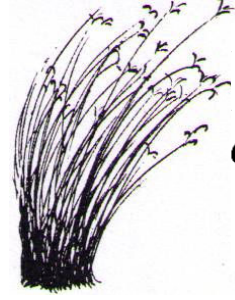


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Prairie Wind



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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. (OPW)

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 (© 2015 Nebraska Zen Center) is the newsletter for both **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple**.

Cover: Enso (Dream), Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

We **always** need material for *Prairie Wind*. Send us articles, drawings, poems, photos, etc. The deadline for publication in our **Fall** issue is **August 15th**.

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@deepspringzen.org

HARMONY

by *Nonin Chowaney*

I spent three years in a Japanese Soto Zen Buddhist monastery. It wasn't easy, but yet, it was one of the most enjoyable and rewarding times in my life.

Living in a foreign country, an Asian one at that, is difficult, especially at first. Cultural and language differences make for constant misunderstandings. The ground you've been standing on for years, the seemingly solid ground of shared principles, values, and agreed on customs, has turned into water. There is nowhere to stand.

Going to Japan was difficult enough, but stepping into a Zen Buddhist monastery there meant taking an additional step -- out of the modern world and into Medieval Japan, which intensifies the difficulties for a free-wheeling American like myself. It was hard, and it was lonely. But it was also one of the best things I've ever done for myself.

My Zen teacher, Dainin Katagiri, once wrote a poem after living twenty years in America about stripping off our cultural clothes and how difficult and painful that is, like stripping wallpaper; it doesn't come off easily. This can be a beneficial process, however. The person is left cleaner, with a minimum of trappings, purer. We can get a sense of what is basic in human life and what isn't and how unimportant many things are that we considered most important. We may even have to throw away some of our most cherished values in order to survive.

We can also see how "Japanese," "American," "Chinese," or "Russian" are mere constructs, conglomerations, mixtures, with no fixed essence. There

is nothing substantial within each to hold on to, for there are an infinite number of ways to be human.

Recently, when I was asked once again what it was like practicing in a Japanese Zen Buddhist Monastery, I talked about how much I learned about getting along in a group. Japanese people do this very well, but Americans generally don't. We have our strengths, but living peacefully and harmoniously with each other is not one of them!

We Americans put ourselves and our principles out in front and promote both at all costs. "Individualism" is probably our most cherished ideal. I've sat through many Board meetings at American Zen Centers dominated by head-banging over pet ideas and projects. We don't seem to be committed to peace and harmony among beings.

Japanese people are. Principles are not that important to them in interpersonal relationships. What *is* important is keeping a "good feeling" in our relationships with others. In Japanese, this is characterized by the word "*wa*," which means "harmony."

Of course, we can go overboard with individualism at the expense of group harmony, and the Japanese can go overboard with group harmony at the expense of individual rights and differences. A common phrase in Japan is, "The stick that stands out gets hammered down!" I saw that happen in Japan more than once.

However, at this time in American

continued on page 4

Harmony

from page 3

culture, when there is so much political hard feeling and cross-cultural violence that it sometimes sickens me, I long for the "good feeling" that the Japanese try so scrupulously to maintain in their interpersonal and group processes. Perhaps someday we can build a culture that doesn't stress one at the expense of the other.

One day in Japan, I was wearing my treasured winter stocking cap at Shogoji Monastery when Ikko Narasaki, the abbot, was about to visit from the larger monastery he was also in charge of. One of the Japanese monks ran up to me and said excitedly, "Nonin-san, take off your hat, Roshi is coming." Now, I knew that hats were not allowed, but it was cold up in the mountains, so we ignored that rule. All of us wore them. I didn't see the need to remove it; it's dishonest to wear it when he's not there and hide it when he is; there's a principle at stake here, dammit! Besides, it's cold. But the only thing the Japanese monks were concerned about was the Abbot's feelings. It would be better to be cold for awhile to preserve peace and harmony and not cause him to invoke the "no hats" rule.

I can recall many incidents around similar issues, and as time went on, I came to value keeping a "good feeling" and acting to promote peace and harmony. It's an issue that I keep working on in my life.

We can practice zazen anywhere, and we can do this alone, sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. The value of living with others is that within a community, a sangha, we get to practice

living with others. No matter how much zazen we sit, if we can't live with all beings peacefully and harmoniously, our zazen is worthless, and we're wasting our time.

When I was in Japan, I wrote Katagiri-roshi a long letter complaining bitterly about my life in the monastery and how difficult it was. Actually, it was a *series* of letters! Part of his response was:

If you forget the practice of no-self or egolessness, Buddhist practice does not make sense for human beings. How do we use and manifest a self on a large scale and in a creative way? It is like a Sky-diver who manifests productive art in the air on the basis of no-self, or egolessness.

From this point, I don't know exactly if American Buddhism is correct or if Japanese Buddhism is wrong. If no-self or egolessness is not actualized in one's life, Buddhism is nothing but an abstract teaching, and no peace or no repose and bliss is found in one's daily life.

In our daily lives, we must strive to manifest peace and harmony through selfless practice, to set aside our self-interests, and to work for the benefit of all beings. This is the Bodhisattva Way. It is especially important to live it in America at this time of rampant violence and strife. Otherwise, we continue to stumble along, banging heads with others as we try to benefit ourselves by promoting, "what's best for me."

Harmony

from previous page



Harmony (Wa)
Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

The Law That Marries All Things

1.
*The cloud is free only
to go with the wind.*

*The rain is free only
in falling.*

*The water is free only
in its gathering together,*

*in its downward courses
in its rising into air.*

2.
*In law is rest
if you love the law,
if you enter, singing, into it
as water in its descent.*

3.
*Or song is truest law,
and you must enter singing;
it has no other entrance.*

*It is the great chorus
of parts. The only outlawry
is in division.*

4.
*Whatever is singing
is found, awaiting the return
of whatever is lost.*

5.
*Meet us in the air
over the water,
sing the swallows.*

*Meet me, meet me,
the redbird sings,
here here here here.*

Wendell Berry

continued on next page

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SANGHA NOTES

Sangha members **Annette Jordan** and **Janelle Arthur** are sewing rakus in preparation for a Precept Ceremony signifying **Lay Initiation** at the temple on **Sunday April 5th** at 10:00 am. **All are invited** to attend the ceremony. There'll be a pot-luck lunch afterwards, so please bring a dish to share.

The **roofing project** has been completed as have repairs from water damage in a couple of rooms upstairs. We now have an **impact resistant asphalt-shingled roof over our entire building**, including the recent addition. Many thanks to **Sho-ju Pam Griffin** whose legal background came in very handy when working things out with the roofing and insurance companies!

The **exterior painting project** is 90% complete. Some storm windows need to be painted as does the trim on the back side of the West addition. We'll be completing the job when the weather breaks in the Spring.

This past Winter **Koshin Milo Alexander** gave a talk at **Unitarian Youth Group** in Omaha, and **Shoju Pam Griffin** did the same at **Peru State University**. **Nonin** visited a class at **Millard North High School** and hosted a group at the temple from **Creighton University**.



Nonin and Leah, one of our next-door neighbors, at her 8th birthday party.

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SPRING EVENTS

SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC This Spring / Summer: a **One-day Sesshin on March 14th**, and **Two-day Sesshins on April 18th & 19th** and on **June 20th & 21st**. Fees: \$40 per day for members; \$50 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. **E-mail us at heartland@prairiewindzen.org** or call **402-551-9035** to register.

BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

We'll celebrate **Buddha's Birthday** with a special service on **Sunday, April 12th**, at **10:00 a.m.**, after regular 9:00 Open Services. Afterwards, there'll be a dharma talk, and then there'll be birthday cake and ice-cream. **Everyone is invited to attend.**

Please note: the temple will be closed over Memorial Day Weekend from Thursday Evening the 21st through Tuesday Evening, the 26th. We will re-open with morning sitting and service on Wednesday, May 27th.

WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE — NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

Morning

Tuesday thru Friday and on 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

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

We are closed on Saturday & 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-mail list. Go to <http://www.prairiewindzen.org/zcp/list.htm> and register. Or, e-mail ZCP at kyoki@prairiewindzen.org. You will also receive our monthly e-Newsletter.

On January 4th, Barbara Gray facilitated a Sangha meeting that resulted in an invitation going out to Rev. Kotoku Crivello to serve as the new Head Priest at Deep Spring Temple. Behind the scenes, the Board of Directors and the Search Committee have jointly been working out a Letter of Agreement with Rev. Crivello for a one-year appointment as Head Priest with all parties assuming that this will become permanent.

Kotoku was ordained in 2004 by Gengo Akiba and received dharma transmission from him in 2012. Kotoku has been practicing Buddhism nearly his entire life, including monastic training in both American and Japan. We are also fortunate to have Kotoku's wife Colleen coming as well. Colleen is trained as a fashion designer and also teacher Zen sewing. Both of them intend to serve Deep Spring Temple full time.

Kotoku will be visiting Deep Spring March 5th-18th. He hopes to meet with as many sangha members as possible during that time. He will give a **dharma talk on March 8th**. Lunch will follow, and a **Sangha Discussion** will follow that.

While Kotoku is here, we will temporarily return to our full schedule. Watch our website calendar for full details.

Kyoki continues to struggle with an **entrapped nerve in her left leg** and wishes to offer her deepest thanks to Sangha members for their continued efforts to maintain the schedule and the property. A new drug has helped her condition, and **she continues to consider treatment options**. Many of you are asking what are **Kyoki's plans** when Rev. Crivello takes over as **Head Priest**. She hopes to continue living and practicing at the temple as **Resident Priest** under a reduced schedule. She'll join daily work meetings and help out as she is able.

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

ZCP SPRING EVENTS

MARCH

- 1 — Katagiri-roshi's Memorial Service
World Peace Ceremony
Group Discussion
- 5-18 — Kotoku Here
- 8 — Dharma talk by Kotoku
- 15 — Tentative Annual Sangha meeting

APRIL

- 5 — World Peace Ceremony
Sangha Discussion
- 12 — Buddha's Birthday Celebration

MAY

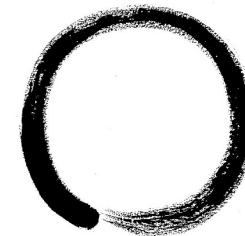
- 3 — World Peace Ceremony
Sangha Discussion
- 31 — Tentative Vesak Ceremony,
Buddhist Society of Pittsburgh
2 p.m.?

[Sesshin is an intense period of practice consisting of sitting/walking meditation, services, work and dokusan (private interviews with teachers). You must sign up for this event.]

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Due to Kyoki's current physical disability, we are only open on these days at these times:

Tues. & Thurs: Zazen and Service, 6:30 a.m.
Wednesday: Zazen, 6:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Sunday: Intro to Zen, 9:30 a.m.
Zazen, service, and dharma talk, 10:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m.



WHITE LOTUS SANGHA NOTES

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.

Volunteering with White Lotus Sangha

by Busshin Joe Smolsky

I started practicing as a volunteer with the White Lotus sangha late last summer. It is something I had been thinking about for a while. Then, even though we had never spoken about it, Zenryu Vicki Grunwald, who coordinates volunteers, asked me if I'd like to. It was an easy decision.

Vicki took me with her on a visit to each of the three places we'd be going. Practice in the correctional system has some differences when compared to how things are done at the temple, so the orientation was essential. Things have to be done differently to meet the regulations of the system. All religious items are stored in a cabinet or locker when not in use. The flowers for our altars are plastic. The bells are smaller. We have zafus but not zabutons, which are replaced by folded blankets or carpeting.

What is not different is the core of the practice. We sit zazen, do kinhin, bow, chant, and offer incense. We talk. We laugh. We gripe. We make the most with what we have and it feels very much like practice at the temple.

Nonin often encourages us to get out and practice at other places or under other teachers. This makes a little more sense to me now. It is nice to see Soto Zen Buddhism in a slightly different form. I am happy that I have this opportunity and thank the members of the White Lotus Sangha for welcoming me.



TENDING THE OX ZENDO SANGHA NOTES

A group affiliated with NZC meets weekly on **WEDNESDAY 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 dougd@windstream.net (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

Tending the Ox will offer three **One-day retreats** on the following **Sundays**:

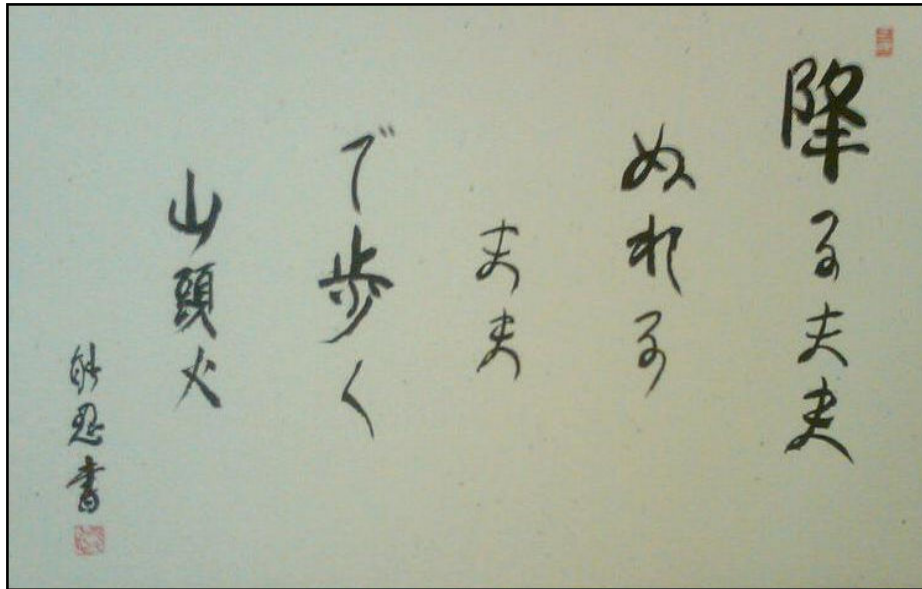
March 15th
April 26th
June 28th

These retreats will run from 9:00 a.m. till 5:00 p.m., and a **mid-day meal** will be served. Attendance is limited to **10 participants**, and the fee is **\$30 per day**. **Advance registration is required.**

A **Zen Meditation and Nature (Spring) Workshop** will be offered **Sunday, March 22nd, from 10:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m.** This will include an Introduction to Zen Buddhist practice and a chance to hike the trails at Branched Oak farm. The cost is \$20.



One of the Ten Ox-Herding Plaques on a trail at Branched Oak Farm. This one is "Seek the Ox."



Just as it is
It rains; I get wet
I walk

Haiku by Santoka

Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

**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.

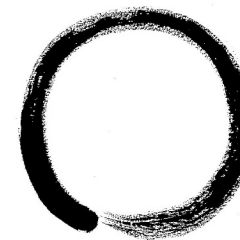
If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak with the appropriate person at either temple after Sunday services.

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.



PERSPECTIVE — “THE ZENS” NEXT DOOR

by Pam Font-Gabel

In 2009, my husband Jack and I bought the house to the east of the Zen Center. It was perfect: old, near Creighton’s campus (where Jack teaches), affordable, and in a diverse neighborhood. When we told our friends about it we teased, “And the house has ‘good karma’ — our neighbor is the Nebraska Zen Center!”

After renovations and finally settling in, we began to gain new perspective. We were not Zen practitioners, and we had cultural perceptions about Buddhism. When we met Nonin, the temple abbot, he seemed a little intimidating but pleasant enough. Our first encounters, though, really began with Buddy and Sammy, who barked loudly and incessantly each and every time we pulled up [not very Zen-like, we mused amongst ourselves]. There were cars constantly coming and going — quietly, but often. One summer Sunday morning, we heard someone yelling profanities in the backyard after stepping on “dog shit that no one had cleaned up.” “Jack,” I whispered-yelled. “You’ll never believe it — the Zen priest next door is wearing his robes, with Birkenstocks, and cussing!”

However, being “the Zens” neighbor was quite enjoyable. They had enchanting, soothing gardens to gaze at from our nearby windows. There were quick, hidden waves from members when we saw them meditating. During warm months, the sound of bells, chimes, and chanting wafted through our windows

— such lovely sounds to awaken to.

A few months after moving in, I asked Nonin if we could remove the ugly chain-link fence that separated our driveways. “It’s difficult to get the kids in and out of the car — and it’s unsightly,” I explained. “As long as you do the work and do not interfere with my fence for the dogs,” Non-



The Font-Gabel Family

in relented. So down came the fence. Later, temple members Pam and Doug and I gardened the strip together. I also added a stone walkway, joining our driveway with “the Zens” driveway. The path began to get used, mostly by me and the kids bringing over food or snacks for Nonin. “Thank you very much,” he would beam graciously. Nowadays, he adds a kiss on the cheek for all of us.

Unlike most of you, I do not know Nonin as a teacher, a guide, or an elder. Over the

“The Zens” Next Door

from previous page

years, I have grown to know and love him as not only a neighbor but also a friend. I know his favorite TV shows (*Dancing with the Stars* and *Royals* baseball games; he hates the Yankees). I know how he takes his coffee (black) and where he shops for groceries and local art supplies (*Whole Foods* and *Dick Blick*). I count him amongst my dearest friends and love him — every part of him. We sit on the front porch together, go to ball games and out to eat together (“You and Nonin have eaten out more often than you and I,” Jack lovingly complains). I borrow tables, spices, and coffee from him. We complain to each other and console one another, discuss books over wine, and celebrate holiday meals together. I’ll never forget that when I was in a terrible car accident, Nonin rushed to the hospital with Jack and cared for the kids while I was treated in the E.R.

The “Zen next-door,” to Jack, Julian, Leah, Amaya, and I, has become “Grandpa Nonin,” who hosts Saturday morning Cartoon Club for the kids, who came over mere hours after Amaya was born at home and held her, who takes Julian out to movies in his smelly, dog-hair covered car, who gave Leah a poem & Buddhist blessing during a special family ceremony. Although I still know barely anything about Soto Zen Buddhism, knowing the head priest of the Nebraska Zen Center has been a most precious gift.

My unfamiliarity with Zen Buddhist practice might still be present, but I know that when I walk into the temple

(sneaking in with my own key, which Nonin gave me, and borrowing some olive oil), I feel calm and balanced. After being joyously welcomed time and time again to community pot-lucks, “the Zens” have become our friends. My idea of what a Zen Buddhist priest was never included a genuine friend who drinks craft beer and shares his humanity so freely and lovingly with our family. I am delighted that my children are not only growing up as a neighbor to “the Zens,” but that they show up at Nonin’s front door on a regular basis. I look forward to seeing members when they come to the temple, and promise to keep sending over baked goods. “Everything is the way it’s supposed to be,” I think, and for that, I am grateful.



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.

I Have Taught Nothing To You

You are nearly as old as the number of years it has been since I came to America.

*I have taught nothing to you at all.
I have done nothing for you at all.*

*But,
You have done a lot for me.*

*I can tell you one thing you have taught me:
"Peel off your cultural skins,
One by one,
One after another,
Again and again
And go on with your story."*

*How thick are the layers of cultural clothes I have already put on?
How would it be possible to tell a story without them?
How would it be possible to peel off the thick wallpaper
in my old house?
How would it be possible to ease my pain
whenever the paper is torn off?*

*If I were not to agree with your teaching,
Believe it or not,
My life would be drifting in space,
Like an astronaut separate from his ship
without any connections.*

*Now I'm aware that I alone am in the vast openness of the sea
And cause the sea to be the sea.*

*Just swim
Just swim.
Go on with your story.*

*Dainin Katagiri offered this poem to San Francisco Zen Center on it's
25th anniversary in 1986*

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 universe, and everything is revealed.

What is this Udumbara flower? There are two plants known as Udumbara. One is figus glomerata, a flowerless, tropical plant that grows ten feet tall and produces a cluster of ten fruit. Another Udumbara plant, figus 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, 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 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 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

continued on next page

Udumbara

from previous page

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. 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.

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

continued on next page

Udumbara

From previous page

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.



Buddha

Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

Visit to Katagiri-roshi

*A pleasure,
We talk of here & there
gossip about the folks in San Francisco
laugh a lot. I try
to tell him (to tell someone)
what my life is like:
The hungry people, the trying
to sit zazen in motels;
the need in America like a sponge
Sucking up
whatever prana and courage
“Pray to the Bodhisattvas” sez Katagiri-roshi*

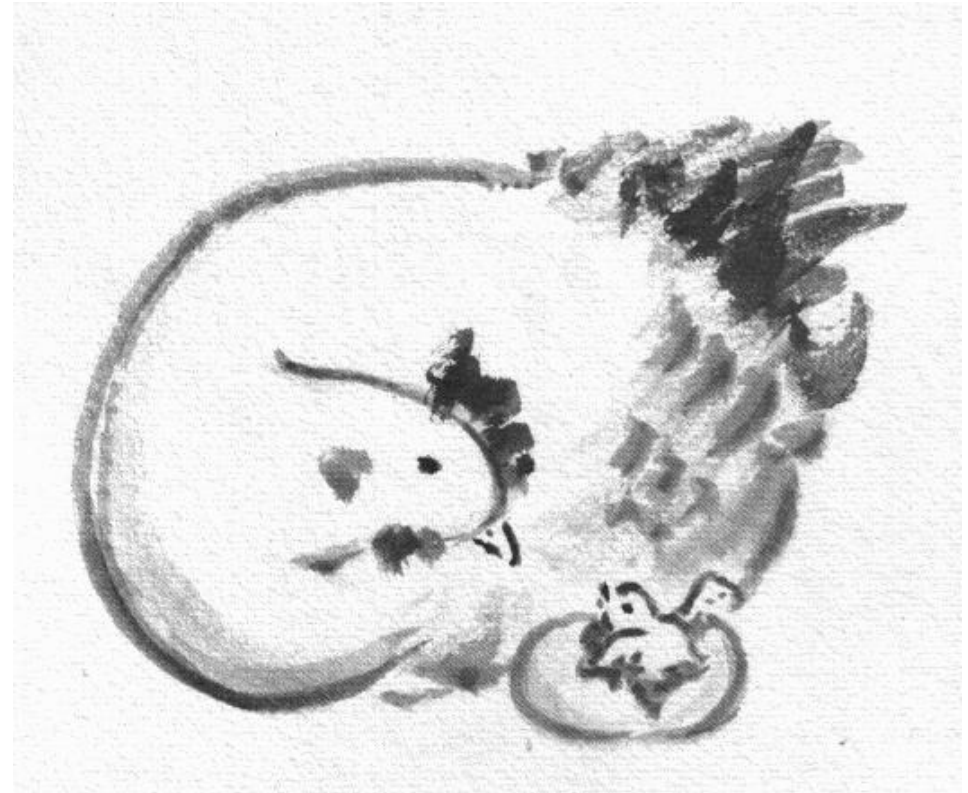
*I tell him
that sometimes, traveling I am
too restless to sit still, wiggle &
Itch. “Sit
only ten minutes, five minutes
at a time” he sez — first time
it has occurred to me that this wd be ok*

*As I talk, it becomes OK.
There becomes some continuity
in my life; I even understand
(or remember)
why I’m on the road.*

*As we talk a continuity, a
Transfer of energy
takes place.
It is a darshan, a blessing,
transmission of some basic joy
some way of seeing.
LIKE A TANGIBLE GIFT IN THE HAND*

*In the heart
It stays with me.*

Diane Di Prima



Hen and Chick — drawing by Tsugen Narasaki

(A Zen Buddhist symbol of the student teacher relationship. The teacher pecks from the outside and the student from the inside. Eventually, the student emerges into awakening.)