

Prairie Wind

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Heartland Temple and Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple*

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

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW, is NZC's Head Priest. He trained with Rev. Katagiri and was ordained by him. Rev. Chowaney also trained at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California and in Japan at Zuio-ji and Shogo-ji monasteries. He received formal Dharma Transmission from Rev. Katagiri and has been authorized to teach by him and by the Soto Zen Church in Japan. Rev. Chowaney is the founder of the Order of the Prairie Wind.

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

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

Prairie Wind (© 2009 Nebraska Zen Center) is the newsletter for both **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple**.

Cover Calligraphy: Wisdom, by Nonin Chowaney

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

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

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

Ryokan

by *Nonin Chowaney*

The Soto Zen Buddhist hermit-monk / poet Ryokan (1758?-1831) is a beloved figure in Japan. In John Stevens' introduction to his translations of Ryokan's poems – *One Robe, One Bowl* – Stevens writes:

Ryokan represents something very special in the Japanese character . . . all who wish truly to understand Japan should study the life and poetry of this eighteenth-century hermit-monk. From a religious standpoint also, Ryokan is exceptional, exemplifying as he does the Zen Buddhist idea of attaining enlightenment and then returning to the world with "a serene face and gentle words." In his life he was indeed Daigu, the "Great Fool" (the literary name he gave himself), one who had gone beyond the limitations of all artificial man-made restraints."

In this article, I intend to look at some of Ryokan's poems and see why he is regarded so highly, but first, a bit of biography.

Ryokan was born around 1758 in Echizen Prefecture, in the heart of Japan's snow country. His father was the village headman, and Ryokan was supposed to succeed him in this position when he turned eighteen. However, Ryokan felt that he wasn't suited for this position, and he decided to become a Buddhist monk. He shaved his head and trained at the local Zen

temple for four years when the famous Zen Master Kokusen came to lecture. Ryokan was deeply impressed with him and decided to return with Kokusen to his temple, Entsui-ji in Okayama Prefecture, and become his disciple.

Ryokan practiced with Kokusen for twelve years, until the Master died. Then, he went on a pilgrimage, and after almost five years, he decided to return to his home area. He found an empty hut halfway up Mount Kugami and began living there, supporting himself by begging in the villages below.

Ryokan lived the hermit's life from the age of forty to his death thirty-four years later in 1831. He became a masterful poet whose work has been translated into many languages and a master calligrapher whose work is now considered priceless.

Here's one of my favorite Ryokan poems:

Untitled

*If someone asks
My abode
I reply:
"The east edge of
The Milky Way."*

*Like a drifting cloud,
Bound by nothing:*

continued on page 4

Ryokan

from page 3

*I just let go
Giving myself up
To the whim of the wind*

trans. John Stevens

What an expansive view of one's environment! I've always admired, and sometimes envied, those who could be at home anywhere, and in this poem Ryokan presents himself as one of those people. Like a drifting cloud, he has no preconceived notion of where he's supposed to be or go. Because he has no preconceived notion, his mind does not limit him, and he can be or go anywhere, with equanimity. This is complete liberation, freedom from all restraint. Wherever life takes him, he will go. How wonderful! Ryokan's poem reminds me of the following koan:

A monk asked the master Sengcan:
"Master, show me the way to liberation."
Sengcan replied: "Who binds you?"
The monk replied: "No one binds me."
Sengcan said: "Then why do you seek liberation?"

Here's another poem by Ryokan along the same lines. This is one of his most famous ones:

Untitled

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.*

trans. John Stevens

This poem is bit more subtle than it first appears. As I read it this morning, I thought of how the mind is fundamentally clear, like the sky, and when thoughts leave, like clouds moving away, the mind is clear again, like the sky when it's free of clouds.

When Ryokan speaks of purity, I think that he's speaking of the heart — or the mind, for the character for both is the same one — that's open and free of the defilements arising from greed, hatred, and delusion, the three poisons in Buddhism. When the heart is free of these, the mental state of nirvana, or perfect peace, arises.

How do we abandon this fleeting world? Well, first, we awaken to the fact that it is fleeting, that nothing lasts from moment to moment. If we cling to impermanent things — and all things are impermanent — we will suffer. The end to suffering is through non-clinging. Also, there is no self, so Ryokan is saying to abandon the notion we have of ourselves as fixed

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Ryokan

from page 4

and permanent entities, and live your life guided by the moon and flowers, which will guide you along the Way, the Buddha's Way, the way of the awakened person. The moon and the flowers come and go, unobstructed and impermanent, like us.

Ryokan truly loved the life he chose for himself, and the following poem illustrates that:

Untitled

*Truly, I love this life of seclusion.
Carrying my staff, I walk toward a
friend's cottage.
The trees in his garden, soaked by the
evening rain,
Reflect the cool, clear autumnal sky.
The owner's dog comes to greet me;
Chrysanthemums bloom along the
fence.
These people have the same spirit as
the ancients;
An earthen wall marks their separation
from the world.
In the house volumes of poetry are
piled on the floor.
Abandoning worldliness, I often come
to this tranquil place —
The spirit here is the spirit of Zen.*

trans. John Stevens

"Abandoning the world" is a phrase encountered frequently in Zen poetry and in Zen sutras and other texts. What does it mean? How can we

abandon the world? We can't step out of it; where would we go? Ryokan says near the end of the poem to abandon worldliness, and to me, this is key to living the Buddha Way.

Most people consider fame, status, wealth, power, security, comfort, and sensual pleasure to be the most important things in life. A person's worth in the eyes of the world is determined by how successful he or she is in these areas. This is especially true in American culture. Monks are not thought of very highly in Omaha, or in any other part of America. In the words of the Catholic monk Thomas Merton, "In a materialistic culture which is fundamentally irreligious, the monk is incomprehensible because he 'produces nothing.' His life appears to be completely useless." And not only monks are looked at in this way. Anyone who does not strive for what most people consider most important in life is regarded as an "underachiever" and lives on the fringes of mainstream American Society.

"Abandoning worldliness" means transforming our basic attitudes toward life. It means to turn away from what most people hold dear and turn towards what the Buddhas, the awakened ones, hold dear. It means to refocus yourself and your aim in life. The example of Shakyamuni Buddha is one we all need to remember. He

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NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SANGHA NOTES

BUILDING ADDITION: Due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances — Nonin’s illnesses, zoning issues, architectural and contractor issues — our timetable for beginning construction has been repeatedly set back. Now, with the economy in terrible shape, it’s difficult to get a loan, so we’ve put the project on hold for now. We have \$80,000 drawing interest in our Building Fund account, and we intend to restart the project in the future, but it’s hard to tell when right now. If you have any questions about the project, e-mail us at heartland@prairiewindzen.org.

Sangha members **Steve Kehler** and **Greg McLawsen** completed **Lay Initiation** at the temple in March. Steve’s dharma name is **Zuiken** (Auspicious Manifestation) and Greg’s is **Kanze** (Perfect As It Is). Our gratitude to Steve and Greg for taking this step, and **congratulations to you both!**



Sangha member **Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer** and her long-time partner **Pamela Imperato** were recently married. **Our heartiest congratulations to you both!**

Our **thanks** go to **Junfu Cornelia Shonkwiler** for coming from California to lead February sesshin. It was great having you here again.

Our Abbot, **Rev. Nonin Chowaney** and his dharma heir, **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**, traveled to **Shasta Abbey** in California this past April to attend the **Head Monk Ceremony** for **Rev. Jisen Coghlan**, Kyoki’s disciple. **Congratulations to Jisen** for passing this monastic practice milestone, and our **deepest thanks to Rev. Master Eko Little and the sangha at Shasta Abbey** for providing Jisen the

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SUMMER EVENTS

SESSHIN

There will be one sesshin at NZC this Summer, a **Two-day sesshin** on **June 20th and 21st**. Fees: \$40 per day for members; \$50 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. call **402-551-9035** or e-mail us at heartland@prairiewindzen.org to register.

OTHER SUMMER EVENTS

Jun 7	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
10	Precepts Ceremony
Jul 5	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
8	Precepts Ceremony
Aug 2	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
5	Precepts Ceremony

WEEKLY ZENDO SCHEDULE — NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

Morning

Tuesday — Sunday

6:00 - 7:00 — Sitting Meditation
(Walking as Needed)
7:00 - 7:30 — Service
7:30 - 7:45 — Cleaning

Sunday Only

8:30 — Zazen Instruction
9:00 - 9:25 — Sitting Meditation
9:25 - 9:35 — Walking Meditation
9:35 - 10:00 — Sitting Meditation
10:00 - 10:10 — Service
10:10 - 11:00 — Dharma Talk

Evening

Tuesday — Wednesday

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

Thursday

6:00 - 8:30 — Classes as scheduled

Friday

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

We are closed on Monday.

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

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH SANGHA NOTES

Rev. Jisen Coghlan recently completed her monastic training period as **Head Monk** at **Shasta Abbey** in California. Her teacher, **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**, and Kyoki's teacher, **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, both attended Jisen's Head Monk Ceremony at the monastery on April 28th. **Congratulations, Jisen!**

Our **June Intensive** begins **June 5th**, with a two-day sesshin and ends **June 28th** with a five-day sesshin. Included this year is a **two-day workshop** on **June 13th and 14th** called *Difficult Conversations: A Buddhist Communication Workshop*. To attend either sesshin, the workshop, or any part of the intensive, please contact ZCP.

Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple's Tenth Anniversary Celebration will be held from August 18th — 23rd. Zen priest, teacher, and renowned chef Rev. Edward Espe Brown will join us for the celebration. Here's a schedule of events:

Tuesday, Aug. 18, 6 am: Sunrise Meditation and Garden Walk. At Mattress Factory Museum and Northside Gardens, 505 Jacksonia Way, Pittsburgh.

Wednesday, Aug. 19, 6 pm: Intro to Zen. At Friends Meeting House, 4836 Ellsworth Ave., Pittsburgh.

7:30 pm: How to Cook Your Life, a documentary film by Doris Dorrie, starring Rev. Ed Brown, who will introduce the film. A reception will follow. At Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Melwood theater. 477 Melwood Ave., Pittsburgh.

Thursday, Aug. 20, 9:00 am: Cooking Class w/ Rev. Ed Brown. At Sweetwater Cooking School. 309 East Carson St., Pittsburgh.

Friday, Aug. 21, 8:00 pm: A Taste of Zen. A Formal Dinner catered by some of Pittsburgh's best restaurants and featuring food from the nations that gave rise to Zen Buddhism. A benefit **Silent Auction** will follow. At Deep Spring Temple, 124 Willow Ridge Road, Sewickley.

Saturday, Aug. 22, 10:00 am: Play Day at Deep Spring for children and adults. Classes in Zen Buddhism, Yoga, Judo, T'ai Chi, Handwriting, and some fun.

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

ZCP SUMMER EVENTS

JUNE

5-28 — June Intensive
5-7 — Two-day Sesshin**
7 — World Peace Ceremony, 10 am
9 — Precept Renewal, 6 pm
1 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm**
13-14 — Difficult Conversations Workshop**
24-28 — Five-day Sesshin**

AUGUST

2 — World Peace Ceremony, 10 am
4 — Precept Renewal, 6 pm
18-23 — 10th Anniversary Celebration*

Unless otherwise indicated, events are at DST
*Please See www.deepspringzen.org
**Please register for this event

JULY

2 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm**
5 — World Peace Ceremony, 10 am
7 — Precept Renewal, 6 pm
19 — Board Meeting
24-26 — Two-day Sesshin**
30 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm**

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

Closed Mondays

Tuesday — 7-7:40 a.m. MFM
6-7:15 p.m. DST
Wednesday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. FMH
Thursday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. DST
Friday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
6:00-7:15 p.m. DST
Saturday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST
Sunday — 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. DST

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

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA NOTES

Prison volunteer **Zenryu Vicki Grunwald** writes:

White Lotus Sangha activity has recently increased at Lincoln Correctional Center. After months of sparse activity, we were unsure of the future of our involvement at LCC. However, a few new practitioners have joined, and it's interesting and even exciting to see a fledgling sangha form.

On the one hand, it's a lot of work since the group is unaccustomed to working together, and new members don't fully know the rituals or, sometimes, even how we sit zazen. On the other hand it's really exiting to see the men discover things. For example, the looks on their faces changed when I explained that we return bows to each other out of respect, and their bows then took on a whole new vigor and authenticity.

Last month, I donated a binder containing pages from NZC's website. The binder also included pictures of the temple, including the Zendo and Buddha Hall. When I brought it with me on my April visit, the men were excited to actually see "their temple," one that they're actually a part of.

I'm looking forward to my next visit to LCC and to see how the

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

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

group's getting along.



Ryokan

from page 5

was a prince, and he had as much, or more, wealth, social status, fame, and power as anyone did in his culture, but he finally realized that these things could not bring him peace and contentment, so he renounced them.

Ryokan did the same thing. He was in line to succeed his father as village headman, a position that would have secured him a comfortable life, but he gave it up and became a monk.

However, "abandoning worldliness" does not necessarily mean becoming a monk; it means "turning away and turning towards." Both the monk and the lay person must make this turn.

The great Tibetan Master, Tson Ka Pa, put it this way: "When there is not the slightest ambition, even for a split second, for even the greatest successes in the world, the mind of renunciation has arisen." Renunciation is a state of mind, the mind of "no worldly ambition," which means no ambition for success in the areas of fame, status, wealth, power, etc. We seek peace and harmony through the way we live, in what kind of person we are, and in following the Sixteen Bodhisattava Precepts. When we live according to the Precepts and are in harmony with the way things are, the need to climb up the ladder of success drops away.

As we've seen, Ryokan loved the life he had chosen, but it was not always sweetness and light. Sometimes, we who live busy lives in the city romanticize the hermit's life and wish that we could go to the mountains and

live it. Here's a poem that illustrates the other side of Ryokan's lifestyle:

Untitled

*Light sleep, the bane of old age:
Dozing off, evening dreams, waking
again.
The fire in the hearth flickers; all
night a steady rain
Pours off the banana tree.
Now is the time I wish to share my
feelings –
But there is no one.*

trans. John Stevens

Ryokan's life was not free of hardship. In the above poem, he can't sleep; it's raining; the fire's going out, and he's alone. He needs to talk to someone, but there's no one; his loneliness is palpable.

The next series of poems further explore this theme.

The Long Winter Night: Three Poems

*The long winter night! The long winter night seems endless;
When will it be day?
No flame in the lamp nor charcoal in the fireplace;
Lying in bed, listening to the sound of freezing rain.*

*To an old man, dreams come easy;
I let my thoughts drift.*

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Ryokan

from page 11

*The room is empty and both the sake
and the oil are used up –
The long winter night*

*When I was a boy studying in an empty
hall,
Over and over I had to fill the lamp
with oil.
Even now, that task is disagreeable –
The long winter night.*

trans. John Stevens

Ryokan's loneliness and sadness now verge on despair. Just getting through the night seems a monumental task, especially as he gets older and older. Eventually, his health began to worsen, and his friends felt that he had to leave his mountain hermitage. He moved to a small hut near a shrine down the mountain, and when he was sixty-nine and in poor health, he went to live with one of his disciples in the city of Shimazaki.

Ryokan frequently wrote about different aspects of Zen Buddhist practice. Here's one of those poems:

Untitled

*Talk is always easy
Practice always hard
It's no wonder people try to make up
for their lack of hard practice with
easy talk
But the harder they try, the worse
things get*

*The more they talk, the more wrong
they go
It's like pouring on oil to put out a fire
Just foolishness and nothing else*

trans. Abe and Haskel

Zen Buddhist practice is about doing the work, not about talking about it, but that doesn't stop people from doing so. I'm active on a Zen Buddhist internet forum, and a large number of people "try to make up for their lack of hard practice with easy talk." In fact many of them don't practice at all, but yet they try to come across as experts! Sometimes, I think of the above poem and want to post it when one of these people is pontificating, but, I restrain myself.

In Zen, we say that reading and talking about Zen Buddhism is like going to a restaurant and eating the menu. A person can receive no sustenance in this way. You can't awaken to your own true nature by reading or talking about other people's experiences. In Soto Zen Buddhism, we need to sit zazen regularly, practice under the guidance of a teacher, and connect with and practice with a group. There's no way around this.

Here's another of Ryokan's poems, another of his most famous ones:

SANGHA MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER / ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH

Membership

While no one needs to formally join either temple to share in our practices, we invite you to become a member of either Nebraska Zen Center or Zen Center of Pittsburgh. Members are people who feel that Zen Buddhism is an important part of their lives and who wish to express that feeling by joining a community of practitioners.

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

Financial Support

Buddhist communities have always relied on the generosity of their supporters. For income, we depend on those who believe in the good of what we do and wish to nourish it.

No one is refused temple membership due to an inability to pay. We do, however, encourage members to commit to our financial support through monthly pledges. We also encourage members to exhibit this support through participation in work projects.

The amount of your pledge is your personal decision. We ask you to support the temple at a level appropriate to your means. For those who participate regularly, we suggest a monthly pledge that reflects one hour of your earnings per week, or four hours per month. Because we are non-profit religious corporations, all donations are tax deductible.

LINCOLN ZEN GROUP

A group affiliated with NZC meets in Lincoln weekly on **Thursday evenings at 7:00 pm** at the **Unitarian Universalist Church, 6300 A St.** For further information, e-mail or call **Kanho Doug Dittman** at **dougdittman@windstream.net** (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

Ryokan

from page 12

Playing with the Children

Early spring
The landscape is tinged with the first
fresh hints of green
Now I take my wooden begging bowl
And wander carefree through town
The moment the children see me
They scamper off gleefully to bring
their friends
They're waiting for me at the temple
gate
Tugging from all sides so I can barely
walk
I leave my bowl on a white rock
Hang my pilgrim's bag on a pine tree
branch
First we duel with blades of grass
Then we play ball
While I bounce the ball, they sing the
song
Then I sing the song and they bounce
the ball
Caught up in the excitement of the
game
We forget completely about the time
Passersby turn and question me:
"Why are you carrying on like this?"
I just shake my head without answering
Even if I were able to say something
how could I explain?
Do you really want to know the mean-
ing of it all?
This is it! This is it!

trans. Abe and Haskel

This poem presents a picture of the
Ryokan that the Japanese love so

much: a playful, childlike person
willing to interact with whomever
crosses his path, especially children,
whom he loved and who loved him. It
also presents a picture of what's most
important for a Zen Buddhist
practitioner: "This is it! This is it!"

"Just this," a famous Zen phrase,
means that this moment is all we have
and to live fully and completely, we
need to engage fully in the issue at
hand, with whatever is in front of us.
In the above poem, Ryokan manifests
this fully.

The following poem is another of my
favorites. I used to keep a copy of it
taped to the wall above my desk, so I
would see it whenever I got the urge
to slack off in practice.

Untitled

The sun sets, and all living things
cease to stir
I, too, close my brushwood gate
A few crickets begin to chirp
The color of grasses and trees has
faded
Burning stick after stick of incense
I meditate through the long autumn
night
When my body gets cold, I put on
more clothes
Practice hard, fellow students of Zen!
Time is gone before you realize

trans. Abe and Haskel

Ryokan

from page 14

Ryokan died on January 6, 1831. He
left behind a wonderfully varied
collection of poetry and some
masterful calligraphy. The two
translations of Ryokan's poetry into
English that I like the most are John
Stevens' *One Robe, One Bowl* and
Dewdrops on a Lotus Leaf and
Ryuichi Abe and Peter Haskel's *Great
Fool, Zen Master Ryokan*.

I'll leave you with the following
poem, one of Ryokan's last:

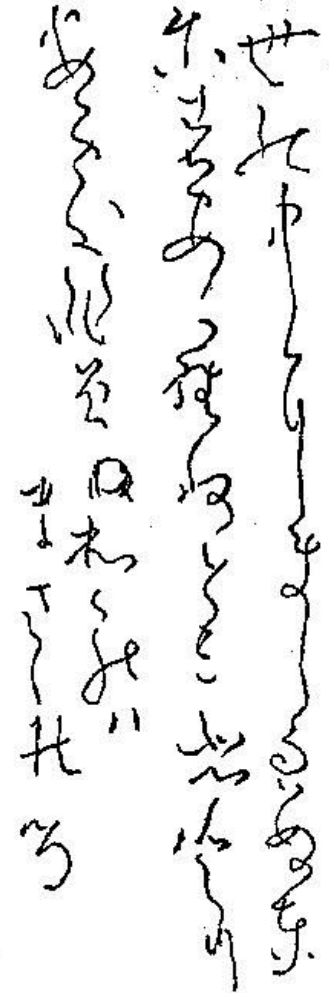
Untitled

Life is like a dewdrop,



Self-portrait and calligraphy by Ryokan:

It is not that I do not wish to associate with men,
But living alone I have the better Way.



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CALLIGRAPHY FOR SALE ON OUR WEBSITE



Mu (nothing)

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

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

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

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

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

Zazen is Good for Nothing

from "On Kodo Sawaki Roshi's Zazen"
by Kosho Uchiyama Roshi

Sawaki-roshi ended a long talk on zazen by saying that it is good for nothing. People thought that he was joking. That however, was not the case. As I have already said [elsewhere]; wherever, whatever happens, I live out my life. As long as I maintain this attitude, I cannot go anywhere. There is nowhere to go. Since I have nowhere to go, it is natural to say that zazen is good for nothing. There I nothing to gain from it because it is universe-full.

Shortly after I began to practice with Sawaki-roshi, I had an opportunity to walk with him in the town of Utsunomiya. While we were walking, I said, "As you know, I'm a rather incompetent person, but I want to continue to practice zazen with you for twenty or even thirty years or until you die. If I do that, would it be possible for a weak person like me to become a little stronger?" Sawaki-roshi replied, "No! Zazen is useless." He had a loud, deep voice, was powerful and resolute. "I am not like this because of my practice of zazen," he continued, "I was like this before I began to practice. Zazen doesn't change a person. Zazen is useless." When I heard these words I thought to myself. "Although Sawaki-roshi said it wouldn't be possible, still I'll be able to improve myself." I followed him for

twenty five years, until he passed away.

Sawaki-roshi passed away in December, 1965. While he was alive, I somehow relied on him. After he died, I couldn't do that anymore. Just after his death, I recalled the question I asked during our walk in Utsunomiya and asked myself the question, "Have I changed after practicing zazen with the Roshi for twenty five years?" I realized that I hadn't really changed at all. In that moment it was natural for me to say to myself. "A violet blossoms as a violet, a rose blossoms as a rose. There are people like Sawaki-roshi who resemble huge rose blossoms. There are other people, like me, who resemble tiny, pretty violet blossoms. Which is better? It's not a relevant question. I should blossom wholeheartedly, just as I am.

I am living out the universe-full life of absolute reality regardless of whether I think so or not, believe it or not, accept it, or reject it. The point of our practice is to manifest this universe-full life here and now. In this there is no judgment in regard to success and failure. If there is success and failure, I am then in relationship to others. However, since everything I encounter here and now is a part of my life, I shouldn't treat anything roughly. I should take care of everything

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Quotes from *Crooked Cucumber*

by Shunryu Suzuki

"Our mind should be free from traces of the past, just like the flowers of spring."

"When my master and I were walking in the rain, he would say, 'Do not walk so fast, the rain is everywhere'."

"Our practice should be based on the idea of selflessness. Selflessness is very difficult to understand. If you try to be selfless, that is already a selfish idea. Selflessness will be there when you do not try anything. When you are practicing with a good teacher, you will naturally be not so selfish."

"Moment after moment,
completely devote yourself
to listening to your inner voice."

"When a tree stands up by itself, we call that tree a buddha."

"We should practice with a beginner's real innocence, devoid of ideas of good or bad, gain or loss."

"As long as you seek for something, you will get the shadow of reality and not reality itself."

"Just to be there in the corner of the garden is enough."

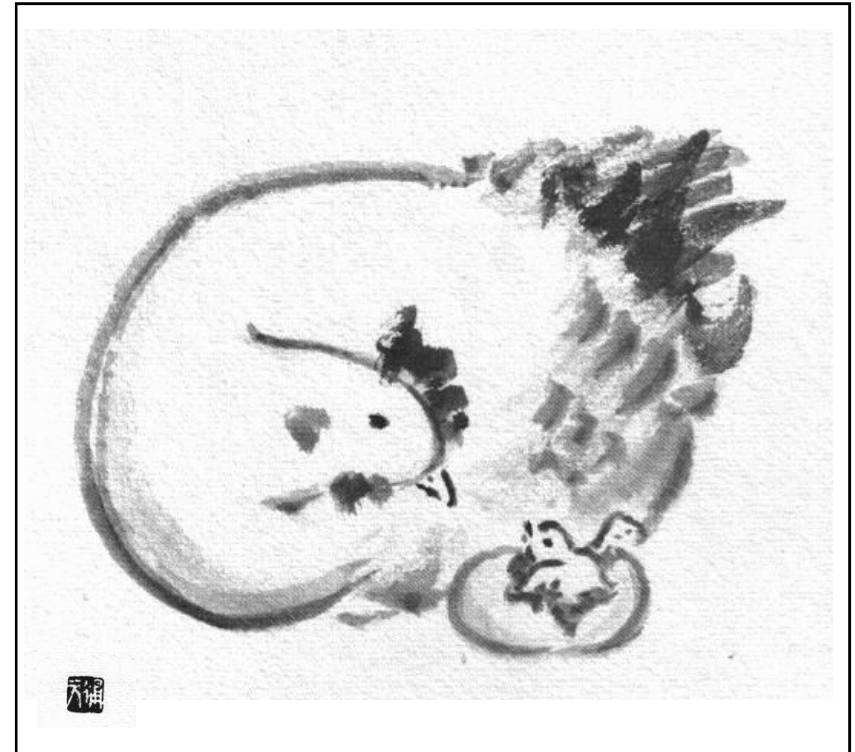
Bodhidharma said, 'I don't know.' 'I don't know' is the first principle. Do you understand? The first principle cannot be known in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, because it is both right and wrong."

"We get no letters from the world of emptiness, but when you see the plant flower, when you hear the sound of bamboo hit by the small stone, that is a letter from the world of emptiness."

"Buddhism is transmitted from warm hand to warm hand."

"There is no special path which is true."

"The ancient bodhisattvas were not afraid of, but found joy in failure, poverty and death -- and in doing small things."



Hen and Chick — Sumi-e by Tsugen Narasaki

[a metaphor for the master-disciple relationship in Zen Buddhism]

Zazen is Good for Nothing

from page 17

wholeheartedly. I practice in this way. Ev-rything I encounter is my life. “Where one attains one thing, one penetrates one thing, when one encounters one practice, one cultivates one practice,” is the way Zen Master Dogen expressed it in *Shobogenzo Genjokoan*. When I encounter one thing, I practice one thing.

For example, when you climb a mountain, you climb moment by moment, one step at a time. It’s not that you climb a mountain only when you reach the summit. To advance one step at a time is what’s important. We live moment by moment, step by step. This is an activity of the whole universe. It is an activity which is good for nothing. It is practice-enlightenment without defilement. According to *Shobogenzo Yuibutsu yobutsu*, “undefiled” means to neither accept nor reject, to not discriminate. There is nothing to pick up or throw away. There is nowhere to go. Since it is universe-full, it cannot be defiled. With this pure life force within myself, I live always here and now, manifesting the whole universe to just do this practice which is good for nothing is the meaning of the word *shikan* [justness]. Zen Master Dogen often used the word *shikan* “just doing” or “doing single-mindedly.” This doesn’t mean experiencing ecstasy or becoming mentally absorbed in some activity. To experience ecstasy or become mentally absorbed, some object or goal is needed. *Shikan* has no

object. It is “just doing” as the pure life force of the self.

In our modern world, most people think in terms of competition with others in the struggle for existence, for money, or status, or power, But a true way of life has nothing to do with relationship to others. We are the self that is only the self. We do self with the self by the self. This self is universe-full; it is one with the whole universe. Whoever, whatever I encounter is my life. We just do things with the true, pure life force of the self without expectation. We don’t have to weep when we fail or fall behind in some kind of competition. There is no need to escape from anything or chase after anything because of a desire to gain happiness and to reject unhappiness. If we restlessly run this way and that, our lives are unstable.

Living straightforwardly with a dignified attitude, moved by the life force of the self that is one with the whole universe – this is the way of life based on zazen that Sawaki-roshi taught.



Buddhist Terms Your Guru Never Taught You

by Gary L. Ray

ZEN SICKNESS: Also known as Madhyamika Sickness. The belief that everything is empty, nothing matters, and that the world is illusory. This sickness is usually cured by a Zen Master with a big stick who asks: “Does emptiness feel pain?”

HUNGRY GHOSTS: Used by Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to describe individuals who inhabit Dharma centers but are unable to absorb the teachings.

MASTER BAITING: Used to describe those lone male individuals who go to Dharma Centers to challenge a teacher, either to try to get them angry or to test their insight with silly questions or koans. Also occurs in martial arts centers.

NOT FULLY BAKED: A term used by Buddhist teachers to describe other Buddhist teachers whom they feel have not reached the spiritual level necessary to teach.

JEWBU: A Buddhist of Jewish descent, who usually wishes to form a synthesis or a reconciliation between their new found Buddhist spirituality and the tradition in which they were raised. See the book, “*The Jew in the Lotus*.”

ROUND RABIN: The going back

and forth, either mentally or physically, between one’s Buddhist practice and Judaic roots.

HINAWEEENIE: A Mahayana practitioner who refers to Theravadin Buddhist with the pejorative term Hinayana [which literally means “lesser path”].

BOOK BUDDHISTS: People who call themselves Buddhists but who have only experienced the Dharma through books.

ETHNOSANGHA OVERSIGHT: The exclusion of ethnic Buddhist groups (nonwhites in this case) when referring to Western Buddhism.

CIRCUMEMBOLISM: Walking meditation performed after sitting to increase circulation and avoid nerve damage to the legs.

BUDDHIST BAMBIFICATION or BUDDHISM LITE: When Buddhist teachers present the dharma in bit size, easily digestible pieces, usually so the hungry ghosts can easily consume them and non-Buddhists can appreciate the teachings.

TELENIRVANA: A state attained by those who answer Dharma Center phones with soft, whispery voices.

Lay Initiation at Heartland Temple



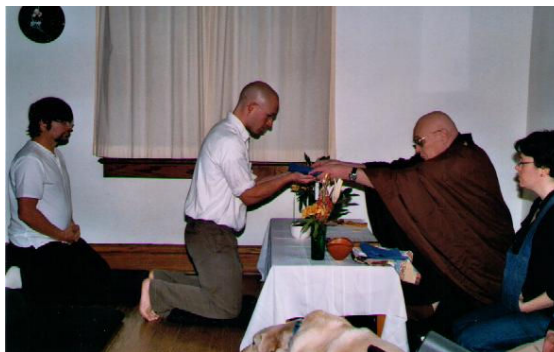
Entering the Buddha Hall



Chanting the Heart Sutra



Chanting the Names of the Buddhas



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