

# Prairie Wind

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## FINDING A TEACHER

by Nonin Chowaney

The student/teacher relationship is extremely important in Zen Buddhism. It is so important that Zen Master Dogen said, “If you cannot find a true teacher, it is better not to practice.”

These are strong words. Anyone either practicing Zen or thinking about practicing needs to take them to heart.

In our tradition, the student/teacher relationship must be direct – “face-to-face” the ancient texts say. Teachers serve not only as guides but also as examples of how to practice and of the long-term effects of practice. Student and teacher must meet and practice together, for Zen masters – especially Soto Zen masters – teach through direct contact in the practice environment by living through everyday life situations with their students.

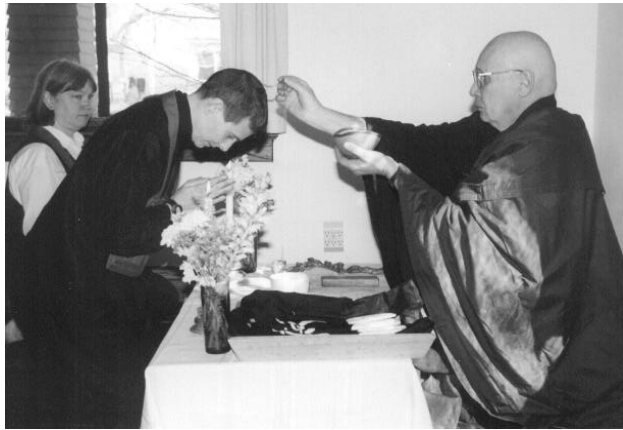
So, finding a teacher is paramount. After finding one, accepting the person as your teacher and committing to the student/teacher relationship is the second necessary step. The third is to stick with your teacher over the long haul.

There are many stories in traditional Zen literature about Zen students who looked long and hard for a teacher before they settled in to study with one. In the ancient koan collections and biographies, we find references to traveling



Samadhi (Absorption) — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

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*Receiving the precepts  
living beings are one with Buddhas  
Buddhas are one with all beings.*

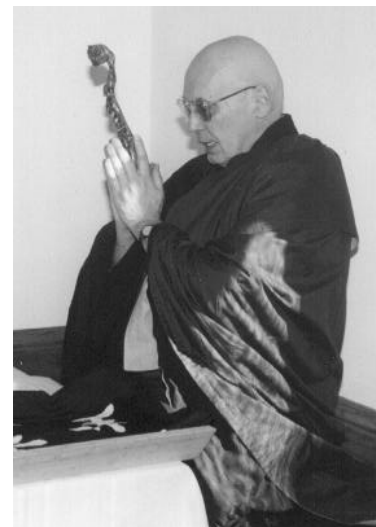
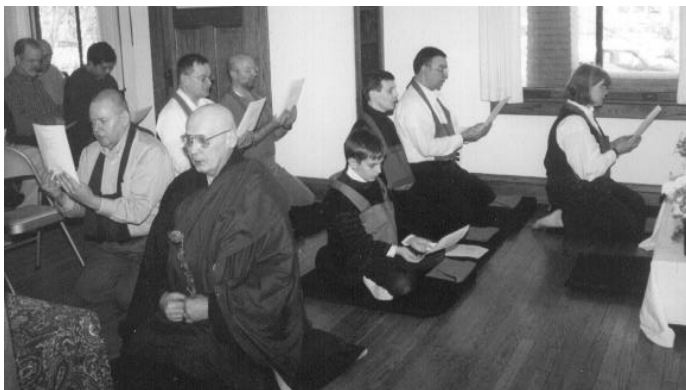
*Individuals, just as they are,  
reveal the unity of Buddhas and beings  
without inside or outside.*

*It is wholly manifested  
at this very moment  
in this very place*

*Zen Master Gesshu Soko*



**Lay Ordination — March 4, 2001**



# ABOUT TEACHERS TEACHING

Life itself is one great teacher, but we must realize that life uses a variety of means to teach. We change ourselves only by changing our consciousness, but a teacher is usually the catalyst. Be they Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, or Jew, all authentic teachers function in this way, for they speak unapologetically for, and in the name of, reality, truth without limit. . . .

Though hardly infallible, the true teacher suffers no compromise on matters he understands; he or she is radically committed to truth, with an integrity that mocks our ambivalence. It is true that we appreciate the teacher when we are not in her line of fire, or when her eloquence serves our interests. We are the first to accord her tribute and respect. But how we squirm when the teacher highlights our own duplicity, calling us to task as well. Then our smiles vanish; consternation is written all over us, and we resist accepting it. It is all so basic; change is for the other person, not me. . . .

While we might be more than willing to accept teaching on an academic or professional level, when it comes to the way we are as individuals, how we think and act, we don't like being told that there is anything wrong with our mind-set or behavior. Yet that is what true teaching is about. Shouldn't we be grateful for the teacher's candor, in whatever setting it appears, for a voice that keeps us honest?

The Monks of New Skete

When visiting a Zen master to seek instruction, listen to his [or her] teaching without trying to make it conform to your own self-centered viewpoint; otherwise you will be unable to understand what he is saying. Purifying your own body and mind, eyes and ears, simply listen to the teaching, expelling any other thought.

Unify your body and mind and receive the master's teaching as if water were being poured from one vessel into another. If you do so, then for the first time you will be able to understand the teaching.

Zen Master Dogen

When you meet a master who expounds the supreme Bodhi-wisdom, do not consider his birth, look at his appearance, dislike his faults, or worry about his behavior. Rather, out of respect for his great Wisdom, reverently prostrate yourself before him three times a day — morning, noon, and evening — giving him no cause for worry.

Shakyamuni Buddha

A roshi [venerable teacher] may be deeply enlightened, with many followers, and yet be the wrong teacher for you. Why? Because he fails to arouse in you feelings of confidence and devotion so that you can willingly bow down before him and, childlike, receive his teaching. You must be able to say with conviction, "He is the teacher for me — the one I've been searching for!" And yet it is also true that the moment you spontaneously cry out, "Oh help me! I need help!" you open yourself to the teacher right for you. . . .

The teachers you remember with gratitude are not those who made it easy for you but the ones who compassionately gave you a hard, painful time.

Roshi Philip Kapleau

## Nebraska Zen Center Officers

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Nebraska Zen Center is a Soto Zen Buddhist Temple established for Zen practice. The center follows the tradition established in Japan by Zen Master Eihei Dogen in the 13th century and transmitted in this century by two Masters, Rev. Shunryu Suzuki, founder of San Francisco Zen Center and author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* and Rev. Dainin Katagiri, who assisted Rev. Suzuki in San Francisco and later founded Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis. Rev. Katagiri was instrumental in establishing Nebraska Zen Center in 1975.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, an American Zen Master, is NZC's Head Priest and Teacher. He trained with Rev. Katagiri and was ordained by him. Rev. Chowaney also trained at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California and in Japan at Zuio-ji and Shogo-ji monasteries. He received formal Dharma Transmission from Rev. Katagiri and has been

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# NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

Six people participated in **Lay Ordination** at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple in March: **Jean Bailey, Winslow Dumaine, Margaret Kurtz, Joe Marshall, Ken McClure, and Jay Pashalek**. Their dharma names are — Jean: **Chuko** (Constant Light), Winslow: **Getsudo** (Moon Child), Margaret: **Myo-en** (Wondrous Circle), Joe: **Ryoshin** (Good Heart), Ken, **Heishin** (Steady Heart), Jay: **Hoshu** (Dharma Island). **Congratulations to all of you!**

The annual **Prairie Wind Retreat** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple** near Pittsburgh this year, so **Nonin** will be gone for the entire month. We will, however, be maintaining our **regular schedule** (printed on **page 12**) with two exceptions: there will be **no early (6:00 a.m.) sitting on Saturdays and Sundays**, and there will be a **Study Class on Sunday mornings** in place of the regular dharma talk. **Study Class details** are in the box to the right. It is open to all.

**Tesshin Paul Lehmborg**, a long-time student of Nonin's who lives and practices in Marquette, Michigan, has decided to end **priest training** and return to **lay practice**. **We wish him well during this transition.**

**Nonin** led a **One-day sesshin** for the **White Lotus Sangha** at Nebraska State Penitentiary in Lincoln last April 7th. Also attending, along with twelve sangha members, were **Seishin Larry Pelter** and **Zengan Jeff Graef** of the **Lincoln Zen Group**. This was the first sesshin ever held at the penitentiary.

A Zen group **affiliated with NZC** has been formed at **Lincoln Correctional Center**. Many thanks go to **Leslie Collins** for organizing the group. **Nonin** visits LCC once a month. Also helping with the group, and with the **White Lotus Sangha** at the State Penitentiary, are **Taido Jon Kayne, Seishin Larry Pelter, and Zengan Jeff Graef**. Thanks to all of you for working with the prison sanghas!

**Lake Superior Zendo** in Marquette, Michigan has decided to end their affiliation with the **Order of the Prairie Wind** and **NZC**. We wish them well.

**Hearty Congratulations** to sangha member **Chanel Helgason**, who recently graduated from the **University of Nebraska Medical School**. Chanel will be moving to Tucson, Arizona this summer to begin her residency in Psychiatry. **We wish her the best.**

**Thanks to all those** who've worked out in the yard and gardens this Spring, especially to **Nonin, Mark Prideaux, Craig Fuhs, and Hoshu Jay Pashalek**. Thanks also to **Jay, Ryoshin Joe Marshall, and Heishin Ken McClure** for help with the screens, and to anyone not mentioned here! Also **thanks to Marcia Prideaux** for updating our database.



## SESSHIN

There will be no sesshins at NZC this Summer. Our usual **Two-day sitting** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple in Pittsburgh on June 9th and 10th**. Contact Deep Spring Temple for details. Their addresses and phone number are at the bottom of page 5.

## DHARMA STUDY CLASS

A Dharma Study Class led by **Taido Jon Kayne** will meet on **Sunday mornings**, June 3rd, 10th, 17th, and 24th after Sunday sitting and services, from @10-11:30. The class will focus on **Lay Practice in Buddhism**, and will look at both **Theravada and Mahayana** texts. There is **no charge** for this class.

## SANGHA PICNIC

Our **Annual Sangha Picnic** will be held on **Sunday, July 22nd**. All are welcome. Our regular morning schedule will be in effect that day — early sitting and service, 9 a.m. sitting, and dharma talk. **The party will be from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., with pot-luck lunch @ noon.**

NZC will provide beverages. Please join us, and bring the kids. We also invite people from the neighborhood, so this is a good time to meet them. **If the weather's bad, we'll do it inside.**

## OTHER SUMMER

Jun 6	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jul 1	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
11	Ryaku Fusatsu
Aug 5	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
8	Ryaku Fusatsu

# ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

## ZCP SUMMER EVENTS

### JUNE

- 1-30 — Prairie Wind Practice Period\*
- 6 — Ryaku Fusatsu
- 9-10 — Two-day Sesshin\*
- 24 — Dharma Transmission Ceremony
- 28 — No Evening Zazen

### JULY

- 1 — World Peace Ceremony

### AUGUST

- 5 — World Peace Ceremony
- 8/31-9/4 — Closed for Labor Day Weekend

\*please register in advance for these events

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple's theme for the past few weeks has been "garden." We've hand-dug beds and have planted fruit trees, raspberries, asparagus, perennial flowers, and hundreds of bedding plants. Deep gratitude to all who've worked out there, especially to **Resident Priest Kyoki Roberts** and members **Scott Leonard, Bob Kirchener, Mimi Jong, Marissa Le, Jane Harter, Myo-en Margaret Kurtz, and Patricia Carpenter**. Thanks also to visitors **Nonin Chowaney, Eido Espe, and Zenshin Keith Hale**. Special thanks also go to neighbor **Alice Greller**, who helped with garden planning all winter and donated pansies, snapdragons, and rose bushes, and to **Rhonda Rosen** for hostas, ferns, irises, and groundcovers. Thanks also to Rhonda's husband **Brian** and son **Zac**, for donating their time to rid our computer of a nasty virus.

Also, a hearty thank you to **Vincent Metal Goods**, our neighbor down in Ambridge, who donated the oak pallets from which our beautiful new compost bins were made.

The **Order of the Prairie Wind**, a group of ordained Soto Zen priests of which **Kyoki** is a member, will hold their **annual June retreat** at **ZCP** this year. Anyone, lay person or priest, can participate in all or part of this retreat. See **Kyoki** for details.

**Kyoki Roberts** and **Myo-en Margaret Kurtz** led a One-day sitting at **Loretto Federal Prison** and were once again inspired by the resolve of inmates there, who sit with zafus only on a concrete floor. **Thanks to all there for their effort!**

Connections to the **larger Pittsburgh area community** are very important. Last month, we hosted a **Carlow College World Religions class** taught by **Sr. Eleanor Loftus**, and **Kyoki** was guest speaker at the **North Hills Anti-racism Coalition's** Interfaith Forum.

## ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Monday - Zen Center Closed

Tuesday - Saturday

5:30 a. m. - Zazen

6:45 a. m. - Morning Service

6:00 -

7:15 p.m. - Zazen

Sunday

9:00 a. m. - Zazen Instruction

10:00 a. m. - Zazen

10:40 a. m. - Work Practice

11:30 a. m. - Service/Lecture

12:30 p. m. - Tea

## DHARMA TRANSMISSION

On Sunday, June 24th, Zen Center of Pittsburgh/Deep Spring Temple will celebrate the **Dharma Transmission** of our Resident Priest, **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**, with a special ceremony led by Kyoki's teacher, **Rev. Nonin Chowaney, Abbot of Nebraska Zen Center/Heartland Temple** and **Head of the Order of the Prairie Wind**. The Ceremony will be at **11:00 a.m.** and will be followed by a **pot-luck lunch**.

**Dharma Transmission** means that a Soto Zen priest has been **fully ordained** and **authorized to teach independently**. All who are interested are cordially invited to attend this auspicious event.

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple is located at **124 Willow Ridge Rd, Sewickley, PA 15143**  
tel: (412) 741-1262, e-mail: [kyoki@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:kyoki@prairiewindzen.org), website: [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://www.prairiewindzen.org)

## ***Finding a Teacher***

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monks who visited this teacher and that teacher, staying with one for a time and then going on to visit another. Sometimes these seekers endured great hardship. When reading in *The Transmission of the Lamp*, an ancient Chinese collection of stories about Masters and Disciples, I came across a brief mention of an obscure teacher named Master Liang. Master Liang came from Szechuan, a mountainous area in far western China. He was a student of the famous master Ma Tsu. Ma Tsu lived in Eastern China, which was the center of Zen practice at that time.

We know very little about Master Liang, but I've speculated about what he had to do to find a suitable teacher. He lived over 1000 miles from where most of the famous teachers lived, at a time when travel was difficult and dangerous. To reach Ma Tsu, he would have had to either float treacherous rivers full of pirates or walk the roads in all kinds of weather through areas controlled by bandits. Because he was a monk, he most likely had little or no money. He probably slept outside unless he could find a monastery to take him in, and they were widely scattered, especially in the West. I wonder how long it took him, what kind of hardships he endured, how many monasteries he stopped at, and how many teachers he checked out before he found Ma Tsu. After finishing his time with his Master -- how long is not known -- Master Liang went back to his mountains a thousand miles away and was never heard from again. I wonder if he made it?

Master Liang is an inspiring example. Some Zen students in America practice for years without ever looking for a teacher, let alone finding one. Others live within an hour or two of good teachers and can't find time to spare a day to visit a temple, sit with others, and hear a dharma talk, or to spare a weekend to sit a sesshin. One of my own students replied, "It's too far" when I asked him a couple of months ago

why he hasn't come to Omaha to sit a sesshin with me for almost a year. He lives a day's drive away! It's a long day's drive to be sure, but nonetheless, only a day's drive. He could also fly down here in a couple of hours. How committed to me as his teacher is he and to the practice itself if he can't come for a visit two or three times a year at least?

I encourage everyone I give basic instruction to at our temple in Omaha to practice under the guidance of a teacher, and I tell them that if I'm not suitable for them, it's best to move on and look for a teacher elsewhere. I tell them not to stay where there isn't a suitable teacher out of convenience. It'll hurt in the long run. Also, it's a mistake to wait for a teacher to come to you. Why? It doesn't happen. It's the student's business to make his or her way to the teacher. The message is: if you don't have a teacher, you need to look for one, and you won't find one unless you look.

The question then becomes: where do I look? At this time in America, there are quite a few good teachers. I personally can suggest a dozen or so off the top of my head, people that I either know personally or that have good reputations. I will and do make suggestions whenever people ask. However, each student has to ultimately determine for themselves whether a particular teacher is a good one or not *for them*. If the teacher's style grates on you, or they don't inspire trust and confidence in you, they're not the teacher for you.

After committing to looking for a teacher, the next questions that arise are: How will I know a good one from a bad one? What makes a good teacher? There are many guidelines for determining this. Zen Master Dogen spoke of the matter this way:

Being a true teacher has nothing to do with age, but it is necessary to have clarified the true dharma and

### **LINCOLN ZEN GROUP**

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

### **WHITE LOTUS SANGHA**

A group affiliated with NZC meets bi-weekly at the **Nebraska State Penitentiary** in Lincoln, NE. For further information, call **(402) 551-9035**, e-mail [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org), or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363**.

### **LCC ZEN GROUP**

A group affiliated with NZC meets weekly at **Lincoln Correctional Center** in Lincoln, NE. For further information, call **(402) 551-9035**, e-mail [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org), or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363**.

received verification from a true teacher. A true teacher does not put primary importance on words or intellectual understanding. He [or she] must have abilities that transcend discrimination, and have aspiration be

## ***Finding a Teacher***

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yond the ordinary. He [or she] has to be free from egocentric views, and unfettered by human sentiments. His [or her] practice corresponds to his [or her] understanding. This is a true teacher.

“Clarifying the true dharma” means to be absolutely clear about what the practice of the Buddha way is and how to teach it to others. “Receiving verification from a true teacher” is easy to check out these days. When a student is ready to go out on their own, a good teacher will make it clear that they have given their authorization to this person to teach independently. Usually, this is done in a formal ceremony and is also confirmed in writing. Otherwise, it’s not clear and can lead to problems later on. These procedures differ within various Zen traditions. In Soto Zen, the ceremony is *shiho* (Jap.). In English, we call it “dharma transmission.” It means that you are a full priest and are capable of guiding others in their practice. I will be doing this ceremony with Rev. Kyoki Roberts in Pittsburgh this coming June.

In the above quotation, Dogen also speaks of “practice corresponding to understanding.” This means is that the teacher continues to practice according to their understanding of what constitutes the buddha dharma in the same ways that he or she suggests to students. In our tradition, this means sitting regularly, continuing to study, and continuing to do intensive practice, such as sesshins or training periods, along with actively engaging in sangha life. Completing dharma transmission does not mean that your training or your relationship with your teacher is over. There is no end to practice. Training is never ended; understanding can always be deepened. When teaching, there is no substitute for experience. I continue to have contact with my teachers even though I’ve been teaching on my own for some time now. Things still come up that I’m not sure about, and I still need advice from time to time. My ordination teacher and one of my main teachers have died, but two are still living, and I still keep

in touch with them. I also belong to teachers’ groups that meet regularly. I find it helpful to discuss common problems with my peers. I don’t think it’s good for anyone to operate in a vacuum, teachers as well as students. And of course, I still carry on the same sitting and devotional practice I have been doing for the past twenty-odd years, the same daily practice my teachers did and still do; I still study, and I still sit sesshins regularly.

There are also other characteristics that, in my view, determine a good teacher. A good teacher will encourage you to begin practice where you are, starting now, and will commit to guiding you as long as the student-teacher relationship continues. A

***The thing to be careful about . . . is subconsciously looking for a teacher who will rubber-stamp your ideas, as opposed to one who knows what he’s talking about and who has the gumption to challenge you.***

good teacher will also encourage you to begin and continue academic study, as long as it’s not undertaken as a substitute for sitting and devotional practices. A good teacher will encourage you to engage in longer training periods, such as sesshins and monastic retreats. Once you are grounded in the practice, a good teacher will encourage you to practice with other teachers as a way of deepening your understanding and broadening your perspective. A good teacher knows that it’s not a good idea to stay in one place all the time and receive only one person’s point of view.

In the end, there is no one specific place or way to look for or find a teacher. My own experience didn’t follow any particular pattern; in fact, it was, on the surface, quite haphazard.

The first Zen teacher I ever met was Dainin Katagiri. I had practiced Zen on and off – mostly off – for a few years and found myself in Minneapolis in the late nineteen seventies, unhappy with life, out of work, the latest love relationship over. Once again, as I usually did when my life began to bottom out, I remembered the solace I had received from practicing zazen in the past. A couple of years before, however, my dog had eaten my sitting cushions. I thumbed through the phone book, thinking, “this is a big city, maybe there’s a Zen Center here.” And there was. I went over, bought a zafu and zabuton, and began sitting at home. A week later, I went back to hear a lecture

by Katagiri-roshi and was irrevocably hooked. As the old Zen saying goes: “When the student is ready, the teacher appears.”

This is the way I found my teacher, or at least this is the way I think it happened. I really wasn’t looking for a teacher, not consciously anyway. In Zen, we say that student and teacher share deep karmic connections, so what brought me to Minneapolis in the first place? Was it construction work, as I thought, or was it the universe’s way of bringing Katagiri-roshi and I together? Was I really seeking a teacher on a sub-conscious level? Who knows? I had been flirting with Zen Buddhist practice for years and had probably been seeking a teacher without even knowing it. I did go to the temple and found him there, however. He didn’t come

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## ***Finding a Teacher***

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to me. All I really know is that we met, and that probably on some level, I knew that I sorely needed a guide.

After finding a true teacher, the next important step is to commit to them as their student. This commitment is based on trust.

In my case, I immediately trusted Katagiri-roshi to guide my practice; he inspired this in me. However, I still did some checking about him. I spoke with many people practicing at Minnesota Zen Center at the time and with others around the country

***Some teachers are rascals and coyotes who trick and surprise their students; some are harsh taskmasters trying to whittle down ego and pride; others teach through honoring and encouragement, nurturing the best in a student; some teachers lecture like a professor; others can melt us open with their love and compassion. The greatest and simplest power of a teacher is the environment of their own freedom and joy.***

who were knowledgeable about Zen practice. After I found out that Katagiri-roshi had a good reputation, I was able to commit to being his student. After a few years of study with him, he became my ordination teacher. I also received dharma transmission from him years later. [In Soto Zen, this means that you are a full priest and are able to teach on your own]

I was Katagiri-roshi's student until he died in 1990, but he was not my only teacher during that time. He sent me to study Buddhist Psychology with Tenshin Anderson in California, who became an important teacher for me, as did Sojun Weitsman, who was the resident teacher when I trained as head monk at Tassajara

monastery. After my time at Tassajara, Katagiri-roshi sent me to Japan to study with Ikko Narasaki, who was a very important teacher for me. So, I've had four main teachers. I consider myself very fortunate. Katagiri-roshi, however, was my master. I was his disciple. That relationship is very special. Although others have been my teachers, my relationship with Katagiri-roshi was the deepest and the most complete.

After I committed to Katagiri-roshi as my teacher, I practiced with him for five years in Minneapolis and at our monastery in Southeastern Minnesota. I still remember and carry with me what I learned from him early on. What most impressed me about him during those early years of study with him were his unshakeable daily commitment to Zen practice and his ability to stand (and sit) up straight through all the ups and downs of life. Over the long run, the most important lesson he taught me was to do the same.

Carrying on a daily practice is not easy, especially at first. It demands a refocusing of your life. When I first started, I usually walked to morning zazen in Minneapolis through the back alley, and when I passed through the gate, the first thing I'd look for was Roshi's bedroom light. It was *always* on. He didn't travel much the first couple of years I practiced with him, and during that time, the light *not* being on was a rarity, a shock, for he was always up, getting ready for zazen. When it wasn't on, his students would buzz while taking off their shoes: "Is roshi sick? His light wasn't on." "He was coughing during zazen last night." Later on, I found out that while I was walking through the back gate looking at his light, he was taking a cold shower! When I heard that, I was really impressed.

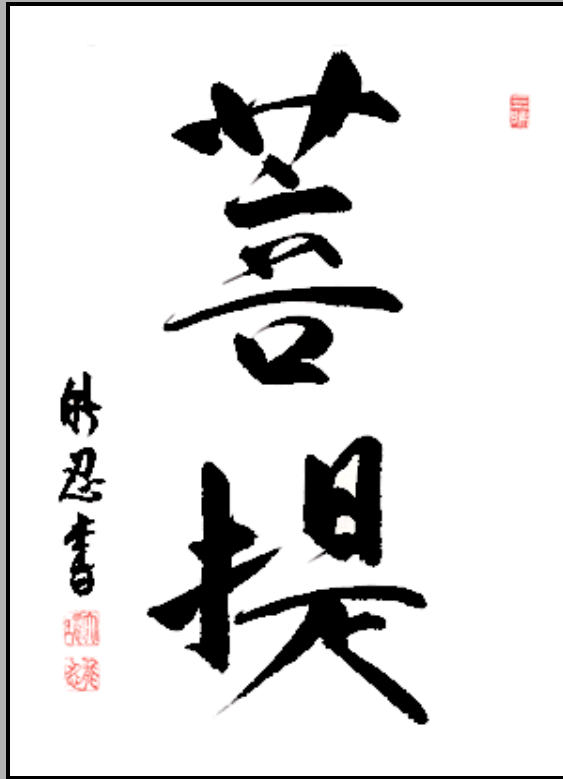
From him, I learned not only the importance of a strong daily zazen practice but also the possibility of maintaining it and seeing it through moment-by-moment in our lives *as they are*. He taught this not through words but by example. There was never any question for me about what Soto Zen practice was. I looked at him and saw it. He got up in the morning, sat zazen, and then did morning service, for he also was committed to devotional practices. Afterwards, he went upstairs, did his personal service, ate breakfast, and then began carrying on the business of the day, seeing people, preparing his dharma talks, helping with the shopping, cleaning, etc. After supper, he went to the zendo to sit zazen or participate in whatever activity was going on. For over forty years, he practiced in this traditional way, which he had learned from his teachers and at Eiheiji monastery. He carried on this way of practice until he became too sick with cancer to do it any more, and then he carried it on in bed the best he could until he died.

Through Katagiri-roshi's example, I learned the importance of "continuing" day-by-day, moment-by-moment, no matter what the ups and downs, the daily fluctuations, of our lives. Zen Master Dogen calls this *gyoji*, "continuous practice," meeting our lives moment-by-moment *as our practice*, and continuing endlessly.

After I left Minneapolis to study elsewhere, I learned that this is indeed what Soto Zen practice is -- living with our teachers, following the schedule they follow, and observing how they conduct their lives as Buddha, an awakened person. Zen Master Dogen said that when we meet a true teacher, we should enter the training place, inquire about the schedule, and then follow it, listening to the teacher's instruction and practicing as instructed. If we don't enter, we will never experience face-to-face transmission; if we don't listen and practice as

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Enlightenment (Bodhi)

## Calligraphy For

Nonin's calligraphy is now for sale.

All are originals signed and stamped by him and are written on high quality paper, either watercolor or printmaking paper or archival matboard.

We sell and ship them unframed. Each piece can be mounted and framed using traditional methods by any good framer.

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

### *Finding a Teacher*

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instructed, we let our own ideas and opinions get in the way and cannot absorb the teaching.

I wish I had wholeheartedly listened and practiced as I was instructed all the time I lived in training places. Sometimes, my head was so full of my own ideas that nothing got in. But good teaching can have a delayed effect; it swishes around until there's room and then pours in. I'm still learning from teaching I resisted years ago, especially in Japan. Things come up and I remember, "Oh, *that's* what was going on." Why didn't I see it before? Lots of reasons. Either I thought I knew better, or I didn't want to do it, or I didn't think it was important.

Katagiri-roshi was frequently disap-

pointed and discouraged in his attempts to transmit the buddha way to stubborn Americans. Students he had high hopes for drifted away — or sometimes bolted! The "big donors" never came through. The monastic practice he deeply wanted to develop in Southern Minnesota never materialized. Yet through it all, he never quit, and he didn't leave, even though he sometimes wanted to. He sat through his disappointment and discouragement and continued the practice he'd learned from his teachers years before. His faith in the Way was boundless. He called it "spiritual security," and it manifested in his life as incredible depth and strength. His example is still inspiring me as I work my work through disappointment and discouragement with my life as a teacher here in Omaha.

I lived in close proximity to Katagiri-roshi for less time than any of his closest disciples. After I'd studied with him a few years and had been priest-ordained a year, he sent me to study with other teachers so I could benefit from their strengths and weaknesses and broaden my experience. I left for California and then Japan. During the last five years of his life, I saw him for one day at Tassajara Monastery (the day of my Head-monk ceremony), two months in Japan when we practiced together at Shogo-ji, and for a month at dharma transmission time in Minneapolis. I was back in Japan when he died. He had asked me not to come back until I finished what he wanted me to finish, so I didn't

During those last five years, he had

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## *Finding a Teacher*

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turned my training over to other capable teachers, but he continued to teach me in many ways. The most important lesson was how to stand on my own two feet. He emphasized this by sending me away.

It takes a long time to fully absorb your teacher's way, to intimately know the in's and out's of practice, and to mature in realization. Therefore, commitment to a teacher must be complete and deep. Otherwise, it's too easy to quit when we get swayed by outside influences or run away when things get rough or we get bored. So, the next step after finding and committing to a teacher is to stick with him (or her) over the long haul.

Lately, I've been reading a book collectively written by The Monks of New Skete, a group of Orthodox Christians living in New York State. It's titled *In the Spirit of Happiness*, and the first part of the book deals with finding and practicing with a spiritual teacher. I was struck by how similar their practices are to ours in this area. The following passage jumped out at me the other day:

Once we actually find a teacher whom we can commit ourselves to and trust, we can still easily be tempted to turn our back on him (or her) when he fails to be "perfect," that is, when he fails to live up to our unrealistic expectations, when we dislike what he says or how he says it – and this happens more frequently than we care to admit. Examples abound of the disciple who turns away from the teacher simply because the teacher told him a truth the disciple could not accept.

How true. I've had it happen with my own disciples and I've done it with my own teacher. Over time, Katagiri-roshi saw how I would get distracted from my path as a priest by love relationships I continually pursued with women I was attracted to. This interfered with my priest training and happened more than once. It happened again at Tassajara at a time when Katagiri-

roshi wanted me to go to Japan, practice with a teacher there, and help develop an International Zen Monastery he was encouraging the teacher to support. I didn't want to go, mainly because I was interested in a woman at Tassajara. This caused a rift between myself and Katagiri-roshi, and I was conflicted over the situation for some time. I spoke about it with a visiting teacher and she suggested that if my needs in this area continually conflicted with my teacher's wishes that maybe I should find another teacher. I actually thought about this for a time, but eventually said "No." I knew deep down that Katagiri-roshi was the teacher for me and that I had to stick with him. What helped me make this decision was my deep-seated commitment to him and my realization that actually, he was right about the pattern he saw. The same thing had happened in my life before Zen and had most recently happened when he'd suggested I go to California to practice and study two years before! As it turned out, the California experience was extremely positive, so I trusted Katagiri-roshi's judgement and eventually went to Japan. Not as soon as he wanted me to, but I went! And it, too, was a positive experience.

There are many examples in Zen literature of students who followed through with their commitments to their teachers over years and years and through many changes and difficulties. I think of Chao-chou (Jap. *Joshu*), the master in the famous koan "Mu." Chao-chou was ordained as monk when a young boy. He came to study with the famous teacher Nan Ch'uan, (Jap. *Nansen*), when he was 18. Chao-chou studied with Nan Ch'uan for *forty* years and also visited other teachers during this time. When Nan Ch'uan died, Chao-chou was 58 years old and on his own, but he felt that he wasn't yet ready to teach. He made a vow to travel and learn, saying, "if an 80 year old man comes for the teaching, I will give it; if a child of 8 comes with the teaching, I will receive it." What a great attitude!

Chao-Chou wandered for over twenty years, deepening his understanding, until he felt he was ready to settle down. He began his teaching career at 80, and it lasted 40 years, until he died at 120 years of age.

Studying with your teacher for forty years is quite unusual. But when looking through the ancient texts, it is not unusual to come across students who studied for 15 or 20 years before they left their teachers to practice and teach on their own. Today, most Zen Masters leading practice in America have studied for at least this long. I think of Sojun Mel Weitsman and Tenshin Reb Anderson in California, John Daido Looi and Roko Sherry Chayat in New York, and my dharma brother and sister: Dosho Mike Port in Minnesota and Teijo Munnich in North Carolina. All of them have been practicing Zen Buddhism for well over twenty years, some over thirty. Sometimes, a teacher will ask a student to lead practice and teach at a temple or with a group after less time, but usually not independently; this kind of teaching is done under the teacher's guidance. Rev. Kyoki Roberts teaches in this way at our temple in Pittsburgh, as do many priests affiliated with San Francisco Zen Center and the teachers there.

If you are committed to Zen practice, to waking up and living the Buddha Way, please find a good teacher, commit to a student-teacher relationship, and stay in it for the long haul. Spiritual training is a long and crooked road, with many obstructions, hindrances, and detours. Sometimes, there are no roads and hence, no maps! It's best to be guided by someone who's traveled the territory before you.

# BOWING

By *Zuiko Redding*

**B**efore we sit down to do zazen, we bow toward our zafu, then away, putting hands together in front of face and inclining the body a bit, bending at the hips. In the zendo, it's a greeting to our neighbors and to those across the room. "Hello. Thank you for your presence and your effort." We also greet the whole universe, which is sitting with us. "Hello. Thank you for sitting with me." So — we bow even when no other person is present.

But this not not the only time we bow. We bow when we enter and leave the zendo, when we do services, sometimes when we greet one another. Sometimes we just bob our heads. Sometimes we touch our foreheads to the floor and lift our hands in a full prostration. There's a good deal of it going on. What's it all about? Where does it come from?

Bowing is a salutation and an expression of respect. Shunryu Suzuki said we should bow to everything we meet. Jack Kornfield talks about how, in the Thai monastery where he practiced, he was

expected to bow to all the other monks and how at first he resented having to bow to monks he didn't respect. He learned to find something in each person that he could bow to. He could respect each person — there was no longer "good person," "bad person." There was only "this person." Can we do that?

Bowing is also about making our spirits more flexible and gentle. It's about giving up obstinate, stubborn, dualistic mind that centers on ourselves as the most important think in the universe and our ideas as the reality of how things are and should be. If we bow, gradually our hearts will follow. In Japan, I heard the story of Ian Kishizawa-roshi, who was asked how low one's head should be in bowing to the floor. He answered that the forehead should touch the floor, adding, "I would like to bow evern lower, but the floor stops me." He felt that he had much arrogance and selfish stubbornness to get rid of.

The meaning of bowing comes only through bowing. Blooming in the heart

is a different flower for each of us. At Shogoji monastery, we did about fifty full prostrations in the course of morning services. And all before breakfast! I used to think of them as Zen morning calisthenics, dutifully holding my robes and trying to do them in proper form. Then one morning as I knelt touching my head to the floor, I remembered that I had slept this way as a small child. Bowing was expressing the confident trust of a vulnerable four-year-old. It was trust in the dharma as an innocent child trusts his or her parents.

So it's best just to give up all the ideas I've been talking about and just bow. Bowing is the same as zazen — just do it with no you, no bow, no "Did I do it right?" "Does it mean what it's supposed to?" When you do it completely, there is no need for anything extra.

*Zuiko Redding is Resident Teacher at Cedar Rapids Zen Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.*

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### From the editor:

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

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## WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE

### 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

We are closed on Monday

### Evening

Tuesday — Wednesday

- 7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation  
(Walking as needed)

Thursday

- 7:00 - 8:30 — Zazen Instruction  
(by appointment; call 551-9035)  
— Classes as scheduled

Friday

- 7:00 - 8:30 — Sitting Meditation  
(Walking as needed)

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