



Prairie Wind

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DIFFERENT VOICES

Usually, each issue of *Prairie Wind* begins with an article I have written, but at least once a year, we like to feature different voices. In this issue, those voices belong to other Soto Zen teachers.

Beginning on page three is an article titled “Zen and the Environment,” by Taitaku Pat Phelan, Abbess of Chapel Hill Zen Center in North Carolina. Taitaku trained for many years at the three practice places that make up San Francisco Zen Center — City Center, Green Gulch Farm, and Tassajara Monastery. She is a dharma successor to Sojun Mel Weitsman, abbot of Berkeley Zen Center and former abbot of San Francisco Zen Center. Taitaku lives in Chapel Hill with her husband and has a daughter in college.

An article titled “Four Words,” by Tonen O’Connor, Resident Priest at Milwaukee Zen Center in Wisconsin, begins on page six. Tonen trained for many years at Milwaukee Zen Center and in Japan at Toyama Nisodo, Shogoji Monastery, and Keisei Zendo. She is a dharma successor to Tozen Akiyama, founder of Milwaukee Zen Center and currently Resident Priest at Anchorage Zen Center in Alaska. Tonen is single and lives at Milwaukee Zen Center. She also serves an extensive sangha of inmates within the Wisconsin correctional system.



This — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

Both Taitaku and Tonen are steeped in Soto Zen practice. Their articles reflect not only the spirit of this practice but also their deep understanding of Zen Master Dogen’s way. We are pleased to be able to present both Taitaku’s and Tonen’s voices in this issue of *Prairie Wind*.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW
Abbot, Heartland Temple



Buddha in Nature — by Margaret Jones

WAGE PEACE

*Wage peace with your breath.
Breathe in firemen and rubble, breathe out whole buildings and flocks of red
wing blackbirds. Breathe in terrorists and breathe out sleeping children and
freshly mown fields.
Breathe in confusion and breathe out maple trees.
Breathe in the fallen and breathe out lifelong friendships intact.
Wage peace with your listening: hearing sirens, pray loud.
Remember your tools: flower seeds, clothes pins, clean rivers.
Make soup.
Play music, learn the word for thank you in three languages.
Learn to knit, and make a hat.
Think of chaos as dancing
raspberries, imagine grief as the outbreak of beauty or the gesture of
fish.
Swim for the other side.
Wage peace.
Never has the world seemed so fresh and precious.
Have a cup of tea and rejoice.
Act as if armistice has already arrived.
Don't wait another minute.*

Judith Hill

ZEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

By Taitaku Pat Phelan

Sometimes people ask, “What is the attitude of Zen Buddhism towards ecology? Does Zen teach an environmental ethic or is it just concerned with meditation practice, enlightenment, withdrawing from the world, and turning inward?”

While I can understand people being active in environmental causes who aren't Zen practitioners, I actually have a hard time imagining someone who is practicing thoroughly not taking care of his or her environment. By “environment” I mean natural resources such as water, air, soil, and trees, as well as the total environment, which is basically everything outside ourselves.

Most of us, however, are conditioned to ignore, or push aside thoughts, mental states, other people, and situations that we find demanding, difficult, or boring, as if by disregarding the elements of our internal and external world that aren't pleasing, they will go away. Zen practice, however, involves bring to consciousness, or illuminating, both what we avoid and the process by which we go about avoiding it. Dainin Katagiri Roshi, a modern Japanese master, once said that

Being a good Zen Buddhist means using just the right amount of toilet paper, not wasting any. If you are that mindful of toilet paper, chances are you will be aware of other things too, like where you left your keys or when you have been hurtful to someone.”

This is a good example of the down-to-earth character of Zen practice, which is not trying to escape from mundane activity in order to experience something else – like enlightenment or nirvana – but attending to what is before us as practice, as an opportunity for non-dual experience, which is what enlightenment actually is.

I have found that in monastic practice it is

easier to see what I'm trying to avoid than it is in my non-monastic routine. The emphasis on attention to detail, as well as the simplicity of monastic life, provides the time and space to live in way that minimizes our impact on the natural environment. I think these two elements are related.

Rushing through one activity after another or disregarding what doesn't appeal to us in order to get to what we think is important or desirable, is what enables us to disregard the natural world and to justify polluting rivers, clear-cutting forests, or logging 1400 year-old trees. It seems strangely arrogant for humans, whose life-span is about 80 years, to be making a decision to end the life of something 1400 years old. Deciding that “this matters and that doesn't” is how we turn other people, animals, and things into objects for our use. It doesn't work to sacrifice, or repress, one part of our life and then expect to be fully alive in some other part.

Two teachings that are emphasized in Zen are (1) that we are not distinct entities – there is nothing in the universe that we are separate from – and (2) that everything has Buddha nature, or is inherently Buddha. These two teachings, which aren't so different from each other, give our practice two possible directions: either treating everything as ourselves or treating everything as Buddha.

Zen Master Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen in Japan said, “Both day and night everything we encounter is our life. Because of that, we put our life into everything we encounter. Our life and what is being encountered become one.” From this position, how can we

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

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

disregard our environment?

An example of these teachings put into

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

Marcia Prideaux was lay ordained at **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** in March. Her dharma name is **Noshin** (“No” means capability, or talent, and “shin” means trust, or faith. **Congratulations to her!**

The annual **Prairie Wind Retreat** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple** near Pittsburgh again 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 am) sitting on Saturdays and Sundays**. Sunday dharma talks will be given by students on the dates specified in the box on the right.

Carolyn Hadsell has left our **Board of Directors** after many years of service. Our deepest thanks go to her for all her help over the years!



Marcia and Nonin during Lay Ordination

Thanks also to **Ryoshin Joe Marshall** for donating two new chairs for the front porch and a bench for the back yard and to **Dallas Marshall** for Lay Ordination photos.

A **One-day Sitting**, from 8 am to 8pm, was held at **Tecumseh State Correctional Facility** in April. Participants included **seven members** of the **White Lotus Sangha** from the prison and **Nonin, Yuki Mark Prideaux, and Seishin Larry Pelter** from the **Heartland Temple sangha**. This was our second One-day sitting at TSCI, and we are hoping to do a two-day sitting there sometime in the future, as well as One-day Sittings with members of the White Lotus Sangha at **Nebraska State Prison** and **Lincoln Correctional Center**.

Sangha member **Stefan Streit** is graduating from Creighton University and will soon be leaving the area. We offer him our **congratulations** and wish him the best.

SESSHIN

There will be no sesshins at NZC this Summer. Our usual **Two-day Sesshin** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple**, outside of Pittsburgh, on **June 7th and 8th**, as part of our annual month-long **Prairie Wind Retreat**. Contact **Deep Spring Temple** for details. Their addresses and phone number are at the bottom of page 5.

JUNE STUDENT TALKS

On **June 1st**, we'll have **World Peace Ceremony** and monthly **Group Discussion**. During the **rest of June**, **Sunday morning dharma talks** will be given by **students** on the **8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th**. Students will focus on what brought them to Zen practice, what their joys and difficulties have been, and what has kept them at it over time.

SANGHA PICNIC

Our **Annual Sangha Picnic** will be held on **Sunday, July 20th**. All are welcome. Our regular morning schedule will be in effect that day — 9 am sitting and service and dharma talk. **The picnic will be from 11 am till 3 pm, with potluck lunch @ noon.**

The temple will provide beverages and dessert. **Please join us, and bring the kids. If the weather's bad, we'll do it inside.**

OTHER SUMMER EVENTS

Jun 11	Ryaku Fusatsu
Jul 6	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
16	Ryaku Fusatsu
Aug 3	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
13	Ryaku Fusatsu

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

ZCP SUMMER EVENTS

JUNE

- 1 — Prairie Wind Retreat Begins
World Peace Ceremony
- 5 — Ryaku Fusatsu (Precept Service)*
(also on the 12th, 17, & 25th)
- 6 — Intro to Zen (also on the 20th)
- 7-8 — Two-day Sesshin
- 19 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 21 — Calligraphy Workshop with Nonin

JULY

- 1-5 — ZCP Closed
- 6 — World Peace Ceremony
- 11 — Intro to Zen (also on the 25th)
- 15 — Ryaku Fusatsu *
- 17 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 19 — One-day Sitting

AUGUST

- 3 — World Peace Ceremony
- 5-9 — ZCP Closed
- 12 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
- 16 — Beginners' One-day Workshop
- 21 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 25-31 — ZCP Closed

*after evening zazen

**There is no evening sitting at ZCP on the nights we sit at Mt. Alvernia Monastery

Congratulations to **Mark Troxell**, who completed **lay ordination** at Deep Spring Temple last month. His dharma name is **Zuiryu** (Follow Stream).

Rev. Doshō Port, Guiding Teacher at **Clouds in Water Zen Center** in St. Paul, Minnesota, has agreed to serve on our **Board of Directors**. We welcome him and look forward to his input.

Many thanks to **Jana Gouge** for her winning bid on the “**Peaceful Heart/Mind**” **wall hanging** constructed from **Nonin’s** calligraphy by sangha member **Jane Harter**. Thanks also to all other bidders. Proceeds from the auction will go directly toward financing our handicap accessible bathroom project.

Thanks also to **Steven Bend** for organizing the **Sangha Work Day** and to the many **sangha members** who participated in our most successful Work



Kyoki at Her Happiest

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Monday - Zen Center Closed

Tuesday - Saturday Mornings

5:30 a.m. - Zazen

6:45 a.m. - Morning Service

Tuesday - Friday evenings*

6:00 - 7:15 p.m. - Zazen

*We no longer sit Saturday evenings.

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

1:00 p.m. - Closed till Tuesday a.m.

In May, we welcomed our **library benefactor**, **Rev. Jerome Petersen**, from San Francisco Zen Center. Jerome led a workshop on Vimalikirti.

Sangha members **Jyakunen Patricia Carpenter** and **Myo-en Margaret Coghlan** joined **Kyoki** at **Loretto federal prison** for a **One-day Sitting** ending with a meal shared with all the Buddhist inmates at the facility.

This past winter, **Kyoki** traveled to **Asheville Zen Center** in North Carolina and **Mt. Equity Zen Center** in Muncy, Pennsylvania, where she gave her **Communication Workshop**. Closer to home, **Kyoki** led **Zen meditation** at the Turrell exhibit at the **Mattress Factory Art Gallery** and participated in an **inter-faith service** for the **North Hills Anti-racism Coalition**.

FOUR WORDS

by Tonen Sara O'Connor

As I continue to walk this path, I find myself trying to distinguish those elements that truly constitute our practice of the Buddha Way as Zen Master Dogen taught it. In this article, I want to focus on four words that for me embody a wholehearted engagement with the Way. They are *practice*, *enlightenment*, *faith*, and *transmission*. Each is inseparably entwined with the others and they may be considered in any order.

I'll begin by considering *practice*. What is it? Not intellection. Not cognition. Not knowing. It is *activity*, and engagement of the whole person.

For Soto Zen practitioners, the primary meaning of this is *shikantaza* (Jap.) or "just sitting." It is of this activity that Dogen said in his essay *Bendowa*:

When one displays the buddha mudra with one's whole body and mind, sitting upright in this samadhi even for a short time, everything in the entire dharma world becomes buddha mudra, and all space in the universe completely becomes enlightenment.

For Dogen, activity is the actualization of the Dharma, the true way of things. He says in another essay, *Gyoji*: "The Way, called now, does not precede activity; as activity is realized, it is called now." We practice the immediacy of reality. We don't bring it into being from somewhere else, for it is not separate from activity. It exists as activity. So to practice "just sitting (*shikantaza*)" is to actualize enlightenment. To act "with one's whole body and mind" is practice, whether driving a car, drafting a report, or cleaning the bathroom. Practice is total engagement of body and mind, so total that they drop away.

If we seek to use zazen to accomplish a goal, this turns zazen into a technique for the acquisition of something separate from ourselves. It only reinforces a false sense

of separateness and a dualistic view of the world. Similarly, in the everyday world, while we must point ourselves in the direction of goals, they recede from our grasp when we are fixed on the end goal and not wholeheartedly on what we are actually doing.

Our practice of "just sitting" is the practice of being "thus," untainted by goals, desires, or mental fabrications. We sit wholeheartedly and actualize what Dogen calls the dharma gate of peace and joy — the state of non-duality, the state of wholeness. Likewise, if we can be "thus" in all of our activities, we enter the realm of peace and joy.

This brings us to the second word, *enlightenment*. This word has given practitioners fits for centuries. It is sometimes translated as "awakening," or in Japanese, *satori*. The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism defines *satori* thusly:

The word derives from the verb *satoru*, 'to know,' however it has nothing to do with knowledge in the ordinary or philosophical sense, because in the experience of enlightenment there is no distinction between knower and known.

This definition gives us a clue to the difficulty produced by the English word "enlightenment." My dictionary defines "to enlighten" as, "to furnish with spiritual understanding." That is to say, some subject — I — is furnished with an object — understanding. But in the Buddhist sense, in Dogen's sense, we are talking about the exact opposite, the disappearance of subject and object. To be enlightened is not to *know*; it is to lose the confines of self and *be*.

Enlightenment is our true state of non-dual existence, at one with everything in the universe. Thus, Dogen says, again in *Bendowa*:

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

The **White Lotus Sangha**, a group affiliated with NZC, meets in three Nebraska prisons, **Nebraska State Penitentiary** and **Lincoln Correctional Center** in Lincoln and **Tecumseh State Correctional Institute** in Tecumseh. For further information, call (402) 551-9035, e-mail heartland@prairiewindzen.org, or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363**.

The wholehearted practice of the way which I am talking about allows all things to exist in enlightenment, and enables us to live out oneness in the path of emancipation. When we break through the barrier and drop off limitations, we are no longer concerned with conceptual distinctions.

He also says,

In buddha-dharma, practice and enlightenment are one and the same . . . since it is already the enlightenment of practice, enlightenment is endless; since it is the practice of enlightenment, practice is beginningless.

Thus, whether we are sitting on our cushions, digging in the garden, or putting a child to bed, activity and being are one. Practice and enlightenment are not separate. Through wholehearted engagement in an action untainted by desires or fears, we wholeheartedly practice life. This is the "just sitting" of everyday activity.

The next word on my list is *faith*, a word that for Dogen was clearly an important element of the Way. "Faith" is a word many Westerners shy away from. They equate it with blind belief, with the acceptance of

Four Words

from page 6

dogma or a sort of mushy sense that things will work out.

I do not think that this is what Zen Master Dogen is referring to. We might more appropriately use the words “trust” or “confidence,” the deep sense that we are not leaping from a plane without a parachute, but rather that experience will bear out our trust. And frankly, without this sort of faith, we will do nothing, never get on the horse, never ride it. No one can practice zazen for long without this kind of trust in the act itself, a confidence that this is the right thing to do. My teacher, Tozen Akiyama often quotes his teacher, who said that after thirty years of practicing zazen, all he could say was that he knows he’s going the right way. To have faith is to know that one’s feet will find the path in the dark.

Finally, we come to the word *transmission*. Face-to-face transmission is the hallmark of the Soto Zen tradition. Prof. Sokuo Eto refers to Dogen’s Zen as “the Zen of authentic transmission.” When an ordained person is given final authentication by his or her teacher, it is called “Dharma Transmission.” But what, if anything, is being transmitted? The matter appears to be complicated by Dogen’s statement that “The Buddha-dharma cannot be known by ordinary people . . . Since only a Buddha can understand the Buddha-dharma, it has been said, *Buddha alone knows Buddha, complete combustion.*”

This statement used to make me crazy. In fact, it offended me. What did it mean, only Buddha together with a Buddha? Did this mean that ordinary human beings couldn’t know enlightenment? I think how that I didn’t adequately understand what a Buddha is. A Buddha is complete, total, here and now, non-dual, without anything else. This is “just sitting.”

Dogen continues:

When this (verity) is fully understood, all preconceptions about awakening fade away. No matter how hard you ratiocinate about awakening, real awakening is not what you think. Awakening cannot be conceived and imagining what it could be will not help . . . When a Buddha is (in a state of) *incomparable wisdom*, he [or she — ed.] is *incomparable wisdom* itself.

In his essay *Menju* (Face-to-Face Transmission), Dogen speaks of his encounter with his teacher, Tendo Nyojo:

The late Master, the eternal Buddha,

Whether we are sitting on our cushions, digging in the garden, or putting a child to bed, activity and being are not separate. Through wholehearted engagement in an action untainted by desires or fears, we wholeheartedly practice life. This the “just sitting” of everyday activity.

first looks at Dogen. Then, indicating the face-to-face transmission and bestowing it upon Dogen, he says, ‘the gate of Dharma transmitted face-to-face by the buddhas and ancestors has been realized.’

What was transmitted? What passed on? It is the pure thustness of each person that is exchanged in that glance, the uncovered suchness of each individual responds to the uncovered suchness of the other. There is no self and no other, and thus, the non-dualism of enlightenment occurs. Dogen goes on to say that this intimate transmission flows down through the generations. He says, “The present several tens of generations of rightful successors are individual instances of the Buddha’s face, and they receive face-to-face transmission from the original Buddha’s face.”

In other words, when you and I realize one another, we realize Shakyamuni Buddha, the essence of our being that has flowed without break.

To again quote Dogen:

At this very moment, when you see through and get free from your habitual bones and marrow, the face-to-face transmission of the Buddhist ancestors is there. . . . the great truth of the Buddhist ancestors is nothing other than a face giving and a face receiving, and the reception of a face and the giving of a face, beyond which there is nothing surplus and nothing

ing lacking.

Nothing surplus and nothing lacking is the wholehearted action of our every moment, and it is in this moment when our true nature is completely revealed. This revelation is at the heart of *practice, enlightenment, faith, and transmission.*

There was a Western merchant who had arrived in a Japanese fishing village in the early 1800’s. Since he had a long layover, he decided to take a look around the village and explore this new country.

As he was walking around, he began to notice that most of the local people had, in general, a good, calm feeling about life. As the merchant became more and more curious, he began to ask the people how they managed to have such a good attitude

The Merchant and the Monk – a Fable

by John Paul Loeffler

towards life.

One day, the merchant had a long conversation with a fellow Japanese merchant. The Japanese merchant tried to explain to him how Buddhist philosophies were ingrained into everyone's life on a daily basis. The Japanese merchant invited the Western merchant to a local dharma talk being given by a Buddhist monk in a local house near the waterfront that evening. The Western merchant agreed and accompanied his friend to the meeting.

Once he arrived, he sat down with the others that had gathered. Shortly after, an elderly monk came in and sat down. He gave a talk about some of the more important ideas in Buddhism. The merchant sat and listened and tried his best to understand what he could. After the dharma talk, the monk stared to sit zazen with the group. The monk instructed the merchant how to sit zazen and what to expect.

The merchant tried and tried to meditate and do what he had been instructed, but because the house was near the waterfront, he kept being distracted by the noise from the docks, from the fisherman working, and from the streets just outside. When the merchant looked around, he was surprised by how well the local people could meditate in the house.

When the group broke up for the evening and most of the local people had left for home, the merchant approached the monk to ask him some questions. He asked a few, and those few led to more and more.

The monk said that he could answer more questions at the next meeting because it was getting late in the evening, and he wanted to get home before it got too dark to follow the roads. The merchant asked if he could walk with the monk and talk



with him as they walked. The monk agreed, and the two of them started on the road to the monk's small hut.

As they traveled away from the village and up into the hills, the merchant slowly became aware of how beautiful the land became. There were more trees, rice fields, and the terrain became steeper as they walked up into more hills.

Finally, they arrived at the monk's hut. The merchant was startled by the serenity that surrounded the hut in the hills. There was a small bubbling brook nearby and a grove of blossoming cherry trees. Birds were gathering at their nests for the

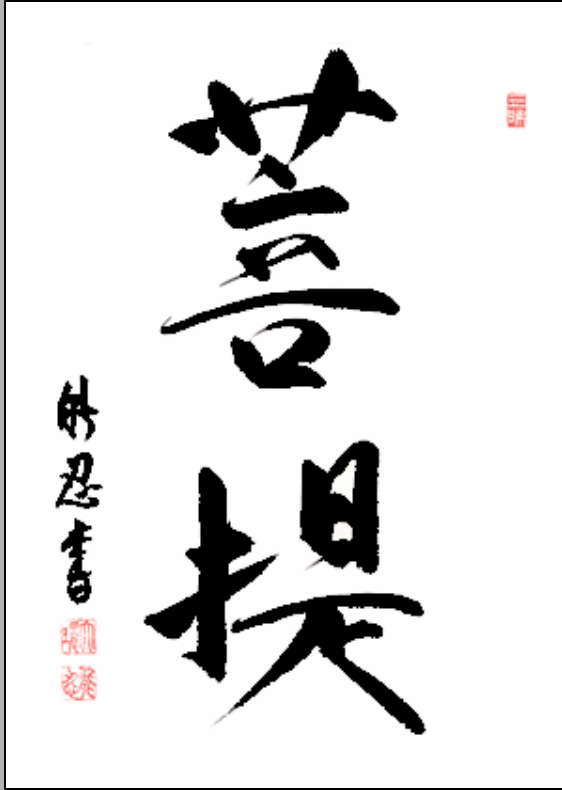
evening and were softly singing.

The merchant asked the monk why he went into the noisy village to have his meetings when such a quiet and pretty site was right outside his own doorstep. Why didn't he simply hold the meetings there?

The monk looked at the merchant, smiled, and said, "Yes, it is always easier to be a good Buddhist on the mountaintop."

John Paul Loeffler practices with the White Lotus Sangha at Nebraska State Penitentiary.





Enlightenment (Bodhi)

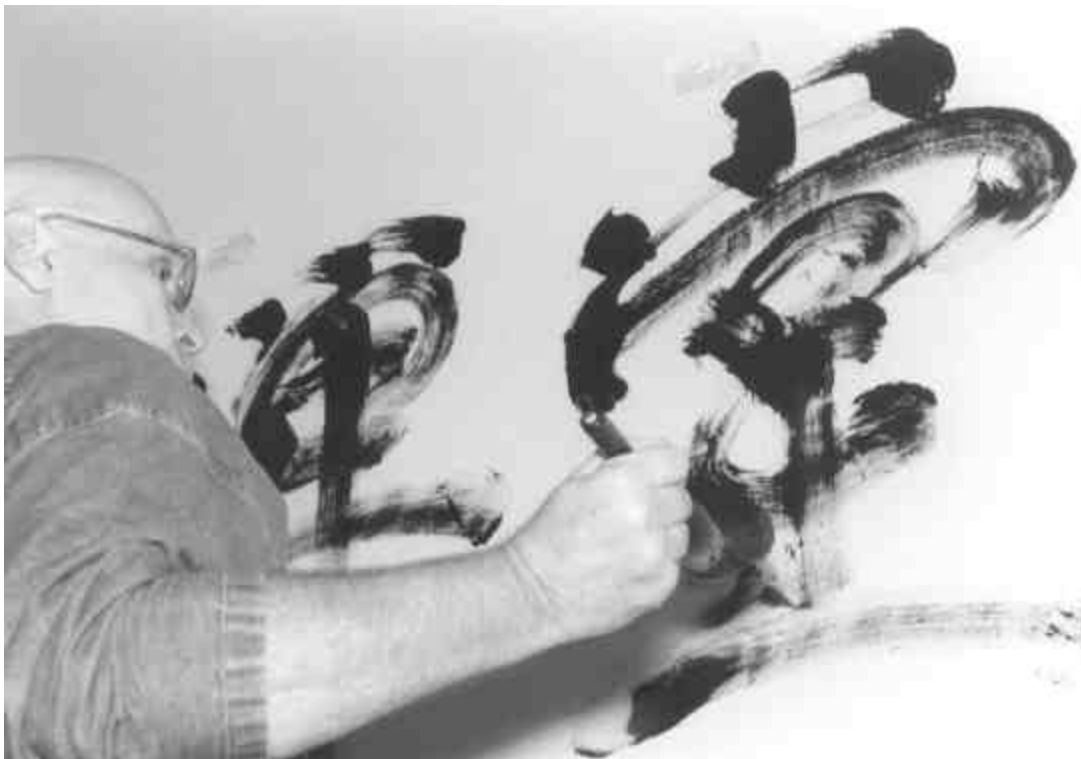
Calligraphy For Sale

Nonin's calligraphy is for sale over the Internet.

All are **originals signed and stamped by him** and are written on high quality paper, either Canson watercolor paper or Rives BFK printmaking paper.

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. Click on the **Nebraska Zen Center** website and go to Nonin's calligraphy pages.



Nonin writing on the wall at Clouds in Water Zen Center

Zen and the Environment

from page 3

practice is the way food is treated in Zen monasteries. Dogen traveled to China as a young man to further his Zen training. He was surprised to find that one of the most senior, mature monks in the monastery he practiced in was the Head Cook, or *Tenzo*, instead of Head of the Meditation Hall. The position of head of kitchen practice was one of the most honored in Chinese Zen monasteries.

When Dogen returned to Japan and began teaching, he emphasized the importance of preparing food and caring for the kitchen as practice. In “Instructions to the Zen Cook,” he wrote:

Even when handling just one leaf of a green, do so in such a way that the leaf manifests the fullness of its potential, which in turn allows the illumination of buddha to radiate through it. This is a power of functioning whose nature is incapable of being grasped with the rational mind and one which operated without hindrance.

The importance given to bringing our attention to everyday activity as if it were something that mattered is characteristic of Zen practice. It brings our practice down to earth, right here where we are. Dogen was strict about not wasting food and said that when washing rice, we should be careful not to waste a single grain. He said to care for each grain as if it were your eyeball.

Dogen lived in the 13th century, so there was no running water; water was carried to the kitchen in buckets. Dogen taught that when using water, one should return whatever was left over to the stream it came from. When pouring the water back into the stream, Dogen poured it toward himself, as an act of respect, rather than just tossing it away as something not longer needed. In Soto Zen practice places, we mirror Dogen’s action during meals by pouring our washing water into the collection bowl toward ourselves rather than toward the server.

When you pay attention to things carefully, you may notice a difference in

how you use your body and the level of your attention when you throw away a piece of trash compared to how you handle and pass the sutra books at the beginning and end of service. In the practice place, we bring our attention and care to fluffing our cushions before we

Also, in monastic practice, we tend to carry things and pass things – cushions, eating bowls, sutra books – with two hands. When we do things with two things instead of one, it helps us bring our undivided attention to what we are doing, unifying body and mind. This may sound simplistic, but this is the craft of practice, how we take the idea of practice and bring it into our body.

Tassajara, San Francisco Zen Center’s monastery, is located in a remote wilderness area deep in a mountain valley at the end of a steep dirt road, more than two hours from the closest store. Although there was electricity when I practiced there, it was supplied by a generator and used sparingly, mostly in the kitchen and in the maintenance shop. The cabins were lit by kerosene lamps. Using and maintaining kerosene lamps is an example of an activity lending itself to simplicity and care. By simplicity, I don’t mean doing things that are quick and easy. Rather, I mean not being split between body and mind but being unified, by simply doing one thing.

At Tassajara, there is time scheduled each week for room cleaning, which includes time for refilling the lamps,

cleaning the globes, and trimming the wicks. After a while, I began to feel a satisfaction when cleaning and filling the lamps that was much different from how I feel about changing a light bulb. Filling kerosene lamps at Tassajara began and ended with a half block walk to the shop where jugs of kerosene were stored. Pouring the kerosene without spilling it and making a mess as well as handling the globe and the lamp itself without breaking them demanded attention, and it took time, much, much longer than it takes to turn a light switch on and off!

Because the lamps and globes are glass, it’s dangerous to rush through the activity the way we might rush through other kinds of cleaning. So, cleaning the lamps became primary activity. I found that the activity became satisfying when I accepted it and

The Dukkha of Being*

*The lamb and the lion
acknowledge the dukkha
of their being
in the implosion
to find God, Allah,
Yahweh, Christ, Buddha —
All projections of personal
Well-being.*

**suffering*

Miriam Ben-Yaacov

leave the zendo, to bowing, to handling the sutra books, or to caring for the altar. Over time, we extend this care and respect to everything we encounter.

In European culture, things on the floor are often treated as inferior, but in traditional Japanese culture, from which we inherited Soto Zen practice, people sat and slept on the floor – they didn’t use chairs or raised beds. In our zendo, we sit on the floor, bow on the floor, eat while sitting on it, and walk on it with our bare feet, so we try to keep the floor clean. Although our cushions are down on the floor, I suggest moving them with your hands instead of your feet. This is easy enough to try out and see if there is a difference in your attention and care between using your feet and your hands.

Zen and the Environment

from page 10

gave up my ideas of what I wanted to be doing instead. When I wholly surrendered to cleaning the lamps, I no longer felt like I needed to hurry to get it over with so I could do something “fun.” Accepting whatever we are doing allows it to be the complete activity of our life at that point in time. The simplicity and immediacy of completing each action connects our attention, our body, the activity, and all things participating in it.

In Zen, we say there’s no place where you can spit. When people spit, they tend to spit behind themselves, in the gutter, or in another out of the way place, somewhere not cared for, where it doesn’t matter. But actually, there’s no place that doesn’t matter, that’s okay to trash. Everything is buddha nature.

In Zen monasteries, there are altars outside the toilets before which people bow and chant short verses when going in and coming out. There is also an altar at the bath house, where people offer incense, bow, and recite verses. This practice of stopping, bowing, and chanting interrupts our stream of thought, brings attentive consciousness to our activity, and conditions us to enter every activity attentively and respectfully.

Sometimes people are surprised when they hear that some Zen students drink coffee or smoke cigarettes. I think they are confusing practice with a kind of purity. There is a relationship between practice and purity, but they aren’t identical. When I was at Tassajara, a few of the students there smoked, and they often rolled their own cigarettes. When they were done, they emptied the tobacco left in the butt onto the ground so it could decompose and threw the paper or filter in the trash. I’ve never smoked, but I have some sympathy with those who do because for some people, it is a very hard habit to break. On the other hand, I’m pretty intolerant of people who throw trash, including cigarette filters on the ground. Filters aren’t biodegradable. They last a long time. So, if you do smoke, practice with it by bringing your attention to it, acknowledge it, be alive for it, and

complete the activity by cleaning up.

Samadhi is a nondualistic state of mind in which the consciousness of the subject or the perceiver becomes one with the object or that which is perceived. This is sometimes expressed at “the mind and the environment are innately one.” In a sense, our practice is the practice of *samadhi* in action, the practice of meeting ourselves wherever we go. Whenever we see, whenever we hear, whenever we smell or taste or touch, the activity can be the intimate experience of meeting ourselves. In this way, our life and what is being encountered become one. How can we *not* treat everything like we treat ourselves?



ZEN MEDITATION WORKSHOP

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

Taught by **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, abbot of Nebraska Zen Center

At **Nebraska Zen Center**

On **Saturday, July 26th**, from **10:00 am till 1:00 pm**

Cost: \$20

For further information, or to register, contact **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave, Omaha, NE 68131-1363 (402) 551-9035**
heartland@prairiewindzen.org

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**.

NZC’s Website Address is:
www.prairiewindzen.org

Our E-mail address is:
heartland@prairiewindzen.org

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

10:10 - 11:00 — Dharma Talk

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)**

We are closed on Monday