



Prairie Wind

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A DIFFERENT VOICE

Usually, an article I have written begins each issue of *Prairie Wind*, but occasionally, we like to feature an article by a different voice. In this issue, that voice belongs to Sevan Ross.

I first met Sevan at an American Zen Teachers Association meeting in San Francisco many years ago. We sat together at a dinner closing that meeting and found that we had a lot in common. In fact, we determined that his ex-wife worked for my cousin many years ago in Syracuse, New York, near where I'm from!

Sevan and I reminisced about mutual friends at that dinner and about living in Central New York. We also spoke of our experience in Zen practice and found that we began at about the same time, in the mid-1970's. Over time, Sevan and I have become good friends.

Sevan began practicing with Philip Kapleau in Rochester, N.Y. and was eventually priest-ordained by Bodhin Kjolhede, one of Roshi Kapleau's dharma heirs and his successor as Director of the Rochester Zen Center. Later, Sevan was sanctioned by Bodhin as a Resident Teacher and in 1996 was asked to serve as Director of Chicago Zen Center, a position he still holds.

Subsequently, Sevan went through koan training with James Ishmael Ford, founding teacher of Boundless Way Zen, a network of Zen centers currently based mostly in New England. Sevan went through dharma transmission with James and was sanctioned as a teacher by him.



Nirvana — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

*Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW
Abbot, Heartland Temple*

PRACTICING WITH A TEACHER

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

Jack Kornfeld

Good teachers know deep in their hearts the boundlessness of the Way. They also know their own pettiness and lack of compassion as compared to the height and breadth of the Way. Accordingly, good teachers do not put on airs. True teachers cannot be recognized by appearance. Only true teachers tell us things we do not like to hear. Without assuming any authority, they dress plainly and live in a simple dwelling, making the Way their teacher, the Dharma their teacher. Singlemindedly, they continue to seek and practice the Way.

Zen Master Dogen



What about those of us without formal teachers, without the benefit of a discerning spiritual director, roshi, or guru: The principle still stands firm: if you don't have a teacher, you need to look for one, and you won't find one unless you look.

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

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

from In the Spirit of Happiness, by The Monks of New Skete

If you can't practice under the guidance of a true teacher, it's best not to practice at all.

Zen Master Dogen

AROUSE THE MIND THAT ABIDES NOWHERE

by Sevan Ross

Most of the grown-up men I knew as a child – my father’s friends, my uncles – had jobs which they held for many years. If they were not employed with the same company for years, they at least held the same or similar jobs for years. Most of these men were coal miners and a few were steel workers. They did not do meditation. They rarely went to church. While they may well have occasionally happened upon thoughts, ideas, or concerns of matters spiritual, these were usually along the lines of worry that the roof coal in the mine butt that they were in had stopped making its characteristic and oddly comforting cracking and popping noise. A silent roof could mean weight bearing down, which in turn could mean an impending cave in. So one would perhaps suddenly be filled with spiritual concerns, but these were as practical and short-lived as the danger itself.

Except for strikes and lay-offs, these men reported for work every day. They did not have interesting jobs. Their labors were not rewarding, except for the good money they got paid. Improvements and advancements in their work lives were measured in their bidding for a better or safer job within the structure of their work place. A buggy operator could become a mechanic and thus be paid better and work outside the mine itself, out where the air was fresh and the roof would never cave in.

Until the mines played out and places like Brazil started making far cheaper steel while our government looked the other way and allowed foreigners to cut into the US Steel industry, these workers, even while suffering the toils and dangers of difficult drudgery, enjoyed secure and long-term employment. They knew who they were. They could provide. Their lives held a gift – what Richard Sennett in *The Corrosion of Character* calls “narrative coherence.” They had skills which were useful long term. These skills and the gained wisdom that accompanied them could become heirlooms passed down to the younger generation of workers with the assurance that these skills would be necessary for a

productive work life.

This narrative coherence, this sense of the continuance of a self set in a social context which had meaning, began to erode in our society and for these workers in the early 1970’s. Many commentators have assessed just how and why this slide began, and these analyses are useful to anyone interested in the socio-economics of our cultural decline in recent decades. Here, however, we want to shed light on practicing Zen in our current culture and also shed light on the joys and benefits of practice, as well as the barriers to it.

There has been a huge shift in how we define ourselves as people in our society. The biological roles of mother and father and daughter still remain (though these are morphing before our eyes, too), but such self-identifiers as “coal miner” or “systems analyst” ring more hollow today than in even the recent past.

We all know that our world is technologically turning at a high rate of speed. We all know that any apparent stability is an illusion. All jobs and any life-long job narrative are subject to wholesale radical change or termination, and these can both come quickly. Companies seem to instantly Frankenstein themselves into new entities and leave behind whole armies of ex-employees who look up from their workstations one day to find that someone has silently removed the roof. Systems analysis becomes mere data entry over night. The web designer is only one software package away from unemployment, and the software may be written in Bangalore or Shanghai by a mere child. Whole industries pass in weekends, towns go up for sale, houses decline in value overnight, and health insurance becomes a mythological holy grail.

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
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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.

Workers, especially young ones, come to know all of this at a cellular level. Any coherence of employment, community identity, or personal narrative is lost. We suddenly find ourselves left with a prevailing attitude of constant, almost desperate skill-set

Continued on page 8

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

ANNUAL FUND-RAISING BEGINS. By now, you should have received our **annual fund-raising appeal** for financial support to continue our on-going programs. We do a lot at NZC, and we do it with limited funds. **Please consider helping us with a donation.** We will be grateful for any support you can give. All donations to NZC are **tax deductible.**

Our **building fund appeal** has been quite successful. We are very, very close to reaching our goal of half-way to \$160,00 and should reach it when all the pledges come in. **Many thanks to those who have contributed to this effort.** We will resume fund-raising for this project in the Spring.

Our **Annual Sangha Meeting** will be held **Saturday, February 2nd at 10:00 a.m.** We will be replacing Board Members whose terms have expired and electing Officers for 2008. We will also be reviewing and finishing business from 2007. **We encourage all who practice a Heartland Temple to attend this meeting. A communal lunch will be served afterwards.**

We're running behind publishing this issue of *Prairie Wind*, so this gives me an opportunity to **thank all those** who participated and made this past **Rohatsu Sesshin** the best we've ever had at the temple. **Special thanks to Rev. Kyoki Roberts** and those students who traveled all the way from **Deep Spring Temple** to sit with us.



Nonin and Sozen George Patenode after Lay Initiation

The **large house next door** is up for sale and our **Board of Directors** is considering buying it instead of building the temple addition. We'll keep you posted.

Eisai Elizabeth Muia has left **Tassajara Monastery** and has been sitting **Practice Period** at San Francisco Zen Center's **City Center** for the past couple of months. Now that Practice Period is over, Elizabeth will be traveling soon to visit her family in Pennsylvania and then will return to Heartland Temple as a resident at the end of December. **Welcome back in advance, Elizabeth!**

Eric Currie has returned from a tour of duty overseas. **We welcome him home.**

Our condolences to **Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer** who lost four friends that she formerly worked with at Von Maur department store, the scene of the recent mass shooting in Omaha. Our condolences also to **Taido Jon Kayne**, his wife **Sandy** and his daughter **Shay**, who live next door to the shooter, who also shot and killed himself.

SESSHIN

There will be two sesshins at NZC this Winter, a **Two-day sesshin** on **February 9th and 10th**, and a **One-day sesshin** on **March 22nd**. Fees; \$30 per day for members; \$40 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. call **402-551-9035** or e-mail heartland@prairiewindzen.org to register.

LAY INITIATION RECEIVING THE PRECEPTS

A **Precept Ceremony** signifying **Lay Initiation** will be offered at Heartland Temple next March. Anyone interested in participating should talk to **Nonin**. He suggest 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** will begin on **February 3rd**.

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will lead a **Dharma Study Class** at the temple this Winter. It will meet on four successive **Saturday mornings** from **10 a.m. till noon** on **February 23rd** and **March 1st, 8th, and 15th**. The text for study will be announced later. This class is **free to members**. The non-member fee is **\$15 per class**.

OTHER WINTER EVENTS

| | |
|-------|--|
| Feb 3 | World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion |
| 6 | Precept Ceremony |
| Mar 2 | World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion |
| 5 | Precept Ceremony |

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

ZCP FALL EVENTS

DECEMBER

- 23 — Rev. Sevan Ross, guest teacher
 24-26 — ZCP closed
 31 — New Year's Eve, begins 6 pm

JANUARY

- 1 — ZCP Closed
 5 — Beginners Intro & Sitting, 9-4
 6 — World Peace Ceremony*
 8,15,22 — Buddhist Study Class, 7:30 pm
 19 — Dainin Katagiri's Birthday*
 22 — Precept Ceremony, 6 pm
 24 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm**
 25-27 — Two-day sesshin**
 26 — Zen Master Dogen's Birthday*

FEBRUARY

- 3 — World Peace Ceremony*
 12,19,26 — Buddhist Study Class, 7:30 pm
 14 — Intro to Zen, 6 pm**
 15 — Buddha's Parinirvana*
 19 — Precept Ceremony, 6 pm
 22-24 — Two-day sesshin**

March

- 1 — Dainin Katagiri's Memorial*
 2 — World Peace Ceremony*
 4,11,18 — Buddhist Study Class, 7:30 pm
 18 — Precept Ceremony, 6 pm
 21-23 — Two-day sesshin**

*Special morning service

**Please register for this event

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

If you want to receive monthly schedule updates and last-minute changes to events, join our e-mail list by going to <http://www.prairiewindzen.org/zcp/list.htm> and registering, or send an e-mail to Zen Center of Pittsburgh at: kyoki@prairiewindzen.org.

This fall has been especially rich and full at Deep Spring. Our very own **Shikaku Meghan O'Donnell** led a weekend workshop here this fall on *Compassionate Care for the Dying*, utilizing her extensive training in hospice work. Immediately following this, we held lay initiation for **Rob (Genkai—Profound Ocean) Moore** and resident **Bryan (Jyoshin—Pure Trust) Ritti**. Along with this event, we had a baby-naming ceremony for **Jen Snyder** and Bryan's daughter **Paige**, who received the name of **Eishin (Eternal Trust)** and for **Eva**, daughter of **Derek and Judy Brown**, who received the name of **Kodo (Illuminate the Way)**.



Kyoki, Jyoshin Bryan Ritti, and Genkai Rob Moore after Lay Initiation

After the baby-naming ceremony, **Jisen and Kyoki** then took off for **Jikoji** in Los Gatos, California, where they attended the first national angu of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association. **Jisen** was one of 9 novice priests attending and **Kyoki** was the administrative teacher, organizing the month-long training for novices. **Kyoki** serves on the national board of the SZBA.

While **Jisen and Kyoki** were away, **Rev. Tonen O'Connor** of Milwaukee Zen Center and **Seirin Barbara Kohn** of Austin Zen Center were visiting teachers at Deep Spring. In November **Daigaku Rumme** from the Sotoshu International office in San Francisco led sesshin for us. Our deepest gratitude for the wisdom and time these teachers shared with us.

December found **Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar**, **Ryushin John Ott**, **Liaoran Mimi Jong**, **Jyoshin Bryan Ritti**, **Jisen**, and **Kyoki** at **Nebraska Zen Center** for the seven days of **Rohatsu sesshin**, where they were joined by nine members of the Nebraska Zen Center, led by **Nonin**.

TAKING CARE OF STUFF

by Daiki Doc

Practicing in prison has been compared to practicing in a monastery – involuntary incarceration (prison) on the one hand, voluntary incarceration (monastery) on the other. The comparison seems valid enough if one focuses upon the dynamic of incarceration itself, but the two just don't feel the same.

Admittedly, my only previous experiences with monasteries have been a few three-week retreats here and there many, many years ago. Nonetheless, there are days here in prison when it seems more like I'm practicing in the middle of an eight-lane intersection at which the traffic lights are broken. Visions of monastic life do not arise. I realize that life in "the real world" also is hectic, frequently unfair, and often harsh. According to CNN and the newspapers, the situation is not likely to improve any time soon.

As a Zen Buddhist practitioner, I know that life is full of suffering, so the notion the "stuff happens" should not surprise me, even though sometimes I act like it does. This kind of "stuff," not the kind I used to buy that was obsolete within six months, I judge to be bad, wrong – negative in some personal way. By making such value judgments, I don't improve my situation any and merely narrow my perception and awareness of reality and the options available to me. I reduce my ability to actually live my life at these moments. As Taizan Maezumi put it, "Value judgments are, in a way, necessary, and yet because of them we create problems. So the thing to do is step backward and not rush forward. Then, examine and reflect upon yourself carefully."

I am struck by Maezumi-roshi's use of the word "carefully." I believe that his meaning is not that I should be only meticulous in my examination of and reflection upon myself, although meticulousness doubtless benefits the process but that I should examine and reflect upon myself "full of care," with compassion.

This is not at all, I hasten to add, like

making excuses for myself, since excuses, by their very nature, include value judgments. Moreover, in every excuse, the arrow of responsibility is deflected, slightly or widely, from its true target. Making excuses, for self or others, simply stupefies awareness, dims perception, and reduces the opportunity to learn.

Speaking of perception, it might be a surprise that not all inmates are like those portrayed on any of the *Law and Order* tv franchises or their clones. Acts of kindness, though discouraged by some staff and some inmates, do occur in prison, and life, for the most part and by most people, is valued here. Still, much of the "stuff" that happens in prison is generated by the karmic ripples of earlier casual violence and pointed neglect. To paraphrase Dainin Katagiri, when we harm others, we devalue human life, and once we devalue it, we find it easier to harm each other. He goes on to say, "we want to make a beautiful life for ourselves, and we hope for a peaceful world. But how can we have hope if we are creating misery?"

Prisons are filled with those who have been harmed and neglected and have behaved in kind toward others. We recreate our earlier misery by our current behavior, behavior made easier by excuses, including blame. But then, we prisoners are not unique in this affliction.

The *Dhammapada* advises us to patiently bear harsh words as the elephant bears arrows. There are days when, I am sure, we all feel more like Dumbo than like one of Alexander the Great's majestic battlefield elephants. Much of the "stuff" of prison life consists of harsh words – inmate to inmate, staff to staff, inmate to staff, and staff to inmate. Distressingly often, such words are followed by harsh actions: a loud argument, occasionally a fight, writing up a disliked co-worker for a real or imagined rule infraction, cursing a staff member, or self-important staff pushing the buttons of vulnerable

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 **Seishin Larry Pelter** at **lpelter@alltel.net** (402-483-1755) or **Kanho Doug Dittman** at **dougdittman@earthlink.net** (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

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**.

inmates. Overt and passive-aggressive hostility is too often the medium of exchange here in prison, and it wears. The appeal of some form of escape is ever present, such as compensatory delusions of grandeur and control or the numbing comfort of sleep. However, many inmates manage to remain interested in the welfare of family and friends, and random acts of altruism and compassion by inmates are not entirely unknown.

On both sides of the corrections fence, most of us have defined ourselves by our profession and have filled our days with the

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Taking Care of Stuff

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activities and status associated with it. In a warehouse like the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution, a profession is not really possible – jailhouse lawyers being a possible exception. Even menial jobs come and go with capricious frequency. Some inmates find purpose and reward in hobbies. There are some excellent artists, jewelers, leather crafters, and musicians here. While self-betterment is officially encouraged, there is, however, an institutional suspicion of any inmate actually becoming serious or successful in these pursuits.

Part of the psychological misdirection of contemporary American corrections ideology and practice is the promulgation and public reinforcement of the invalidation and denial of inmate self-worth and also the denial of our personal perceptions. In a *Tricycle* magazine article, Joan Tollifson comments: “When our reality is not culturally verified and we are made out to be crazy, we internalize this and discount our own feelings and insights. It seems to take years and years of work to begin to take one’s own perceptions seriously again.” Being made invisible or viewed as pariahs leads to a mistrust of those skills and abilities that reflect our Buddha-nature. The spreading of gossip and the misinformation planted and fertilized by both staff and inmates daily threaten to choke us off from our true selves. My alternative is to follow the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts as best I can, trust my true nature, and step off the hundred-foot pole.

We cannot have new lives by living old ways. Shunryu Suzuki emphasized the studying Zen Buddhism is not a verbal enterprise. His view was that we should open ourselves, give up our preconceptions, and see what happens. Then, study that, whatever it is, and deepen our practice with what we learn. In other words, see with your own eyes. This is pretty basic and essential to practice.

Occasionally, “stuff” arrives in a novel way in prison. In part because we

inmates have so little, small things can take on great value. For example, I have had since arriving here a translucent plastic tea cup. I have like it very much because it look like a tea cup and handles like tea cup. It doesn’t at all resemble the awkward, flimsy, flask-shaped “cup” with a leaky lid that the canteen sells. The other day, I lost my teacup. That left me with two options: I can be either angry and miserable or I can let it go and be okay. Either way, my teacup is gone. (I’m leaning toward “okay,” but I’m not quite there yet!) The Japanese poet Basho wrote a poem that embodies the perspective to which I aspire. As I recall, it goes something like this:

For a lovely bowl
Let us arrange these flowers
Since there is no rice

His focus, and I suspect, the well-spring of his enlightenment, is on the moment, on “taking care of the moment,” in the best way possible. Here, he sees beauty instead of the potential for hunger.

It is, after all, by taking care of the “stuff” of our lives moment-by-moment that we see our true nature and manifest enlightenment. In *Zen Training*, Katsuki Sekida says of zazen that “In this state . . . the activity of consciousness is stopped and we cease to be aware of time, space, and causation.” In other words we just brush our teeth, just walk, sit, write, take care of our surroundings, prepare food, or eat. Our life is our practice.

By my taking care of each moment, perhaps much of the “stuff” in my life will, for the most part, take care of itself. This is a testable hypothesis.

Daiki Doc is a member of the White Lotus Sangha. He lives and practices at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institute in Tecumseh, Nebraska.

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.

Winter Practice Period at Nebraska Zen Center

Winter Practice Period will begin with February Sesshin on the 10th and 11th and will end with April Sesshin on the 14th and 15th.

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 Precept Ceremonies. Practice Period 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 9th. If this is your first Practice Period, speak with Nonin before turning in your commitments.



Arouse the Mind

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acquisition and identity morphing which is consciously or sub-consciously designed only to manufacture the next lifeboat of employment and security no matter what our personal investment or satisfaction in these morphing efforts may be.

We are told to be flexible: be ready for the next opportunity (read threat). This kind of environment has contributed to vast insecurity, both in our economic prowess and in our sense of place within a fabric of family and community. On a mass scale, this amounts to the destruction of any community fabric at all. We are all quietly preparing to jump ship. We are getting ready to hole-up in an investment cave, move to Canada, or move back in with Mom and Dad (no matter their age). The whole work force has become in many ways a large temp agency, with corporate careers shortened to two or three years at any given position before something happens to truncate the employment relationship.

It is hard to build family life, community, financial security, or any sense of personal identity in such an environment. While some will find some sense of community and personal work narrative as church members — either in mainline churches, temples, mosques, or in what I have come to call the new “entertain-churches” — most eventually discover that even here there is a cloud. While membership and involvement speak to some of the inner need for personal and communal narrative, it simply cannot escape this economic and technological seismic cataclysm taking place right below our feet. I personally have several friends, ministers of mainline churches, who are basically hopping around from one “cal-ling” (curious word here) to another just as fast as their lay members hop jobs. There is really no place to stand to establish a long-term personal narrative; no career, skill set, or market place lasts long enough, for the ground is ever shifting. No spiritual community

offers a viable substitute for this sense of abiding purpose.

So, we become confused spiritually. We lose our sense of judgment about spiritual practice, about its functions and purpose. Temporary satisfaction, new starts and quick farewells on the job, and multiple relocations all carry over to our spiritual endeavors and expectations. We bring to spiritual practice an expectation of interest and entertainment. We want our spiritual life to “pop,” to jazz us a little, to give us a reward for our investment of time, to impress us. Hence we have the popularity of the “entertain-church” and all the phony gurus and lecture-circuit spiritual re-packagers who deliver neither solid inspiration to look deeply within nor any abiding help with our lack of an enduring sense of purpose.

The fact is that we need to push in exactly the opposite direction. We need to somehow personalize the spiritual endeavor so that our efforts sink below all personal narrative. This work anchors us, and the ever-shifting muddy grounds of this society can’t so easily move us. Personalizing spiritual endeavors also gives us “deep narrative.” We grow more aware of awareness itself. We have some control over how much we are losing and gaining in the saha-world and how it is effecting us and everyone around us.

Zen Buddhist practice is the perfect tool for this effort, for it forces us to develop (actually uncover) an abiding attention and caring about pretty much everything and everyone. While the culture is screaming at us to keep moving and eating (rather like sharks), zazen grounds us, stills us, and reveals the unchanging right here within the shifting ground. Our sense of narrative shifts from identity with purpose and position to current empty functioning. We do not simply find a still point, but find the shifting still point. the still point which is none other than the shifting ground itself.

When our employment shifts again and

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 watercolor paper, Rives BFK, or archival matboard.

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

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

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 p.m.** with a **Pot-luck Supper** followed by **Services at 8:00**. We'll then **sit zazen from 9:30 till midnight**, with walking meditation when needed. 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.**

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 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

Arouse the Mind

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again, we become outdated; if we practice zazen – that is *really* practice zazen – we do not simply roll with the shifting ground and swing into some other job / career / narrative line. No; with enough practice, we can see that we were never identified with the past narrative line sufficiently to feel the ground shake. It is not simply our purpose in Zen practice to deal with change better. It is our purpose to not even think in terms of something that changes. There is the shifting *now* – the still point which has no place in which to be still. There is not a hub point which

miner, there would be a more stable, deeply rooted sense of self that would have to be seen through by using a proportionately greater effort. But I feel that it is our uniquely contemporary insecurity about our work identity which forces us to focus even more on that personal narrative. It has become a big management problem for us, one of the largest in fact. We are so constantly concerned now with where we can secure health insurance and a pension that we are working even more at beefing up our identity. The flood of

quickly protest: “I’m not getting anything out of this practice. When will it pay off?” or “How many sesshins do I have to do to get enlightened?”

We lack now the tool of simple tactile experience and the expectation that experience is indeed tactile. It’s beyond my understanding how we got to the place where someone who has written a book on spiritual matters is thought to have real experience simply because he or she has read and can reference other books. Reading a book is not experience. Well, it

is, actually. It is the experience of only reading a book. However, we have largely lost the judgment needed to separate the real from the imagined. No wonder our employment / social narrative is muddled.

I have a friend who works for the local electric utility. He told me recently that his crew replaced a utility pole with the wrong size pole, a thinner and weaker one, and as they left the job-site, three heavy transformers (weighing what a small car weighs) snapped

off the top of the pole and fell onto two expensive cars. He laughed and explained that new, young engineers designed the replacement line on their computers. He said, “On a computer, a pole is a dot.” Then he added, “These people have never even seen a pole being put in. They deal in math theories and have no practical knowledge in the field.” I have heard this same complaint about engineers in other fields.

However, the real monster in our utility tale is the manager who refused to allow my friend to upgrade the pole on the spot, even though my friend has been a line foreman for twenty years. The manager said, “Just do what you’re told! The engineers have to be right!” when my friend called him on his cell phone to tell

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grounds us in spiritual practice and enables us to swing with change. There is *only* hub; so, where is the problem? Narrative continuance, which is now unattainable in our society (I am a coal miner) doesn’t become “Today I am a coal miner, but I realize that this can change,” but rather simply becomes, “Joey, let’s ceiling bolt number 28 butt and take our lunch.” Nothing added.

This central shift away from an insecure and embellished ego-narrative cannot happen without dedicated practice. We are individually and socially always struggling to return to the concrete *now* and away from abstractions which wrap around a sense of self. One might argue that in a 1950’s America, when a miner knew he would always function as a

change is coming. We know this. So we are constantly tending the retaining walls. This takes so much energy that we have little left for spiritual stewardship. The irony is palpable.

We also lack the simplest spiritual practice tools because of our constant shoring up of these social retaining walls. We are always busy. We are very busy, but it’s not so much time that we lack but the tool of patience. We have forgotten as a culture the Paramita of waiting. We fight great skirmishes, it is true, but poor battles and terrible campaigns. Naturally, it is clear to our terrorist enemies that they can simply wait us out of any conflict. We have become almost child-like and undeveloped in our lack of patience. We

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him of the inadequate pole size. In today's world, theory trumps tactile experience.

Is this not true in airline flight also? Ask any commercial pilot who is really flying your plane. Also, how well has our civilian military leadership listened to the assessment of the experienced generals on the ground in Iraq? If we can't trust tactile experience in the tactile arena, how can we be expected to in spiritual exploration?

I was recently questioned about a system of teaching pastoral care to ministers that I have presented and given workshops in at a local seminary. The questioner was a well-know publisher's acquisitions editor. He seemed fascinated with my approach to the subject and he began directing the conversation toward a possible book idea. Then he asked me where I got my pastoral care background. I replied, "Experience." The conversation and all interest on his part ended right there. He was clearly looking for degrees and learning, so he was disappointed that I only had seventeen years of actual experience to offer.

Narrative itself suggests non-involvement in some sense, even though we have seen it as a positive concept here. To have a life narrative you have to have a vantage point and vantage point suggests distance from the action of the moment. Vantage point suggests separation. So oddly, to aid our employment / social life narrative and the process that establishes it, we need to sacrifice it directly by allowing no room at all for commentary. This is the function of zazen. There is no room for separation.

Separation leads to commentary and opinion, and this invites confusion between tactile experience and theory. This confusion leads to increased separation. Then, the cycle speeds up and we generate a spiritual anxiety that comes to parallel our employment anxiety. The coal miners of my youth knew that they were coal miners today and they would be tomorrow. While they may have suffered

in this knowledge, it spared them the anxiety and insecurity which force many current employees into a constant state of obsession about their identity.

Zen monks, especially those of decades or centuries past, dealt with the drudgery of being monks, but they also could freely cultivate both the patience and intimacy necessary for the spiritual quest. They knew they were monks today and would still be monks tomorrow. The coal miners could dedicate themselves to the work at hand and to returning home safely each day by being simply alert and aware in a dangerous place. The monks could commit themselves to practice without the separation of expectations and insecurities. Can practitioners in today's shifting environment commit themselves to practice over time by simply directly practicing? Can they cultivate the attention and commitment necessary to find the still point which is not still? Maybe we cannot control the shifting world enough to practice. Maybe we need instead to practice in order to not control the shifting work world. Maybe we need to do this patiently, directly, and without theory or narrative. And maybe if we do this long enough and with heart we will become quite still and arouse the mind that abides nowhere.



Nebraska Zen Center 2008 Practice Schedule

| | | |
|------------|--------------|---|
| Jan | 19 | Dainin Katagiri's Birthday* |
| | 26 | Zen Master Dogen's Birthday* |
| Feb | 3 | World Peace Ceremony Rakusu Sewing Begins |
| | 9-10 | Two-day Sesshin Winter Practice Period Begins |
| | 6 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 15 | Buddha's Parinirvana* |
| Mar | 1 | Dainin Katagiri's Memorial Day |
| | 2 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 5 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 11-16 | Lay Initiation Week |
| | 16 | Lay Initiation |
| | 22 | One-day Sesshin |
| Apr | 8 | Buddha's Birthday* |
| | 9 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 19-20 | Two-day Sesshin Practice Period Ends |
| May | 4 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 7 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 11 | Remembrance Day |
| Jun | 1 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 4 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 7-8 | Two-day Sesshin |
| Jul | 2 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 6 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 20 | Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day* |
| | 30 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| Aug | 3 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 27 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| Sep | 7 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 13-14 | Two-day Sesshin Fall Practice Period Begins |
| | 29 | Zen Master Dogen's Parinirvana* |
| Oct | 1 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| | 5 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 18 | One-day Sesshin Bodhidharma Day* |
| | 29 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| Nov | 2 | World Peace Ceremony |
| | 19 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |
| Dec | 1-7 | Rohatsu Sesshin |
| | 8 | Buddha's Enlightenment Day* |
| | 17 | Precept Ceremony (<i>ryaku fusatsu</i>) |

*Services commemorating these days will be held before dharma talk on the Sunday nearest the date indicated.

Precept Ceremony (*ryaku fusatsu*) follows a shortened evening zazen.

World Peace Ceremony precedes monthly Group Discussion

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

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.

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

Nebraska Zen Center
3625 Lafayette Avenue
Omaha, NE 68131-1363

(402) 551-9035
heartland@prairiewindzen.org

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