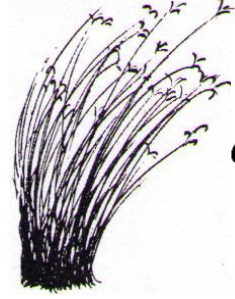


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# Prairie Wind



*Published by the Order of the Prairie Wind for Nebraska Zen Center /  
Heartland Temple and Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple*

*Volume 26, Issue 1*

*Spring / Summer 2016*

# The Four Bodhisattva Vows

by Nonin Chowaney

**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** 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.

**Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple** is NZC's sister temple and follows the same Soto Zen Buddhist tradition.

**Rev. Kotoku Crivello** is ZCP's Head Priest. He trained with Rev. Gengo Akiba, the Bishop of North American Soto Zen temples affiliated with the Japanese Soto Zen system and was ordained by him at Kojin-an temple in Oakland, California. Rev. Crivello also trained in American and Japanese monasteries, received formal Dharma Transmission from Rev. Akiba, and has been authorized to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan.

**Rev. Kyoki Roberts** is ZCP's retired Head Priest. She was ordained by Rev. Chowaney and received formal Dharma Transmission from him. She resides at ZCP and is the administrator of An Olive Branch, a Buddhist mediation and conciliation service.

*Prairie Wind* (© 2016 Nebraska Zen Center) is the newsletter for both **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple**.

**Cover:** — Sunday Morning Zazen, photo from the abbot's seat

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](http://www.prairiewindzen.org).

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

A bodhisattva is an awakened being, and the practice of a bodhisattva is clearly expressed through the Four Bodhisattva Vows, which we chant during each Morning Service and during many other services at Heartland Temple. These vows are an important aspect of Mahayana Buddhism, of which Zen Buddhism is a part. Here's the translation we use:

Beings are numberless; I vow to free them.

Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them.

Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.

Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to realize it.

When I first started practicing with Dainin Katagiri-roshi at Minnesota Zen Center thirty-five years ago, these vows were extremely puzzling to me. How could it be possible to free all beings (or "save" them, which was the word we used back then)? There must be quadrillions upon quadrillions of beings on Earth. Also, what are we freeing them from? If delusions are inexhaustible, how can we end them? Doesn't inexhaustible mean that they'll never come to an end? And, if dharma gates are boundless, how can we possibly enter them all, and what is a dharma gate anyway? I had less of a problem with Buddha's way, for I saw it as the way of awakening, insight, peace, harmony, wisdom, and compassion. These were all very desirable goals. However, how to realize them was yet another conundrum I'd yet to solve.

Part of my problem back then was that I tended to take things that I read in Bud-

dhist texts literally and tried to puzzle them out rationally. That approach only led to more confusion, and it wasn't till I dropped it that I began to understand what the Four Vows actually meant.

One day, I was trying to come to grips with the first of the Four Vows, and I asked Katagiri-roshi, "How can we save all beings?" He replied, "By encountering them wholeheartedly wherever we find them." Oh? That's how? I didn't get it, and I sat with his answer for a long time -- months, years? -- before I did. I had understood earlier that the "saving" or "freeing" mentioned in the first vow meant freeing from suffering, which was one of the three marks of existence: "impermanence, suffering, and no self." It's suffering in some form that brings all of us to Zen Buddhism, actually to all Buddhism, and I would even say to all religious or spiritual practice. We want to stop suffering or overcome dissatisfaction with our lives and live peacefully with some measure of equanimity.

What marks Mahayana Buddhism as different from the earlier Theravadan form of Buddhism is the shift away from only striving for personal salvation, or freeing ourselves from suffering, to making the vow to free all beings, but here I was, practicing Zen, a form of Mahayana Buddhism, and I didn't understand what Katagiri-roshi meant by "encountering them wholeheartedly wherever we find them" and thereby freeing them from suffering. This had become a "koan" for me, some aspect of life and practice that I had to solve or come to grips with.

## The Four Bodhisattva Vows

from page 3

One day, it came to me. Instead of trying to take on the impossible task of freeing all beings *in toto*, focus on freeing the being directly in front of us! "Encountering them wholeheartedly" means facing each being in front of us completely and openly by removing the barrier we've created between self and other, approaching each being without pre-judging or relying on past conditioning, entering each encounter fresh and new, and treating all beings with compassion and kindness. We then cause them no suffering (free them) and ease their pain. This can be manifested concretely in a myriad of ways, by picking up a child and wiping its tears after it has fallen on the sidewalk, by comforting a friend who's lost a loved one, by giving encouragement to a student who's done poorly on an exam, by giving a hug when a friend needs one, by helping a homeless person, by brushing the dog after she's been out for a run and has come back covered by stickers, by feeding the birds regularly, especially in the winter, by taking our shoes off carefully and placing them side by side with toes facing the wall instead of kicking them off and leaving them lying haphazardly, by washing dishes and pots and pans carefully after we've finished using them, by drying them and putting them back carefully in their places, by hanging up our clothes after we've taken them off instead of just throwing them down on the floor, or by simply greeting everyone we meet with a smile and warmly shaking their hand. By living this way, "freeing all beings" becomes possible and we not only ease their suffering but also open our hearts so that we ease our

own.

The second of the Four Vows is "Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them." Delusions are beliefs held with strong conviction despite superior evidence to the contrary. Living this vow means that we have to be clear what delusions are and how we can put an end to them so that we can see things clearly, as they are, not as we've been taught they are or think they are. One of the most common delusions is that beings are fixed and permanent. However, as I mentioned earlier, according to Buddhist teaching, there are three marks of existence: "impermanence, suffering, and no self." If we see things clearly, and by "seeing" I mean not with the eyes but with the whole body and mind, we come to the realization that nothing is permanent; everything that comes into existence eventually passes out of existence, or, more truthfully, is transformed into another form of existence. There is nothing fixed or permanent that exists within any being that passes from one form of existence to another.

When we practice zazen, we, in Zen Master Dogen's words, "turn the light inward and illuminate the self." When we illuminate what we are, we find that there is no self that's fixed and permanent, that what we are is a mixture of physical forms and mental activities constantly transforming from moment to moment with nothing fixed and permanent at the core. There is nothing within me that I can pull out and say, this is "Nonin," and this is something that exists intact from one moment to the next. Thinking that there is a fixed and permanent self is a form of delusion.

continued on next page

## The Four Bodhisattva Vows

from previous page

In the ancient Buddhist text the "Questions of King Milinda" the Buddhist Master Nagasena, compares the

conventional designation and can run you down. Nagasena points out that it is a grave error to say that the chariot exists, but it is a graver error to say that it does not. In other words, to say that the chariot exists independently as a permanent object is delusion, but to say that the chariot does not exist at all is also delusion. To say that the chariot exists in an interdependent, temporary way is reality; in seeing it this way, we see it as it is and are no longer deluded.

As the second vow states, "Delusions are inexhaustible," so we are constantly falling into them. Our practice is to do our best to see things as they truly are, and in this way, we end them. However, because they are inexhaustible, they will come up again. Ending them is a constant process.

The third of the Four Vows is "Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them." In this context, "dharma" can mean either "truth" or "buddhist teaching." Because dharma gates are boundless, they appear in front of us every moment of our lives. The vow to enter them means that we take a step forward both figuratively and literally and manifest buddha's way in our actions as we enter each moment. Be-



The Four Bodhisattva Vows  
Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

self to a chariot. If you take a chariot apart you will find no part you can call a chariot, only an assemblage of parts. There is no permanent, absolute, eternal, self-existing chariot that exists independently. However it does exist in an inter-dependent temporary way as a

continued on page 12

## NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SANGHA NOTES

Sangha member and recent Ino **Shoju Pam Griffin** has moved to California to take care of some family business. **She has been sorely missed.** Pam has kept her house here in Omaha and has visited twice since she left. We're all hoping that she'll eventually move back into her house in Benson.

Two more key sangha member have relocated, and they are also sorely missed. Air Force member **Taishin Eric Currie** has relocated to Washington, D.C. for a year to prepare himself to serve as Head Military Attache in Thailand (at least we think that'll be his title) for three years. We hope he'll end up back here eventually. And, **Cindy Formeller** has returned to Utah to be near her family. We wish her the best.

**Nonin** hosted a class from **Lawrence Elementary School** in December and recently visited a Confirmation Class at **St. Michael's Lutheran Church**. He'll be hosting groups at the temple from **Metropolitan Community College** and **University of Nebraska at Omaha** in the near future.



Nonin teaching Charlotte Hoban the Inkin on New Year's Eve



Teaching Rebecca Hoban the Rin



Getting ready to make some sweet sounds!

## NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SPRING / SUMMER EVENTS

### SESSHIN

There will be two sesshins at NZC this Spring / Summer. Winter: **Two-day Sesshins on April 16th & 17th** and on **June 18th & 19th**. Fees: \$40 per day for members; \$50 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. **Sign-up at the temple or E-mail us at [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org)** to register.

### BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY

We'll celebrate **Buddha's Birthday** with a special service on Sunday, April 10th, 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 May 26th through Tuesday Morning, May 31st. We will re-open with evening zazen on Wednesday, June 1st.**

### 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  
(Walking as needed)  
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 schedule updates, news, and events notices, join our e-mail list. Go to <http://www.deepspringzen.org> and register. Or, e-mail ZCP at [kotoku@deepspringzen.org](mailto:kotoku@deepspringzen.org).

Also, please know that you are welcome at Deep Spring Temple as often as you wish to visit or attend any of our events.

Our sangha has been participating in monthly meetings with the **Buddhist Association of Pittsburgh** and helping to plan and promote the annual **Vesak Celebration**.

Sangha members also visited **Stillpoint Zen Center** in late November in support of their guest speaker, **Beth Goldring**. We have begun to explore how the two Sanghas may collaborate and use each other's space for **Soto Zen Buddhist classes and events**.

**Rev. Kotoku** is working with **Washington and Jefferson College** faculty to develop an **interfaith council**.

An additional **Tai Chi** class is being offered on Saturday mornings taught by **Thaddeus Popovich**, who is certified by the **American Arthritis Foundation** and **Tai Chi for Health**. Contact us for details.

*We are offering Introduction to Zen Buddhism classes twice a month. These are intended for anyone new to Zen meditation and practice at Deep Spring Temple. Check our website for times and dates.*

**Events: Sewing Workshop Series** starting April 9th. There'll be rakusu sewing in lieu of the precepts (see Kotoku in advance). Rakusu and Okesa repairs, Samue sewing (jacket and pants).

**Hive Meditation Workshop:** A half-day event including Honey Tasting Meditation, Yoga with Kimberley from Hive Yoga, and Zen with Kotoku on June 18th.

Please check our website for the latest news, and sign-up to receive our digital newsletter.

## ZCP SPRING / SUMMER EVENTS

### MARCH

- 1 — Katagiri-roshi's Memorial Service
- 19 — Mindfulness Fair at PITT
- 20 — Avalokiteshvara Day / Spring Equinox Ceremony
- 26 — One-day Sitting / Sangha Day Celebration

### APRIL

- 8 — Buddha's Birthday
- 10 — Buddha's Birthday Celebration
- 16 — One-day Sesshin

### MAY

- 15 — Vesak Celebration

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

### SUNDAY A.M.

- 9:00 Doors Open
- 10:00 Zazen
- 10:45 Soji (Work Practice)
- 11:15 Service
- Dharma Talk
- Vegetarian Pot Luck Lunch

### MONDAY

Closed

### TUESDAY

- 6:00 a.m Zazen
- 6:40 Service
- 6:30 — 7:10 p.m. Zazen

### WEDNESDAY

- 6:00 a.m. Zazen
- 6:40 Service
- 6:00 — 6:40 p.m. Informal Zazen
- 7:00 — 8:00 Tai Chi

### THURSDAY

- 6:00 a.m. Zazen
- 6:40 Service
- 6:30 — 7:10 p.m. Zazen
- Intro to Zen Buddhism (See website for dates)

### FRIDAY

- 6:00 a.m. Zazen
- 6:40 Service

### SATURDAY A.M.

- 6:30 a.m. Doors Open
- 7:00 — 7:50 Zazen
- 8:00 Service
- 9:00 — 10:00 Tai Chi for Arthritis (2nd & 4th week)
- 10:00 — 11:00 Yoga (1st & 3rd week)
- 10:00 — 11:30 Introduction to Zen (see website)
- Soji / Special projects

Schedule is subject to change. Check website for updates on times and dates

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website: [www.deepspringzen.org](http://www.deepspringzen.org)



## 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 **dougsdittman@gmail.com** (402-326-6954). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

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

**March 13th, April 24th, June 26th, and September 18th**. 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**.

**Introduction to Zen Meditation Workshops** will be offered at the **Jayne Snyder Trails Center, 228 N 21st St, Lincoln, NE 68503** on the following **Thursday evenings: March 24th, June 16th, September 22nd and December 22nd**. The fee is **\$20**.



## WHITE LOTUS SANGHA NOTES

The **White Lotus Sangha**, a group affiliated with NZC, meets 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**.



### *A Zen Buddhist Fable*

*A senior monk and a junior monk were traveling together. At one point, they came to a river with a strong current. As the monks were preparing to cross the river, they saw a very young and beautiful woman also attempting to cross. The young woman asked if they could help her cross to the other side. The two monks glanced at one another because they had taken vows not to touch a woman. Then, without a word, the older monk picked up the woman, carried her across the river, placed her gently on the other side, and carried on his journey. The younger monk couldn't believe what had just happened. After rejoining his companion, he was speechless, and an hour passed without a word between them. Two more hours passed, then three, finally the younger monk could contain himself any longer, and blurted out "As monks, we are not permitted a woman, how could you then carry that woman on your shoulders?" The older monk looked at him and replied, "Brother, I set her down on the other side of the river, why are you still carrying her?"*

Let Go — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

## The Four Bodhisattva Vows

from page 5

cause the truth of our existence is that all beings are buddha, we smile and warmly shake the person we are meeting's hand in the same way whether the skin color is white, brown, black, yellow, or otherwise as we enter that dharma gate. When we enter the dharma gate at the entrance to a board meeting at work, we vow to carry ourselves peacefully and treat other board members with kindness. When we enter the dharma gate at our front door as we come home from work, we leave work behind us, close the door without slamming it, and greet our spouse with a warm hug. When we spill some coffee on the floor, we enter the floor-cleaning dharma gate, take a napkin or a washcloth, clean the floor, dispose of the napkin or wring out the washcloth, hang it up, and then go about our business. When we see that the bird feeders are empty, we enter the bird-feeding dharma gate, put on a coat and some outdoor shoes and fill the tube feeder with black oil sunflower seeds and the hanging platform feeder with cracked corn and white millet seeds.

Every moment is an opportunity to enter a dharma gate and manifest the buddha way in everything we do. If we miss an opportunity to do so, we should just put it behind us and resolve to do better the next time. During a dharma talk many years ago Katagiri-roshi said, "We walk the Buddhist path as best we can, and if we fall off, we just get back on as soon as possible." I've carried this advice with me all these years. Sometimes this is not easy, but I try nonetheless, and eventually, get back on.

The fourth of the Four Vows is,

"Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to realize it." "Buddha" means awakened person, so this vow means to realize (make real or manifest) the awakened person's way. Why? Because it's unsurpassable. The awakened person sees things as they are, is awakened to it, and then acts accordingly. Most people start practicing Zen Buddhism because they want to "get enlightened," and after that, everything will be rosy. However, enlightenment, or as I prefer, "awakening," although extremely important, is only half of what Zen Buddhism, and all Buddhism, is about. The other half is **acting** like an awakened person, **behaving** like a person who is clear about their true nature and their relationship to the rest of the universe behaves.

In Zen Buddhism, proper, or ethical, behavior is outlined by the **Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts**. Here they are in a translation similar to the one we use at Heartland Temple:

### The Three Refuges:

We take refuge in Buddha  
We take refuge in Dharma  
We take refuge in Sangha

### The Three Pure Precepts:

Do no harm  
Do good  
Live to benefit all beings

### The Ten Prohibitory Precepts:

Do not kill but rather cultivate and encourage life.

Do not take what is not given but rather

## 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.

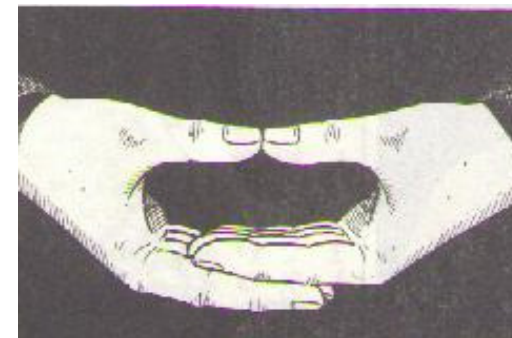
If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak with the appropriate person at either temple after Sunday services.

### 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.



continued on page 14

## *The Four Bodhisattva Vows*

from previous page

cultivate and encourage generosity.

Do not misuse sexuality but rather cultivate and encourage open, honest, and acceptable relationships

Do not lie but rather cultivate and encourage truthful communication.

Do not intoxicate self or others but rather cultivate and encourage clarity.

Do not slander but rather cultivate and encourage respectful speech.

Do not extol oneself nor demean others but rather cultivate awareness of the interdependent nature of self.

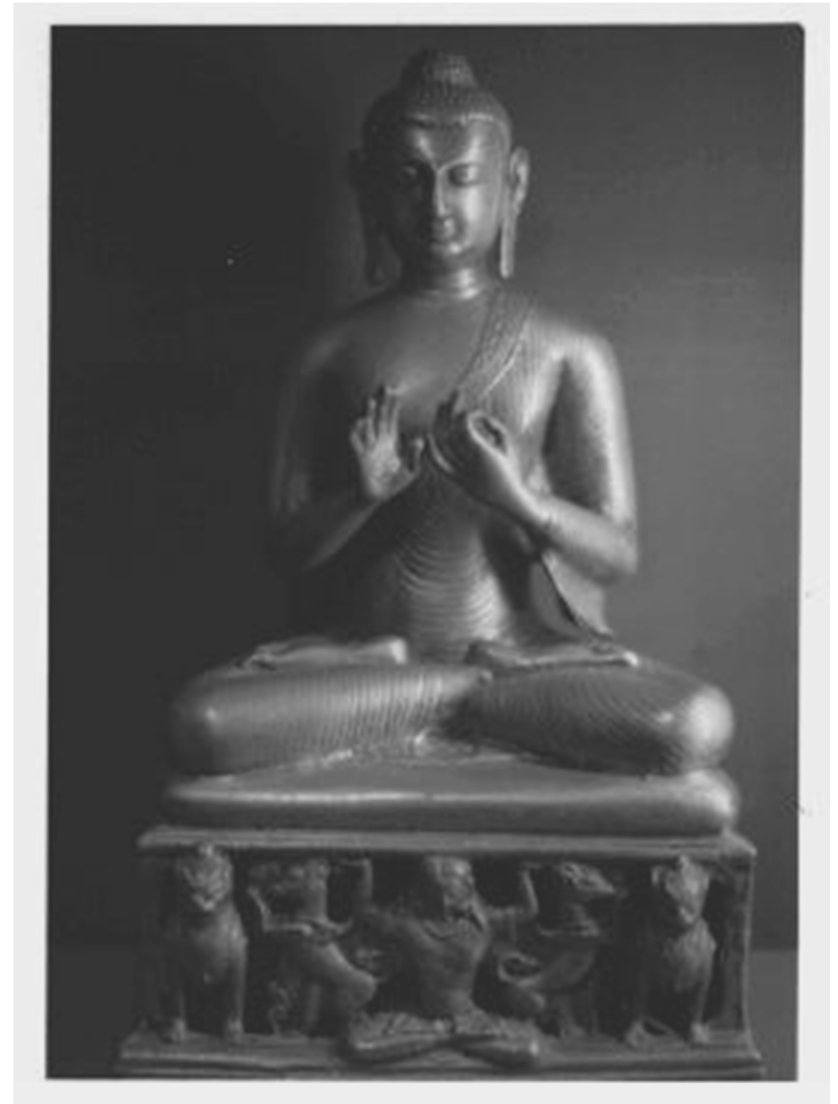
Do not attach to anything, even the teaching, but rather cultivate mutual support and share the dharma with all beings

Do not harbor ill will but rather cultivate loving-kindness, understanding, and forgiveness

Do not turn away from the Three Treasures but rather cultivate and encourage taking refuge in them.

We Zen Buddhist practitioners take the The Four Bodhisattva Vows and all they encompass very seriously. However, we also know that it takes quite a long time and lots of daily practice to even begin to embody them, and we find that it's best to understand that we're not perfect and never will be. As Katagiri-roshi said: "We walk the Buddhist path as best we

can, and if we fall off, we just get back on as soon as possible."



**Heartland Temple Altar Buddha — Teaching Posture**



## CALLIGRAPHY FOR SALE ON OUR WEBSITE



Mu (nothing)

Nonin's calligraphy can be purchased through our website, at [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://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](mailto: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.**

## Sangha Life

By *Dainin Katagiri*

According to Zen Master Dogen, there are three aspects to functioning in the Buddhist community we call the sangha. We practice (1) to benefit others, (2) to develop the sangha, and (3) to follow the ways of the Buddhas and ancestors.

First, the sangha is not a place to practice Buddhism just for ourselves; we practice to do something for others. Our practice is not to enhance our personality or deepen our character but to express our deepest gratitude for all beings, by which our lives are already supported and helped. If we don't practice in this way, our practice is consciously or unconsciously based on egoism.

Yesterday, I received a journal from Eiheiji Monastery. In it, a professor of education wrote of his impressions when he visited Eiheiji. From the monks' attitudes he felt very deeply how strict their life was. On the other hand, he found something completely different, a sense of arrogance. A monk showed him all the buildings, explained their functions, and described the strictness of daily life, but this monk never expressed his gratitude for all beings.

Monks cannot practice at Eiheiji without the help of all beings. Many people work in order to support the monastery and the monks – growing vegetables, working at jobs, and serving society. To create just one grain of rice takes a lot of effort. Without expressing our deepest gratitude for these

people and these things, we cannot practice. That is why the professor said that he found a sense of arrogance. This is really egoism. Though we practice very hard, if we don't express our deepest gratitude for our lives, we cannot practice as Buddha taught. Practice must go on very quietly, not showing off, with humility, gracefulness, even shyness sometimes, with nothing to say, not comment, very quiet.

So remember the real meaning of practice. Particularly in the Buddhist sangha, we have to practice not for ourselves but for others first. Otherwise, egoism and self-centered ideas will always come up. "For others" means not only for human beings but also for all living beings, for a piece of toilet paper, our clothes, our cushions, vegetables, pans, everything. Help all living beings. This does not mean to give them something material or psychological. Giving lots of material things to others isn't necessarily helpful. To help all living beings means to deal with them wholeheartedly whenever we encounter them. Show them compassionate, kind attention. This is the way to help others and all things around our lives: vegetables, books, tables, floors, lights, water – all things, visible or invisible.

Once I had an experience at Eiheiji. We had electricity there just as we have here, so everything was very bright. One day, we had a severe thunderstorm during morning service. One hundred and fifty monks were

continued on next page

## Sangha Life

from previous page

chanting sutras in the Buddha hall when the lights went out. It was completely dark, yet the chanting continued. It was beautiful; all the monks were chanting in the dark. I was very impressed. Then, a monk who took care of the Buddha hall carried in two candles, one for the prac-



Sangha  
Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

tice leader and one for the leader of the service. Only two candles for the whole hall, which was very large. The light was very soft and created shadows of the monks on the floor and walls. I was very impressed by these shadows and the light of the two candles. I felt truly grateful for the light. Usually, we don't have a chance to feel grateful for light, because we are always soaking in it. We

forget how wonderful the light is.

Wherever we live, our lives are supported by all beings. We should express our deepest gratitude for this support, but at home and at work, we often are too busy, and we don't pay attention to things and express our gratitude. That is why sangha life is very important and why we have places to gather and practice. In them, we try to take care of everything with compassion, kind attention, and with gratitude.

This is an important aspect of our practice. Sangha is not a place to build ego or promote self-centered ideas. Instead, we should do something for all beings, not only human beings but all beings. For this, we have to give life to a vegetable as it is, to water as it is, to our clothes as they are, whenever we encounter them.

Second, to practice in the sangha we have to develop the Buddhist community. How can we do this? To help all living beings is to develop the sangha. This is not a matter for discussion. Day after day, from moment to moment, when we encounter a piece of paper, we should deal with it with kind, compassionate attention and with gratitude. This is a great way to develop the sangha.

Third, practicing in the sangha, we try to follow the way of the Buddhas and ancestors. After hearing about the practice of the Buddhas and ancestors, you probably complain, saying that their circumstances were completely different from ours, that we can't live that way. But sometimes, we need to read about the lives of great people – spiritual leaders,

## Sangha Life

from previous page

politicians, or philosophers. It is important for us to read about and study their lives. Then, if we really want to create our lives and reach what they reached, consciously or unconsciously, we have to follow their examples. Sometimes it is impossible to repeat or follow their ways exactly because their circumstances were so different from ours. I don't mean that we should follow them exactly but that we should live according to their spirit. There are many ways to give life to these great people of the past right now, right here. We shouldn't forget to follow the example of these people; we should try to approach their lives as much as possible.

Day-by-day, as we live our lives, we practice with the sangha. As we do, we should always remember to follow Zen Master Dogen's way of functioning: benefitting others, developing the sangha, and following the ways of the Buddhas and ancestors.



## Practicing the Six Perfections

1. **Generosity:** giving of oneself with open-hearted attentiveness.
2. **Morality:** understanding and actualizing the deep meaning of the Precepts.
3. **Patience:** steadfast perseverance and cheerful willingness no matter what the circumstances.
4. **Enthusiasm:** practicing with vigor, diligence, and assiduity.
5. **Zazen:** with one-pointed attentiveness, opening to the vastness of Being.
6. **Wisdom:** manifesting lucid insight into the fundamental nature of This Great Matter.

**Life is short  
Mystery Profound:  
Vow to Awaken!**

from: Zen Center of Syracuse

continued on next page

# Poems of True Freedom

*My daily affairs are quite ordinary;  
but I'm in total harmony with them.  
I don't hold on to anything, don't reject  
anything;  
nowhere an obstacle or conflict.  
Who cares about wealth and honor?  
Even the poorest thing shines.  
My miraculous power and spiritual activity:  
drawing water and carrying wood.*

*Layman P'ang  
trans. Steven Mitchell*

*The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,  
and the weather is clear again.  
If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are  
pure,  
Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,  
Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the  
Way.*

*Ryokan  
trans. John Stevens*

*By the roadside  
cool spring water flowing  
In the shade of a willow  
I stop  
and linger*

*Saigyō  
trans. Nonin Chowaney*

## **Dark Morning: Snow**

*It falls on the vole, nosing somewhere  
through weeds, and on the open  
eye of the pond. It makes the mail  
come late.*

*The nuthatch spirals head first  
down the tree.*

*I'm sleepy and benign in the dark.  
There's nothing I want . . . .*

*Jane Kenyon*

## **no longing**

*Okayama*

*sunlight shining  
on green moss*

*nightingale singing  
in a thicket nearby*

*I eat lunch under  
blooming plums*

*no longer thinking  
of home.*

*clouds drift  
across blue sky*

*Nonin Chowaney*

## **mid-february thaw**

*laid off  
out of work  
snow gone  
temperature 55*

*free to wander  
like han shan's  
drifting boat  
i scribble  
in my journal  
back against oak  
remembering old friends  
from long ago*

*wang wei  
laughing and chattering  
with some old coot  
he met in the woods  
forgetting to go home*

*ryokan  
playing ball  
with the village children  
li po  
out buying wine*

*the workaday world  
drops away*

*grey squirrels skitter  
on an oakstudded knoll*

*a dirt road  
sun flashing in puddles*

*gnarled oak limbs twist  
into a cool blue sky  
last year's leaves  
golden in the sun*

*Nonin Chowaney*

# From the Writings of Kosho Uchiyama

When you have completely clarified the great matter of lifelong practice, you probably think this means you don't have to practice any more; but it is not true. Completing life's great matter, gaining the Way, or attaining satori, means that you have clarified the true meaning of practice, clearly understand in which direction you have to go, and on what you should place absolute value in life.

We usually live our lives without a sense of the true point. All of us become prisoners of our own desires and wander here and there without any direction. "Clarifying the Way" means that we determine the point we should aim at throughout our lives based on the self that is only the self and life that is only life. This is the sole great matter, and this is what "completing the sole great matter of one's life" means. True practice begins at this point.

. . .

"Breaking through the barrier and dropping off limitations" means that we usually build a barrier between ourselves and the outside world. We separate ourselves and others, subject and object. When we go beyond this barrier by letting go of thought, then all conceptual distinctions and verbal explanation like the ones I have been giving are no longer necessary.

. . .

The Six Realms of samsara are simply the way people live, losing touch with the reality of life, floating around in space. These Six Realms are hell, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting spirits, human beings, and heavenly beings. People lose their heads by treating abstract concepts as if they were real. The Six Realms are a measurement of the degree to which one does this.

Satori is getting our feet on the ground of the reality of life before we fall from the clouds. The phrases, "actualizing enlightenment" and "actualizing anuttara samyak sambodhi" refer to this.

How do we live on the ground of the reality of life in a concrete way rather than living with our heads in the clouds of concepts? We see a cup, society, and money in our own particular world. In this whole world, north, east, south, and west, no matter where we look, we see nothing but our self. Instead of living in the world which is shared by all of us, the self lives in a world in which there is nothing but the self. This oneness of the world and self is dharma. Both "wondrous dharma" and "Buddha Dharma" are referring to this.

from previous page

You cannot fail or succeed in practicing zazen. This truth is obvious. No one can do anything but live out the self. However, in some prescribed paths of practice it is necessary to receive the affirmation of your teacher after having practiced a certain length of time. If your teacher says your realization is correct, you succeed. If not, you fail. Even though many people try with all their might, I would guess the percentage of people who gain satori is low. The gate to enlightenment for them must be narrower than the gate to Japanese universities is for Japanese students.

However, the zazen taught by Dogen ZEnji is not like that; it is zazen as a true religion. It is not zazen as a kind of discipline or training. There is no failure or success in zazen as a true religion. All of us can be saved. This is only natural because we just practice the reality of life which is abundantly inherent in every person.

However, the reality of life is not manifested without practicing zazen, and it is actualized only inasmuch as you practice zazen. The reality of life is not attained without realization. If you do not actualize the reality of life, it is not attained.

. . .

Some people say that we should gain satori in order to experience dropping off body and mind. However, dropping off body and mind should not be misunderstood as a kind of satori experience in which our body and mind disappear. In the latter part of *Hokyoki* [Dogen's China Journal—ed.], it is said that dropping off body and mind is zazen. This is clearly mentioned. Just to sit wholeheartedly is dropping off body and mind. When we sit, letting go of all thoughts which reify abstract concepts, all things fall off. This is dropping off body and mind.

