm, 17015 NW 70th St, Raymond, NE 68428-4041**. For further information, e-mail or call **Kanho Doug Dittman** at doug@windstream.net (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

Muso Soseki

from page 12

them resembles a chain of mountains in a Sung dynasty painting. Over the tomb, two fluorescent light tubes have been attached to the beams under the floor. Above, in the raised shrine, is a wooden statue of Muso that looks life-size. He is seated in what is no doubt zazen posture. The carved robes flow down from the raised seat to the floor. His hands are in the meditation mudra and his eyes are half closed.

Muso Soseki was not only a great Zen Master, but as mentioned previously, he was extremely talented in many areas. None of the gardens he designed survive in their original state, but his gardening principles are reflected in all Zen gardens. His poetry, however, survived intact, and is cherished in Japan. With recent translations, it is now highly regarded by Zen practitioners throughout the world. Here's a good one to end with:

*Green Mountains have turned yellow
so many times*

*The troubles and worries of the
world of things no longer
bother me.*

One grain of dust in the eye will render

the three worlds too small to see.

*When the mind is still the floor
where I sit is endless space.*



Shy About Coming to Zen Center?

Maybe you came to Zazen Instruction once but it's been a while and you've forgotten what you learned. Maybe you haven't come back because it would be too embarrassing to make mistakes in front of everyone, or maybe it was so different from what you're used to that you felt uncomfortable and awkward. Perhaps you don't feel that you could sit for the length of time that we do. Maybe you came a few times a while ago but haven't been back since and would feel awkward, or perhaps you felt uncomfortable during bowing and chanting services.

All of the above reasons for not coming have been expressed by newcomers. They have also been felt by most of us when we first started practicing Zen!

If you'd like to come sit with us some evening or would like to come on Sunday morning for the 9:00 a.m. sitting and dharma talk but haven't for whatever reason, e-mail us at heartland@prairiewindzen.org. Let us know when you'd like to come, and someone will meet you a little early and help you orient yourself. We also give zazen instruction and an orientation to the temple every Sunday at 8:30. Even though we sit for long periods in the evening, walking meditation can be done at any time.

We are not a closed or insular group. We welcome you to come practice Zen Buddhism with us.



Dream — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

CALLIGRAPHY FOR SALE ON OUR WEBSITE



Mu (nothing)

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

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

Nonin also accepts **commissions** to write temple names, individual dharma names, and specific characters or Zen phrases. **For further information**, contact him directly at the following e-mail address: heartland@prairiewindzen.org.

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

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

SUTRAS WITHOUT WORDS

by *Tonen O'Connor*

What is a sutra? Our natural response is that it is a teaching. The Oxford dictionary of Buddhism defines it as "A discourse of the Buddha." So a sutra can be thought of as the truth of the Buddha.

We usually think of sutras in terms of the well-known great teachings: the Lotus Sutras, the Vimalakirti Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, the Prajna Paramita Sutra, or the Avatamsaka Sutra, yet this is only to list the sutras that are comprised of words, sutras that are descriptions of truth. What about the wordless sutras, the sutras that directly demonstrate truth itself?

The Sung dynasty poet Su Tung-p'o struggled to understand enlightenment, and it arrived for him only at that moment when in the mountains at night he heard the sounds of the streams flowing in the darkness. His famous poem describing his experience reads:

The sounds of the valley streams are
His long, broad tongue,
The forms of the mountains are
His pure body,
In the night I heard a myriad sutra
verses uttered;
How can I now relate to others what
they mean?

And then there is the oft-repeated Zen refrain, paraphrased here:

Before I awakened mountains were
mountains and rivers were rivers.
Awakening, mountains were not
mountains, and rivers were not rivers.
Awakened, mountains are mountains
and rivers are rivers.

The poet begins as we always begin, by seeing natural phenomena as metaphor: the valley streams murmuring the teachings of the Buddha, the shapes of the great mountains representing the great Buddha Body of the universe. But then he ventures closer to the truth, for he says he cannot relate to others the meaning of the sutras he has heard. This is because in truth they are not metaphor for the Buddha, they are all the actuality of the Buddha. They are Reality itself, not a description of it.

When you and I take out our cameras and take snapshots of mountains and rivers, we are photographing objects that we label as mountains or describe as rivers. They do not speak directly to us, we merely see our description. Awakening, we encounter them as representatives of the Buddha's great teaching on impermanence and interdependence. They smash into our consciousness as Emptiness. But the final outcome of the process is that we learn that they themselves ARE truth. They ARE mountains and rivers, neither our labels and names, nor metaphors rep-

Continued on page 20

UDUMBARA

by Dainin Katagiri

Buddha's birthday is celebrated on April 8. The following article was originally given as a talk many years ago shortly before Buddha's birthday. It has been edited by Nonin Chowaney.

There is an old legend that the Udumbara flower blooms on the birthday of our great teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. Like a luminous sun, it fills the uni-

unusual, or unprecedented event.

One commentary on the Lotus Sutra says that the "Udumbara is a symbol of spiritual auspiciousness. Its flower-blooming announces the advent of a Golden Wheel King." This means that the advent of a great man who is unparalleled in the world is a rare occurrence. Other sources say that the opportunity to encounter the Buddha

Shakyamuni Buddha gave dharma talks for over forty years, but no one can realize the core of human life by listening to verbal teaching. In order for us to realize the core of human life, the teaching must be put into practice. This is Mahakasyapa as Buddha's disciple. Buddha did not just sit, waiting for his death, without transmitting the core of his being to others. The core of human life is not something limited to one person, not something limited to Buddha. This teaching is universal. The Buddha needed Mahakasyapa who practiced it for many years.

verse, and everything is revealed.

What is this Udumbara flower? There are two plants known as *Udumbara*. One is *ficus glomerata*, a flowerless, tropical plant that grows ten feet tall and produces a cluster of ten fruit. Another Udumbara plant, *ficus carica*, is a member of the same family as the fig tree. Both Udumbaras are flowerless plants. In India, the flowering of the Udumbara is a metaphor for a rare,

Way is a rare and auspicious occurrence, like the flowering of the Udumbara plant.

In Zen, the flowering is a metaphor for dharma transmission. This is exemplified by the story of Shakyamuni Buddha and Mahakasyapa, which begins one day when Buddha and his disciples were gathered on Vulture Peak. To the gathering comes Brahma, who implores the Buddha to

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preach for the benefit of sentient beings. Buddha says nothing, but merely holds up an Udumbara flower before the assembly. No one understands Buddha's meaning except his main disciple, Mahakasyapa, who smiles. The Buddha says: "I have the right Dharma eye, the wondrous mind of Nirvana, peaceful rest. This I entrust to you, Mahakasyapa." Historically, this moment marks the beginning of Zen transmission.

There are three important things to be learned from the Udumbara legend. The first is that right here and right now, you must realize the blooming of the Udumbara flower. In other words, you were born in this world as a Buddha. Birth as a human being is a rare and auspicious event, and it is even more rare for human beings to realize the importance of the here and now. Zen Master Dogen says, "When I look over my past life, I regret how often I have missed the great opportunity in now and hereness to realize the Buddha nature. I have wasted time seeing snow on a mountain, but now realize the beauty that snow creates the mountain." No matter how often Shakyamuni Buddha holds up the blooming Udumbara, we miss the point. In the story, only Mahakasyapa realized the sublimity of human life. He was the only one who understood that human life is Buddha.

The second thing to be learned from the Udumbara legend is that the present is not just the present but also extends simultaneously through past and future. This has to do with beauty. How does the Udumbara blossom? How does the cherry tree blossom? The cherry blooms in the spring, but do you think the cherry blossom ignores winter, fall, or summer? When the cherry blooms in the spring, it is able to touch our hearts with its beauty, because the spring in which the cherry blooms includes winter, fall, and summer.

Often, we limit our perception of ourselves to the present. Seeing yourself in this limited way, you have a bad feeling about your life. However, other people looking at you can usually see your life in broader perspective as it extends into past and future. That's why people respect your present life and try to help you. If we see ourselves limited to some idea of the present, we cannot live our lives in peace. The moment you ignore past life and future life, present life becomes disordered. You become completely confused. The Udumbara makes every possible effort to be, through all four seasons, again and again. This is its beauty, and this is the beauty of human life, which is as deep as the ocean, as high as the mountains. Your life is not just your life, but the life of the whole universe.

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representing the workings of Buddha-nature. Their great teachings are that they are totally, wholeheartedly, unthinkingly SUCH. They inhabit the truth of their own being, something very rare among we human beings. In this sense, they offer the greatest teachings of all, the teaching of simple, complete beings. They are the sutras we encounter in every moment of our lives, yet too often do not recognize.

If we learn to become attuned to their teachings, we can receive their gifts moment to moment.

In the *Jisho-zanmai* fascicle, of *Dogen's Shobogenzo*, he writes:

In general, when we follow and practice the sutras, the sutras truly come forth. The meaning of 'the sutras' is the whole Universe in ten directions, mountains, rivers and the Earth, grass and trees, self and others; it is eating meals and putting on clothes, instantaneous movements and demeanor. When we pursue the truth following these texts, each of which is a sutra, countless thousand-myriad volumes of totally unprecedented sutras manifest themselves in reality and exist before us... At the same time, all instances of following good counselors and of following the sutras are just to follow the self... We

learn in practice that the self is inevitable efforts like these. In this learning in practice we get rid of the self, and we experience the self in exact accordance.

How can a moment of getting out of bed and slipping the feet into slippers be similar to "mountains, rivers and the Earth"? We think of those as grand and the moment of stepping into slip-

Sutras are as close as the flowers in the garden, the leaves of the trees, the taste of water. If we pay close attention, all things are the sutras of Buddha.

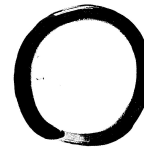
pers as mundane. But it is not a question of grand or mundane. It is a question of total engagement in the particular moment. A river does not question its meaning. It is totally, one hundred percent a river. When my feet meet the slippers that moment is also a teaching of the "Sutra on Total Unselfconscious Being." It can be compared to nothing. It is all there is at the moment. Mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers, feet are feet, slippers are slippers.

We are so busy observing, comparing, describing, evaluating that we are unable to release our consciousness of self through what Dogen describes in

several places as "total combustion." The streams and mountains and flowers and fleas of this life are totally consumed by direct, absolute being. We would do well to listen to these sutras, for they point to the possibility of our "self" being totally the self, as totally as the valley streams and the mountains that exist completely without self-view.

Sutras are as close as the flowers in the garden, the leaves of the trees, the taste of water. If we pay close attention, all things are the sutras of Buddha.

Tonen O'Connor is the abbot of Milwaukee Zen Center. The above article first appeared in the newsletter of MZC and is reprinted here by permission.



Meditation Workshop at Nebraska Zen Center

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

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For further info or to register, either e-mail NZC at heartland@prairiewindzen.org or call 402-551-9035

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This is the beauty and purity of our life.

The third thing to be learned from the legend has to do with Mahakasyapa and his smile. No matter how much we explain the pure nature of being, Buddha nature, our explanations make no sense whatsoever unless we understand the nature of phenomena. The pure nature of being, Buddha nature (or enlightenment), is expressed through the world of phenomena. This is symbolized by Mahakasyapa. This is human life. No matter how much we try to explain the true nature of human life, our explanations do not hit the mark. To realize this true nature, the core of human life, we need individual lives, each of which has a certain form. It is through this self, this individual life, that the true face of being is realized.

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ing to verbal teaching. In order for us to realize the core of human life, the teaching must be put into practice. This is Mahakasyapa as Buddha's

The thready limbs of the weeping willow play with the spring breeze.

They almost touch my sleeve when I promenade in the soft air with Bodhidharma.

The sunset glow of a summer day tinges my window while I watch the colorful clouds in the western sky, and listen to the whisper of Bodhidharma — a message from eternity.

The agitated wind of autumn scatters the fallen leaves in the garden, and the noise wakes me up at midnight.

The light still remains burning, and I thought I spoke To Bodhidharma — nay, it was my own shadow.

In a winter day, children play with the remaining snow.

They make the blue-eyed snowman, Bodhidharma, but it will not last long.

It will melt soon, reducing itself to nothingness.

Nyogen Senzaki

disciple. Buddha did not just sit, waiting for his death, without transmitting the core of his being to others. The core of human life is not something

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limited to one person, not something limited to Buddha. This teaching is universal. The Buddha needed Mahakasyapa who practiced it for many years. When Buddha raised the Udumbara flower, the time was ripe for Mahakasyapa and he could smile.

Zen Master Dogen says, "Within the zazen hall, Udumbara. Within the Buddha hall, Udumbara." Udumbara is encountered in every moment. When Udumbara is encountered in the Buddha hall and in the zazen hall, Buddha hall and zazen hall immediately come to life. Udumbara works in dynamism through the Buddha hall, through zazen, through human life, and through the lives of the sun and the moon. Through the sun, through the moon, through the zazen hall, we have the opportunity to realize Udumbara, the opportunity to understand our true nature.

Dogen goes on to say: "Within the zazen hall, Udumbara, within the Buddha hall, Udumbara. Here the flower blooms brighter and brighter." Udumbara is one with the zazen hall, one with each monk sitting the zazen hall. From the zazen hall, the wood block sounds and echoes when zazen begins. Udumbara echoes. Udumbara echoes the pulse of all life. At this very moment, what happens? Harmonious unity. Buddha.

Just continue to practice on and on.

Buddha's birthday is April eighth. Today is April fifth. But April fifth is the same as April eighth. Today is today. Today is Buddha's birthday. When April eighth comes it is April eighth, not April fifth, so the present moment is very important. Present life penetrates to yesterday, to tomorrow, and to the day after tomorrow. Forever. Today is just today. When tomorrow comes, tomorrow is today. Our life is just a continuation of today -- today -- today. At this very moment, we can hear the music of Udumbara. Congratulations on Buddha's birthday. Congratulations on the auspicious day of your own birth.

Rev. Dainin Katagiri (1928-1990) was founder and abbot of Minnesota Zen Center in Minneapolis and Hokyo-Ji Zen Monastery in Southeast Minnesota. He was a Soto Zen Priest for over forty years.

