



Prairie Wind

Volume 12, Issue 4

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

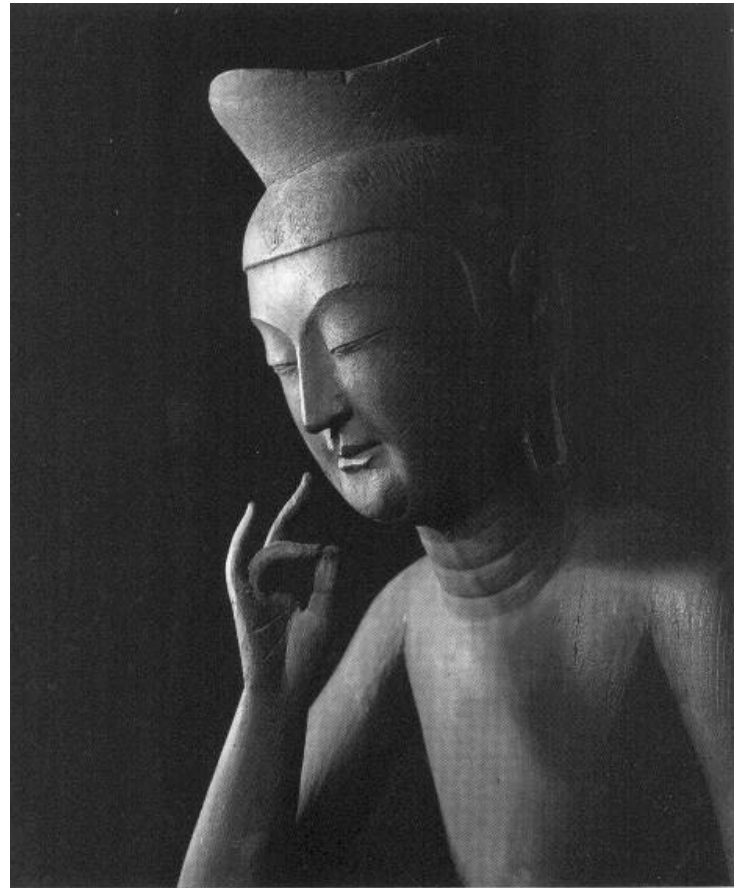
Winter 2003

TRUE FREEDOM

by Nonin Chowaney

We live in the land of the free, or at least that's what we call this country of ours. Nothing is more important to Americans than freedom, and what that means to most of us is personal liberty. Americans want to be at liberty to do what we want to do, go where we want to go, and have what we want to have. Those who take this to extremes would add, "and the hell with everybody else."

To me, this is not freedom but selfishness – "me first-ness" – and it is rampant in our culture. When new laws are passed prohibiting smoking in a particular area, the Letters to the Editor section in the Omaha newspaper is filled with angry responses from smokers who claim that this is tyranny and that they should be able to light up anywhere they want. When I drive through town on the Interstate, either at the speed limit or over it, drivers frequently pull up to a few feet of my back bumper – sometimes flashing their lights – and try to intimidate me into changing lanes so they can have clear sailing. I can feel them screaming, "Get out of my way!" These days, this has become an American anthem.



Bodhisattva — Japan

Although we may think that being at liberty to do what we want to do is freedom, it is really not. True freedom actually has three aspects, and none of them has anything to do with personal liberty.

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Harmony — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

HERMITAGE HEART

by Bonnie Myotai Treace

Bonnie Myotai Treace is the first dharma heir of John Daido Looi. She is the spiritual director of Zen Center of New York City and vice-abbess of Zen Mountain Monastery. The following article, a transcription of a dharma talk, first appeared in Fire Lotus, the newsletter of ZCNYC. It is reprinted here by permission.

A scent of woodsmoke and incense, wind wrapping itself around a small hut, the quiet presence of a settled, generous spiritual friend: to sit with the poems of the Buddhist nun Rengetsu is to allow a teacher into the depth of one's mind. This was my winter practice last year, taking up a few of Rengetsu's winter-inspired verses from the John Stevens translation *Lotus Moon* and staying with them, committing myself to let them inform whatever teaching happens during this time.

Keeping that commitment hasn't always been easy. Some of Rengetsu's writing is so strong that it is immediately engaging and stirs that sense of trust and humility which comes so naturally when excellence takes hold of one's attention. Nothing truer or finer beckons; restlessness slips away. But some of her verses, like many of the classic koans in the collections used in Zen training, lie a little flat initially and take more work to open up. Since commitment to any practice means not moving to something easier when it gets difficult, the challenge has been to stay with them and give even her harder-to-appreciate poems time to work on the heart and soften the impulse to reject them and move on.

Rengetsu lived what could have easily become a tragic life. She was born the daughter of a courtesan and a samurai, but her natural father had her adopted by a lay priest serving at Chionji, Japan's head temple of the Pure Land sect of Buddhism. Her adopted father, Teruhisa, seems to have been devoted to Rengetsu. He taught her martial arts, calligraphy, and an appreciation for art and literature, an appreciation that later — in a way —

would save her life.

For several years, Rengetsu served as an attendant to the lord of Kameoka, a city near Kyoto, and she was fortunate in being able to continue her classical education while there. Stevens writes, charmingly, that "Rengetsu was just as capable of disarming intruders and subduing annoying drunks as she was at making poetry and performing the tea ceremony."

However, challenges then began to roll in: she was married off and had three children who died in early infancy. She eventually separated from a husband who abused her and who also died shortly thereafter. She re-married, and while pregnant with their second child, her husband became ill and passed away. Try to imagine, if you will, this woman's life: She was only thirty-three years old with two small children, and she had experienced more heartbreak and loss than most of us will know in a lifetime. If ever there was an excuse for feeling overwhelmed and depressed, her life certainly offered one.

One pleasure of discovering the lives and teachings of the rare women we find in the history of Buddhism is seeing how they take up the tragedies in their lives and transform them. They remind us of the freedom that no circumstance can take from us. Because their stories are generally less accessible — and because the luxury of serious religious training was less available to them — finding someone like Rengetsu is a great gift.

At the moment in her life when impermanence had pretty much whipped her to the bone and when despair could have taken hold, Rengetsu's heart somehow sparked. She ordained, took her children with her to live on the grounds of Chionji

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

Yuki Mark Prideaux	President
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Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW

Abbot



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.

with Teruhisa, and practiced in earnest. Still, death kept coming, and by the time she was forty-one, her remaining children and the adoptive father she had loved since childhood were all gone. Not allowed to

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

ANNUAL FUND-RAISING BEGINS. By now, each of you should have received our **annual fund-raising appeal**. We do a lot at NZC, and we do it with limited funds. (Our 2003 budget was under \$45,000). **Please consider helping us with a donation.** We will be grateful for any support you can give. All donations to NZC are tax deductible.

HEARTLAND TEMPLE WILL BE CLOSED FROM THURSDAY, JANUARY 1ST THROUGH WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14TH. WE WILL RE-OPEN THURSDAY, JANUARY 15TH WITH MORNING ZAZEN.

Our **Annual Sangha Meeting** will be held **Saturday, February 7th at 10:00 am**. We will be replacing Board Members whose terms have expired and electing Officers for 2004. We will also be reviewing and finishing business from 2003. **We encourage all who practice at Heartland Temple to attend this meeting. A communal lunch will be provided afterwards.**



We finished **painting the exterior of the temple** this Fall. Many thanks to **Nonin**, who organized the project and supervised the crews, which this Fall consisted of **Noshin Marcia Prideaux, Doug Dittman, Chuko Jean Bailey, Valdene Mintzmyer, Randy and Lacey Putnam, Koken Greg Petitto, Gary Carlson, and Bob Schenck.** **Our apologies to anyone inadvertently left off this list!**

We are continuing with the **expansion project** into the lot next door that will provide us with a **new entrance, a much larger zendo, and a handicap-accessible bathroom.** Our architect, **John Albers**, has provided a series of drawings that we will soon take to contractors and ask for bids. **Our continued thanks to John.** We intend to begin fund-raising for the project next Spring.

Many thanks to those who have kept up with their **temple jobs** since last July: **Kido Albert Lickei** for Bookkeeping, **Valdene Mintzmyer** for Altar Cleaning, **Chuko Jean Bailey** and **Noshin Marcia Prideaux** for Ino Work, **Ryoshin Joe Marshall** for Flowers, **Koken Greg Petitto, Doug Dittman, and Sarah Chapman Petitto** for Zendo and Buddha Hall Cleaning, **Bob Schenck** for Office Work, and **Yuki Mark Prideaux** for Yard Work.

After the first of the year, **Nonin** will be traveling to the **Zen Buddhist Temple** in Ann Arbor, Michigan to lead a **Dogen Study Seminar** and give Sunday dharma talk on the weekend of March 13th. He will also visit **Clouds in Water Zen Center** in St. Paul, Minnesota in April, where he'll lead a **Calligraphy Workshop**, give Sunday dharma talk, and show his work at the **St. Paul Art Crawl.**

SESSHIN

There will be one sesshin at NZC in the first quarter of 2004, a **Two-day sesshin on February 14th and 15th.** Fees: \$30 per day for members; \$40 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. **Call (404) 551-9035 or e-mail heartland@prairiewindzen.org to register.**

RECEIVING THE PRECEPTS (LAY ORDINATION)

A **Precept Ceremony** signifying **Lay Ordination** will be offered at Heartland Temple **next March.** Anyone interested in participating should talk to **Nonin.** He suggests the following guidelines for considering this step: **a commitment to zazen, a commitment to study with a teacher, a commitment to sangha, and a commitment to dharma study.** Rakusu sewing begins **Sunday,**

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will lead a **dharma study class** at the temple on three successive **Saturday mornings, from 10 am till noon, on February 21st, 28th, and March 6th.** The text we'll study together will be announced later. The class is **free to members.** Non-members may attend for **\$15 per class.**

OTHER WINTER EVENTS

Dec 10	Ryaku Fusatsu
Feb 1	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
4	Ryaku Fusatsu

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH — SANGHA NOTES

ZCP WINTER EVENTS

DECEMBER

31 — New Year's Eve Open House
(6pm - 1am)

JANUARY

1 — Closed
2 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm
4 — World Peace Ceremony
6 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
9 - 11 — Two-day Sesshin***
15 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
31 — Beginners' Day***

FEBRUARY

1 — World Peace Ceremony
10 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
13 — Intro Zen, 6 pm
19 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
20-22 — Two-day Precept Sesshin***

MARCH

5 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm
6 — Rakusu Sewing Begins
7 — World Peace Ceremony
9 — Ryaku Fusatsu*
18 — Sitting at Mt. Alvernia

*after evening zazen

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

***Please Register for this event

Beginning in January, our **Tuesday morning sitting and service** will be held at **7:00 am** at the **Mattress Factory**, an installation Art Gallery at **500 Sampsonia Way** on the north side of Pittsburgh. **Deep Spring Temple will be closed on Tuesday am.** Thanks go to Sangha members **Dainei Jane Harter, Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar, Eden McNutt, and Ruth Stanford** for organizing and staffing this new venture.

We have hosted three **special retreats** this Fall: A **Jewish Women's Contemplative Group Retreat** led by **Lyle Poncher**, a twenty-four hour **Zen Retreat for Indiana University of Pennsylvania students** led by **Kyoki**, and a **Sesshin for Women** led by **Rev. Teijo Munnich** from Zen Center of Asheville, North Carolina.

The **Sangha of Deep Spring Temple** has selected three people to serve with **Kyoki** on our **Board of Directors** and assume Officer roles, **Myoen Margaret Coghlen — President, Cary Crouth — Vice-President, and Mary Dieter — Treasurer.** Thanks to you all for serving.



Wild Turkeys at Deep Spring Temple

Kyoki continued her **dharma travels** this past Fall. She led a workshop in Ames, Iowa on **Handling Difficult Conversations** for the **Iowa Hospice Association**, spoke at the **United Methodist Church** in Blue Springs, Nebraska, and gave **Sunday morning dharma talk** at **Nebraska Zen Center** in Omaha. Each month, **Kyoki, Myoen Margaret Coghlan, and Jyakunen Patricai Carpenter** visit the Sangha at **Loretto Federal Prison.**

Many thanks to all who help during our last **Sangha Work Day: Kyoki, Jyakunen Patricia Carpenter, Myoen Margaret Coghlan, Dainei Jane Harter, Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar, Mimi Jong, Michael Kapus, Eden McNutt, Meghan O'Donnell, John Ott, Ruth Stanford, and Don, Joshua, and Malisa Smith.** We readied the garden and flower beds for the Winter, cleaned gutters, washed windows, and did other essential maintenance tasks.

Check out our website at www.prairiewindzen.org. It's updated regularly with news of **upcoming special events!**

ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

AM

Tuesday

7:00 a.m. - Zazen at the Mattress Factory

Wednesday - Saturday

5:30 a.m. - Zazen

6:45 a.m. - Morning Service

PM

Tuesday - Friday

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

Sunday

10:00 a.m. - Zazen

10:40 a.m. - Work Practice

11:15 a.m. - Service/Dharma Talk

12:30 p.m. - Lunch

Closed Mondays

True Freedom

from page 1

The first aspect of true freedom is manifested by *not* following desires. We are most free when we realize that true freedom lies in *not doing* rather than in doing, and *not doing* begins in the mind, for it is there that desire begins. Realizing that we do not have to follow the desires that are always coming up for us is truly liberating.

Whenever we see or meet someone we are physically attracted to and desire for them comes up, we have a choice. We can either pursue the person or not pursue them. If we pursued every person we are physically attracted to, we'd probably spend most of our days pursuing and would be thus enslaved by our desires. Whether it's sex, food, cd's, clothes, or drugs, the more we get, the more we want, and it's endless. There is no freedom in this. True freedom lies in *not* chasing after things we desire rather than being chained by pursuing them.

I love music and books, and sometimes, I'm chained by this love. Last month, I visited my daughter and her family in

We are truly free when we need nothing and want nothing. This is ultimate liberation, from desires, from cares and worries, and from the mistaken notion that true freedom is something we must attain.

Southern New Jersey, and my granddaughter and I drove to the Princeton Record Exchange, a used music shop. I found three operas at very low prices, so I bought them all. We also stopped at a bookstore, and I bought three books that I'd been looking for. When I returned home, I found myself having difficulty finding time to listen to the operas or read the books! They sit on my "things to listen to or read shelf" and stare out at me as if to say "read me; listen to me." On my last day off, I found myself arranging my time so I could fit in one of the operas rather than taking it easy and moving from one activity to the next freely and easily, as I like to do on a day

off. Because I bought the operas, I now feel compelled to listen to them. I am not free!

Desires are constantly arising for everyone, and the more we give in to them, the more we are enslaved by them. The more we let them go without acting on them, the freer we are, and the simpler our lives become.

Another aspect of true freedom is liberation from cares and worries. This, too, begins in the mind. If we think we can be free from cares and worries by making our lives more comfortable – by getting a bigger house, a nicer car, a better-paying job, or by investing in an IRA – we are simply deluding ourselves. Everything is impermanent. Anything can be taken away. Those who invested their retirement savings in Enron were rudely awakened to this fact, as were those who lost their jobs when companies they worked for either folded or moved to a foreign country in the past few years.

Seeking freedom from cares and worries by acquiring material goods is a mistake. They not only give us a false sense of security but they also weigh us down and limit us. We have to work long and hard to earn the money to buy the goods and services that we think will end our cares and worries, and once we acquire them, we have to work longer and harder to maintain them. Not only do we mistakenly believe that acquiring things will ease our cares and worries but we also fail to see that the more we have, the more we have to worry about! Our possessions chain us up and limit our freedom. In the following poem, Louis Jenkins puts it this way:

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**.

Picnic on the Shore

Shore grass growing
among the big rocks
enduring year after year.
This is the way to live.
A simple life,
the proper arrangement
of a few elements.
But here you are
standing on slippery stone,
trying to balance
a full plate and a cup.
What with the wrappers,
the flies and the wind,
already things have gotten out of hand.

True freedom from cares and worries doesn't come from acquiring things. It comes when we are spiritually secure, if our needs and wants are few, and if we cultivate the ability to let go of cares and worries when they come up.

The other day, I visited a sangha member who was in the hospital recovering from a back operation. His recovery was progressing nicely, but he was quite worried about not being able to walk someday. I asked him if he were able to walk now, and he said, "Yes, I can get around pretty good, and it's getting better day by day, but I'm worried about the future." I tried to get him to acknowledge

True Freedom

from page 6

that worry when it came up but to let it go as soon as possible. Because he's doing fine now, any thoughts about not walking in the future are just ideas; they have no substance; they are illusions. Why worry about things that don't exist?

When we let go of cares and worries about the future and live life as it is right now, we liberate ourselves from cares and worries. Like the first aspect of true freedom – not pursuing desires – letting go of cares and worries begins in the mind.

The third aspect of true freedom is the realization that we are already free, that we can only enslave ourselves. One of my favorite koans addresses this issue:

The monk Daoshin asked the Zen Master Seng Ts'an, "Please show me the way to liberation." Seng Ts'an replied, "Who binds you?" Daoshin responded, "No one binds me." Seng Ts'an replied, "Then why do you seek liberation?" At these words, Daoshin was greatly enlightened.

What was the nature of Daoshin's awakening? He understood that, fundamentally, we are already free. Unless we are physically someone else's slave and wear real chains, no one can bind us; we can only bind ourselves by what we think and what we do.

Daoshin probably sought out Seng Ts'an because something was missing in his life. His spiritual practice was not taking care of this lack, and he most likely heard that there was a Zen master living up in the mountains who might be able to help him. Seng Ts'an was indeed a Zen master, a great one, the third Zen Ancestor in China. He was a leper, and because of this and the constant persecution of Buddhists rampant in China at the time, lived a reclusive life high in the mountains.

Daoshin was not a novice monk. He had been practicing for many years, yet he still did not feel free. From what? From the cares and worries of human life? From unhappiness? From the workings of mind pushing him this way and that way? From

confusion and doubt? I see Daoshin as someone at the end of his rope. His question, "Please show me the way to liberation" comes out of desperation. After a long spiritual journey and a rugged trip through the mountains looking for Seng Ts'an, Daoshin's relief when he finally realized that he no longer needed to seek liberation, that he was already free, must have been so profound that it shook the bottom out of his life. The koan says, "Daoshin was greatly enlightened."

We are truly free when we need nothing and want nothing. This is ultimate liberation, from desires, from cares and worries, and from the mistaken notion that true freedom is something we must attain.

The Japanese monk/poet Ryokan writes:

I've never bothered about getting ahead
But just gone leisurely along letting things take their way
In my bag are three measures of rice
A bundle of firewood sits by the hearth
Who cares about delusion and enlightenment?
What use is there in fame and fortune?
In my hut, I listen to the evening rain
And stretch my legs without a care in the world

trans. Abe and Haskel

How wonderful to sit and listen to the evening rain, wanting nothing, needing nothing. Completely free.

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.

Hermitage Heart

from page 3

remain at Chionji, she then had to find her way alone.

Rengetsu walked into a world that attempted to limit her on the basis of her gender. It's said that she considered whether she could make a living as a teacher of the chess-like game of *go*, at which she excelled, but she recognized that few male students would be able to muster student-mind with a woman teacher. She soon realized that art would be her path and began making pottery as a kind of moving meditation, inscribing each piece with a bit of poetry.

Over time, her work became immensely popular, so much so that she found it necessary to never stay long in any one place or crowds would begin to gather around her. Likening herself to a "drifting cloud," she was still incredibly prolific, and her work became one of the most generous, sustained offerings of deep spiritual practice in Buddhist history. When she died in 1875 at the age of eighty-four, she left a legacy of more than fifty thousand pieces of pottery, calligraphy, paintings, and poetry. She is remembered not as a tragic figure, but as one of those rare human beings who drew from a seemingly bottomless well of strength and love.

The three Rengetsu winter poems that I'd like to introduce to you to have a straightforward, unadorned quality, as does most of her writing. Although she did not organize them into the sequence in which they appear in Stevens' book, their progression struck me as — however inadvertently — the expression of a spiritual journey.

Here's the first poem:

Winter Confinement in Shigaraki Village

Last night's storm was fierce
As I can see by this morning's thick
blanket of snow
Rising to kindle wood chips in lonely
Shigaraki Village.

Shigaraki Village is where Rengetsu would go to get clay for her pottery. This is such a beautifully simple poem. A woman enters a hut; she's come some distance; she's worked all day. Darkness comes. At dawn, she sees snow blanketing the hills and knows that there must have been a fierce storm in the night. She kindles the fire. In its *thusness*, it is just *thus*.

But as we stay with the poem, we might find ourselves reflecting on the journey we make to find the clay for our own vessel. We might begin to wonder about leaving home and coming to dwell alone. During our practice period at the temple, each of us, for instance, is asked to leave our familiar patterns and intensify practice, to dwell peacefully in each moment's sufficiency and make our home there. When monastics ordain, it's the same deal; we become *unsui*, "clouds and water," letting go of the activities in our life that are self-securing, and giving ourselves to the journey that is itself our home. So, when the poet makes her pilgrimage to Shigaraki, going with her is to take that journey as well. Will we go, gather the clay for our real work, and settle into the moment?

In Shigaraki village, the poet is waking up. She's inferring from the evidence the realities of a night's storm. It's interesting that in the Buddhist tradition, night is often used to point to total intimacy, the reality of oneness, of not separating the self from things. In the night, or "darkness," there is no distinction, no separation between seer and seen. In the words of the Heart Sutra, it is the time of "no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind." What is that night? Of course, when many of us begin to sense the "fierce storm" of night in spiritual life, we may yearn for nothing but to be elsewhere. On the edge of it, we pull back, trying to hold onto something of ourselves.

Haven't you felt that resistance that thrives right on the cusp of breaking through? There, on the edge, most of us

have some kind of argument. "I can't sit another minute," we say. Or, "I can't see this koan." Or, "I don't know how to love this person." The poem points to a kind of sweet constancy, the kindling of the fire. Just take care of the moment. Stoke the flame when it falters. The poet stirs the wood chips; we stir our life to find the warm center of things. What is that center?

Master Dogen writes, "When the Dharma does not fill your whole body and mind, you think it's already sufficient. When the Dharma fills your body and mind, you understand something is missing." What is needed? The world has never depended more than it does now on those who will genuinely ask that question. Always encourage each other to go deeply into that inquiry. How might you serve? What remains to be seen?

Dogen continues, "To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be confirmed by the ten thousand things. To be confirmed by the ten thousand things is to cast off body and mind of self as well as that of others. No trace of realization remains, and this no trace is continued endlessly."

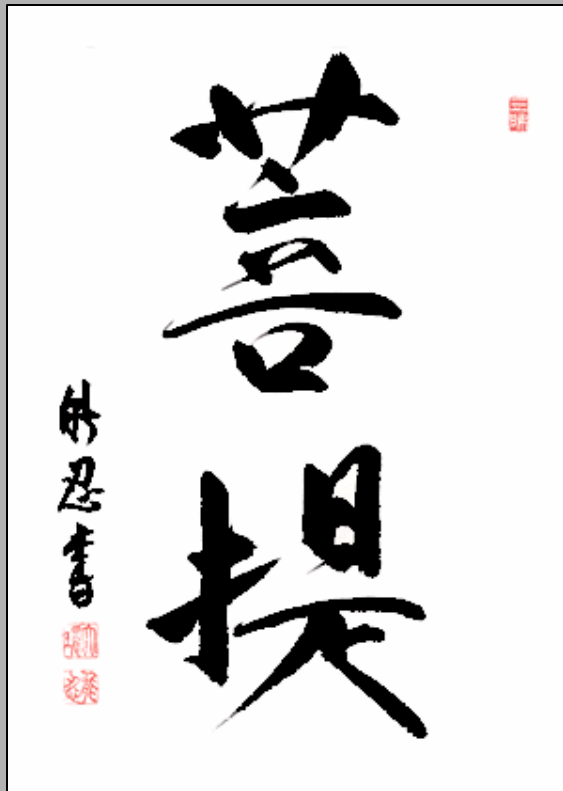
The fire of our freedom will always warm the hut, but somehow we won't feel it unless we kindle it. And that kindling of the fire continues. It's not on the clock, like a workday we can't wait to see end. It's loving, and essentially timeless. Practically, getting this point means we're relieved of feeling we're behind, or progressing too slowly in our training, or that we're spiritually talented and should set our sights on becoming teachers. It's just time to kindle the wood chips and get over yourself.

In the hut where she's come to make the vessel, responsible for the fire, awake to the night's storm as it was revealed only in the light, the poet then faces the day.

Our second poem is:

A Day of Hail

continued on page 9



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**.

Hermitage Heart

from page 8

Will the paper
On my makeshift little window
Withstand the assault of the hailstones?

In this poem, a woman, alone in a hut, wonders if her small window made of fragile rice paper will be strong enough not to be ripped apart by a long day of pelting hail. Simple enough: the sound of heavy stones of solid water hitting and hitting and hitting, the paper window pocking with each hit, quivering, providing such a thin barrier against the storm.

What is this makeshift window — this temporary point of view, if you will? The poet takes us into a day in which the essential vulnerability of our position is a visceral reality. She invites us to feel and hear and taste the aliveness of right now. How do we live with impermanence? By

adding another layer to the window? By praying for sunnier days? We cannot stop the hail, Rengetsu seems to whisper, but we can be awake. Awake and at peace.

How do you find that peace?

Be yourself. Be yourself, and live that boundless reality intimately, generously, freely. Usually, if you ask someone who they are, you're likely to get the list: "I went to this college; I'm married to this person; I know how to make soup; I'm good at this; I'm bad at that; I can do this; I can do that." We list all the aggregates, all the things that change, all the makeshift identities. But what is the real nature of the self? Noticing the thinness of the seeming barrier between inside and out, just experience that permeability. What are we protecting?

A monk asked Master Tozan, "When

cold and heat come, how can we avoid them?" How do we live in this world of trouble, of suffering, of horror, of change, where we can't hold onto what's pleasant or completely get away from what's unpleasant? How can we avoid the heat and cold? Tozan replied, "Go to where there is no heat or cold."

The monk then implored, "But how do I get to that place where there is no heat or cold?" Tozan said, "When it's cold, the cold kills you. When it's hot, the heat kills you." In other words, kill the separation. Quit living in fear of what might be, and dwell in this.

But what about the assault of the hailstones? When what hits is not just weather but something that arrives with intent to harm, what then? I find it inspiring that Rengetsu spends none of the precious moments in her poem cursing the sky, or dissecting the cause of precipitation.

Hermitage Heart

from page 9

Why are so many people trying to kill so many people? Why is there such enormous greed? Why is there evil? Why did this happen to me? We should consider how a day of hail might be simply, utterly, just that: a day of hail, not to be denied, not feared, not hidden from. There's a story told about an old fisherman out on a very foggy day. Suddenly, this other boat comes and crashes into him. He spends the next couple of hours battening down the boat where it's leaking and cursing this sailor who shouldn't even be on the water, who ruined his day, ruined his catch, ruined his

Under the eaves of my hermitage
Are they freezing tonight in the winter
storm?

This last of our three poems brings us into the hermitage again, with a feeling of the life under its eaves. Entering it, we, in a sense, enter the heart of Buddhism. We stop waiting for company. We stop needing others to show us what's normal, to know what we should do. We sit alone. That's the first teaching gesture of the Buddha; he stopped deferring, referring, and looking for an authority. He just sat down — in his own life, in his own mind, in his own condition, with his own karma

wisdom. Each of us can leap thoroughly into that hermitage heart and get on with it. We don't need another life, a different condition, a greater wisdom, a better personality. We just need to take care of the life under the eaves of this measureless hermitage.

How? In asking, we begin the journey home.

The rain has stopped, the clouds have drifted away,

and the weather is clear again.

If your heart is pure, then all things in your world are pure,

Abandon this fleeting world, abandon yourself,

Then the moon and flowers will guide you along the Way.

Ryokan
trans. John Stevens



family's meal and his livelihood. Enraged, he works through the morning, cussing and cursing as, gradually, the fog begins to lift.

Suddenly he sees that what hit him wasn't another boat. It was a rock. All at once, he regretted the hours wasted in such anger, the birds he didn't hear, the enjoyment he didn't feel.

Rengetsu's third poem is:

Mountain Retreat in Winter

The little persimmons drying outside

— and aloneness was transformed. The whole world wasn't excluded; when he sat, the dividing wall between his life, mind, condition, and karma and those of the world was dropped. This is the hermitage heart that beats in each of us. We just need to stop being too afraid to trust it.

Practice is the journey to that trust. It begins when we stop waiting for someone to say: here's the plan, here's the right thing to do, here's the act of courage, of attention, of kindness, or of wisdom that you can make. Each of us has that wisdom. Each of us, in fact, is that

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER 2004 PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Jan	19	Dainin Katagiri's Birthday*
	25	Rakusu Sewing Begins
	26	Zen Master Dogen's Birthday*
Feb	1	World Peace Ceremony
	4	Ryaku Fusatsu
	14	Winter Practice Period Begins
	14-15	Two-day Sesshin
	15	Buddha's Parinirvana*
Mar	1	Dainin Katagiri's Memorial Day*
	3	Ryaku Fusatsu
	2-7	Lay Ordination Week
	7	Lay Ordination
	20	One-day Sesshin
Apr	4	World Peace Ceremony
	7	Ryaku Fusatsu
	8	Buddha's Birthday*
	17-18	Two-day Sesshin
May	2	World Peace Ceremony
	5	Ryaku Fusatsu
	15	One-day Sesshin
	16	Remembrance Day
Jun	1	OPW Practice Period Begins
	2	Ryaku Fusatsu
	5-6	Two-day Sesshin (at ZCP)
	6	World Peace Ceremony
Jul	4	World Peace Ceremony
	7	Ryaku fusatsu
	20	Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day*
Aug	1	World Peace Ceremony
	4	Ryaku Fusatsu
Sep	1	Ryaku Fusatsu
	5	World Peace Ceremony
	11	Fall Practice Period Begins
	11-12	Two-day Sesshin
	29	Zen Master Dogen's Parinirvana*
		Ryaku Fusatsu
Oct	3	World Peace Ceremony
	18	Bodhidharma Day
	23	One-day Sitting
	27	Ryaku Fusatsu
Nov	7	World Peace Ceremony
	24	Ryaku Fusatsu
Dec	1-7	Rohatsu Sesshin
	8	Buddha's Enlightenment Day*
	29	Ryaku Fusatsu

*Services commemorating these days, unless they fall on a Sunday, will be held before dharma talk on the Sunday nearest the date on the Sunday nearest the date indicated.

Note: Ryaku Fusatsu follows shortened evening zazen.

World Peace Ceremony precedes Sunday Group Discussion.

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

All are welcome to join us for New Year's Eve Services. We'll begin at **6:00 pm** with a **Pot-luck Supper**, followed by **Candlelight and Fire Ceremonies** at **8:00 pm**. We'll then **sit zazen** (and walk) from **9:30 pm till midnight**. During sitting, we'll **ring the temple bell 108 times** to mark the turning of the year. **Refreshments will be served at midnight**.

You may attend during any part of the evening. **Come when you like and leave whenever you need to.**

WINTER PRACTICE PERIOD AT NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER

Winter Practice Period will begin with **February Sesshin** on the **14th and 15th** and end with **April Sesshin** on the **17th and 18th**.

Practice Period is designed to provide structure for those who wish to **intensify their practice** and their **Sangha connections** for a specific period of time. **Practice Period students** commit to intensifying practice in three areas: **(1) daily practice at home** (sitting and devotional services), **(2) regular involvement at the temple** (e.g. on Sunday mornings and for work practice), and **(3) special events** (e.g. sesshins, study groups, and ryaku fusatsu). Students also commit to keeping a **daily practice journal** and to periodic **Practice Period Group meetings**.

Interested students should write up their Practice Period commitments and turn them in to **Nonin** before **February 10th**. If this is your first Practice Period, speak with Nonin before turning in your commitments.

From the editor:

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

NZC's Website Address is:
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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

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