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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** (© 2010 Nebraska Zen Center) is the newsletter for both **Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple**.

**Cover calligraphy: Buddha in the Circle, by Nonin Chowaney**

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

Websites for **Nebraska Zen Center** and **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** are at: [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://www.prairiewindzen.org).

**Nebraska Zen Center's** e-mail address is: [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org).  
**Zen Center of Pittsburgh's** e-mail address is: [kyoki@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:kyoki@prairiewindzen.org)

# KNOWING MIND

by *Nonin Chowaney*

In an ancient Buddhist sutra, a student asks: "O Master of the Secret, what is Enlightenment?" The Master replies, "It means knowing your own mind as it really is. This is unexcelled, complete, perfect enlightenment, in which there is nothing at all that can be attained."

So this is what it's all about: "knowing the mind as it really is." But what is it, really? We come to Zen practice because our minds are troubled; we seek peace; we want to *know*. We are intrigued by enlightenment, to which Zen meditation is supposed to lead, and we hope to attain it, to experience it. Hopefully, we will, and afterwards everything will be unceasingly okay.

But the Master says that there is nothing to be attained, that enlightenment is "knowing the mind." Most of us, however, are left with a nagging question: "Exactly how do I accomplish this?"

This question is the basis for many well known teaching stories. The following is one of my favorites. It concerns the Indian Zen Master Bodhidharma and his Chinese disciple, Hui-k'o:

Hui-k'o said, "My mind is not yet at peace. Please set it at peace for me, Master!"

Bodhidharma responded, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you."

Hui-k'o answered, "I have searched for it, but I can not find it."

The Master responded, "your mind has been set at peace."

Hui-k'o was a Chinese monk who, after many years of practice, came to study with the Indian master Bodhidharma, the first Zen ancestor in China. Bodhidharma, however, turned him away. Hui-k'o, after standing outside all night in the snow and being turned away again in the morning, cut off his arm to show Bodhidharma the depth of his desire to study with him. He was then accepted as Bodhidharma's disciple and eventually became his dharma heir. Hui-k'o serves in Zen lore as the quintessential example of total commitment!

The exchange between Bodhidharma and Hui-k'o cited above, however, occurred *after* Hui-k'o had been studying with the Indian master for some time. After finally finding a true master, convincing him of his deep commitment, and studying with him intimately, Hui-k'o was *still* not at peace. He must have been deeply discouraged when he asked, "My mind is not yet at peace. Please set it at peace for me, Master."

Don't we all know this feeling? We certainly did when we began to

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practice Zen, because lack of peace and contentment drove us to this path. As soon as we started to sit zazen regularly, our lives smoothed out a little. We became more stable. Things that once annoyed us no longer did, and as it became clear that Zen was our path, zazen became a bigger and bigger part of our lives.

However, no spiritual path is without disappointments and pitfalls. Perhaps we've practiced and

studied for many months, or even years, yet we seem to be making no progress. Or maybe we lose a loved one, or a job, and we find ourselves falling into despair. Maybe we've been treated badly, and anger comes up. Then it builds and

builds as we keep chewing on it for hours (or even weeks or months), unable to let it go. How many times have we re-cycled ourselves in these situations? Perhaps those of us who've practiced for some time begin to brood over our lack of spiritual progress and become profoundly discouraged. Haven't we then longed for the same peace that Hui-k'o is seeking?

Bodhidharma's response to Hui-k'o's longing is, "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you." He directs Hui-k'o back into himself, for Bodhid-

harma knows that the answers to our difficulties are always found by looking within. Hui-k'o must understand what mind is and what is causing his pain, and he must know it directly, for himself, before he can be at peace. All Buddhist teachers know this; they know that a teacher's understanding cannot settle a student's doubt or ease their pain. Shakyamuni Buddha, when asked by his disciples what they needed to do to awaken, pointed in

***The Disciple asks: 'What is it that is called 'mind'? How do we put the mind at ease?' The Master answers: 'You need not suppose a mind, nor need you particularly endeavor to put one at ease. That can be spoken of as putting the mind at ease.'***

front of him and said, "These are forests; these are roots of trees; sit and meditate." Similarly, Bodhidharma directs Hui-k'o inward to find the answer to his difficulty.

Hui-k'o responds to Bodhidharma's "Bring me your mind, and I will set it at peace for you" by saying: "I have searched for it, but I cannot find it." I sometimes wonder how much time elapsed between Bodhidharma's injunction to find the mind and Hui-k'o's giving up and saying, "I cannot find it." Maybe this whole exchange

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took place in a few moments during morning tea, but Hui-k'o had been examining the nature of mind through sitting zazen ever since he became Bodhidharma's disciple. Maybe he went back to his cushion and searched for the mind for months before he gave up, went back to the master, and said, "I cannot find it." In any case, this "giving up" came as a result of long, serious inquiry, and is crucial, for Bodhidharma then says: "Your mind has been set at peace." With this "not finding," the search ends. If there's nothing to find, there's nothing to fix, so everything must be okay as it is. In this moment of realization, everything manifests as perfect and complete as it is, deep understanding arises, and peace manifests.

This same issue is addressed by the following exchange in a Chinese Zen text called *A Dialogue on the Contemplation Extinguished*:

The Disciple asks: 'What is it that is called 'mind'? How do we put the mind at ease?' The Master answers: 'You need not suppose a mind, nor need you particularly endeavor to put one at ease. That can be spoken of as putting the mind at ease.'

To know the mind in this way is to know it as it is, as "no mind," as we say in Zen. What does this mean? It means that what we call mind is not a fixed, permanent entity that we can

isolate, purify, and heal. What we call "mind" is an impermanent, constantly changing process. Hui-k'o found nothing when he searched for mind; he experienced only thoughts arising and passing away. Viewed in this way, what is there to heal? Thoughts arise. Thoughts pass away. This is the nature of thoughts, both negative and positive. Even if we fall into a persistent, negative state of mind, it, too, will pass away. In the words of Zen Master Dogen: "No matter how bad a state of mind you get into, if you hold out over the long run, the clouds will disappear and the autumn winds will cease."

Liberation -- and in Buddhism, the only liberation is liberation from suffering -- manifests when we deeply understand the nature of what we call mind. Thoughts -- or mental states, or whatever we want to call them -- arise and pass away because it is their nature to do so. This process is occurring moment by moment. The practice of zazen puts us on intimate terms with "mind as it truly is" moment by moment. Allowing this process to happen with as little interference as possible, allowing thoughts to come and go, is sometimes called, "according with the natural condition of mind." When we don't accord with this natural condition, we create great suffering for ourselves.

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## NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER SANGHA NOTES

Our **Annual Sangha Meeting** will be held on **Saturday, February 5th at 10:00 a.m.** We will be replacing board Members whose terms have expired and electing Officers for 2011. We will also be reviewing and finishing business from 2010. **We encourage all who practice at Heartland Temple to attend this meeting. Lunch will be served afterwards.**

**Winter Practice Period** will begin with **February Sesshin** on the **12th and 13th** and will end with **April Sesshin** on the **23rd and 24th**. 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 their 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). Students also commit to keeping a **daily practice journal** and to attending 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.

**Many thanks** to all who've kept up their temple jobs. The present job period will end on **Dec. 31st**. **New jobs** will be begin on **Jan. 16th**. **Special thanks** go to **Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer** for organizing the Fall yard clean-up and to all those who helped. **Thanks also** to **Kansoku Tom DiNaro, Jose Correa, and Mike Zagozda**, who came on weekdays to work on the clean-up.

**Special thanks** also go to **Pam Griffin** for her work in the garden all Summer and to **Shuji Valdene** for researching and facilitating the **replacement of our over thirty year-old furnace**. Thanks also to **Mike Zagozda** for doing the electrical hook-up for the new furnace.

Also, many thanks to **Sozen George Patenode** and **Kanho Doug Dittman** for taking down screens and putting up storm windows.

**Nonin** sends his **personal thanks** to all those who **brought dinner** to him when he was recovering from recent surgery and to those who **accompanied him** to his medical appointments. His recovery is pretty much complete and he's **very grateful** to all who helped him.

**NZC will be closed from January 1st through the 16th. We will reopen with morning zazen on Sunday, January 16th.**

## NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER WINTER EVENTS

### SESSHIN

There will be two sesshins at NZC this Winter, a **Two-day sesshin** on **February 12th and 13th** and a **One-day sesshin** on **March 12**. 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](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org) to register.

### 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 Feb. 26th and March 5th 12th, and 19th. The text for study will be announced later. The class is **free to members**. The fee for non-members is **\$15 per class**. For further info, call **402-551-9035** or e-mail [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org).

### 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 suggests the following for considering this step: **making a firm commitments to sitting zazen, to practice with a teacher, to sangha, and to dharma study**. **Rakusu sewing** will begin on **February 6th**.

### 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

If you want to receive monthly schedule updates and last-minute changes to events, join our e-mail list. Go to <http://www.prairiewindzen.org/zcp/list.htm> and register. Or, e-mail ZCP at [kyoki@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:kyoki@prairiewindzen.org).

The past October, **Kyoki** and **Jisen** attended the **Soto Zen Buddhist Association** biennial meeting at **Great Vow Zen Monastery** in Clatskanie, Oregon. Kyoki recently finished her second and last term on the **Board of Directors** of the SZBA. She remains on the **Ethics and Grievance Committee**.

**Steven Bend** sewed a rakusu and completed **Lay Initiation** on November 21st. **Congratulations, Steven!**



**Shogen Gary Crouth** and **Kyoki** led a three-week **Anger as a Spiritual Practice Workshop** at the First Unitarian Church in Pittsburgh this fall.

In October, **Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar** returned to the area to celebrate her daughter **Lizz's baby shower** at Zen Center. The baby is due on **December 8th**, which is Buddha's birthday! **All the best to the new family.**

**Kyoki**, who previously worked as a **professional mediator** for the **State of Nebraska** is taking the first steps towards establishing a **Mediation Service** that will specialize in serving **religious organizations** and **other non-profits**. **Taikan Doug Gouge** and **Jyoshin Bryan Ritti** went to Nebraska in October to train as mediators for this project. There will be a **training at Zen Center** from **January 3rd-8th**.

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website: [www.prairiewindzen.org](http://www.prairiewindzen.org)

## ZCP WINTER EVENTS

### DECEMBER

1-7—Rohatsu Sesshin\*\*

8-11—ZCP Closed

24-30—ZCP Closed

31—New Year's Eve Party, 6  
p.m. — midnight

26—Dogen's Birthday

### FEBRUARY

6—World Peace Ceremony

11-13—Sesshin\*\*

15—Buddha's Parinirvana Day

### JANUARY

1—ZCP closed

2—World Peace Ceremony

3—Katagiri-roshi's Birthday

22—One-day Sitting\*\*

\*\*Please register for this event

## ZCP DAILY SCHEDULE

### Closed Mondays

Tuesday — 7-7:40 a.m. DST

6-7:15 p.m. DST

Wednesday — 5:30-7:15 a.m. DST

6:00-7:15 p.m. DST & 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 — 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. DST

DST — Deep Spring Temple, Bell Acres

FMH — Friends Meeting House, Oakland

## WHITE LOTUS SANGHA NOTES

On October 18, 2010 the sangha of Nebraska State Penitentiary (NSP) held a sesshin. A total of 8 people attended: 6 White Lotus members (Anzen Tom, Zensan Tony, Gangleri, David, Dave, and Zack) and two volunteers (Kanho Doug Dittman and Zenryu Vicki Grunwald.) A special thanks to Steve Marsh, Religion Coordinator, and all the other people at NSP who made it happen.

The sesshin at Nebraska Zen Center in Omaha two days prior had 10 people, plus Nonin, for a total of 11. The attendance in prison rivaling that of the outside highlights the commitment of the White Lotus members. When people hear that I am a prison volunteer, I receive a variety of reactions. Some think it's cool. Others want to know if I'm afraid especially when they find out I walk through the prison yard. Still others have an underlying mistrust thinking that any inmate who "finds religion" is just looking for a way to impress the parole board or that they must just want to interact with a female.

My experience with inmates has been extremely positive. As a matter of fact, many of them are sincere about religion because of their environment not in spite of it. With all the guards and the sincerity of practitioners, many people are surprised to find out that I feel more respected

## 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](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org), call (402) 551-9035, or write **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave., Omaha, NE, 68131-1363.**

and safe inside prison than I do on the outside.

What I like the most is what the men teach me. To get into a prison, you have to lock up your possessions and go through "shakedown," where you walk through a metal detector and are frisked by a guard. I go to prison, lock up my purse, keys and, of course, my judgments because you cannot be judgmental in there. When I leave, I pick up my purse, keys, etc. and go. The next time I come I lock everything up and pick it up when I leave. After volunteering for about the sixth time, I asked myself why I was picking up my judgments when I left. I was so eager to suspend opinions about crime but I wasn't willing to let my sister forget that she broke my Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer record when she was 3. Of course, it's harder to let go of things involving family than it is for acquaintances or friends. Despite the challenges, the

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## Sangha notes

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men inspire me to let go of my judgments. I think my relationships with coworkers and family are better because of them.

Often I hear about fights, particularly between cell-mates. The closest ex-



Sangha

perience I have to living in a cell, which is typically 6 by 8 feet, was in the college dormitory (I think the dorm room was about 50% bigger). Of course the bathroom was down the hall and I could come and go as I pleased. I can't imagine living in a room where I might be locked in for up to 23 hours each day. In this society we live in 1000 or even 2000 square foot houses and can't always get along with our kids, spouses or roommates. Instead of judging or

## Meditation Workshop at Nebraska Zen Center

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

Taught by **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, abbot of Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple at **Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave, Omaha, NE 68131** on **Saturday, March 26th, from 10:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m.**

For further info or to register, either e-mail NZC at [heartland@prairiewindzen.org](mailto:heartland@prairiewindzen.org) or call 402-551-9035.

telling them to behave, I ask the men to help set an example for us on the outside.

I enjoy volunteering in prison. Not only does it help the men, but it also makes me a better person. I am grateful for knowing them.



# DEAN ZIMMERMAN'S TOOL BOX

By Kanho-Doug Dittman

Nebraska Zen Center's friend and neighbor, Dean Zimmerman, has been gone for some time now. The big white house across the street sold soon after he died, and a young couple moved in. Shortly after that, a baby was born, and now, as I look out the window, I see that she is already a toddler, zipping across the green lawn just out of her mother's reach. However, I catch myself looking for Dean smoking out on the front porch or pattering out in the yard, a tan bucket-hat pulled low across his eyes. Even though he was 70, Dean's hair still hinted at the red it had once been. Fifty years as a union bricklayer had worn him thin, and it's a safe bet that the scotch and cigarettes didn't help much.

The day his tools sold, I got too busy and ended up getting there the day after the sale was over. His widow, Mary, showed me down the stairs to the basement, and literally, all that was left was Dean's beat-up old tool box and a three foot level out of plumb. I didn't need either, but the way they looked sitting there in the empty room tugged at my heart, so I bought them and took them home. I stuck them out in the garage, got busy and forgot about them.

In a few months, it was time to start bricking the new dairy parlor on our farm, so I dug out Dean's tools. I set up the scaffold, plunked down the toolbox next to the mortar board and finally took the time to look inside it. The sides of the box undulated in and out, mortar and paint had been splashed here and

there, and rust red had replaced most of the original grey color. I was struck, however, by the care with which the tools were placed, and although worn, how sharp, clean, and ready they are.

The blade of the trowel was worn thin and sharp from use, but it was free of any mortar whatsoever. The heel of its handle was wedge-shaped from the old practice of tapping down bricks. The broken-handled brick hammer was neatly mended with cotton tape, and the head is spray-painted burnt orange to distinguish it from the hammers of the men he worked with.

In the box, there were also odd striking tools, bent at all angles and obviously home-made, wood blocks and steel jigs for pulling line-up string tight, steel "twigs" to hold it up over long spans, bits of wedges to hold the piece up and in place, lead and wax pencils, chalk to lay out the work, and a worn brick-rule with brass joints worn smooth and loose, the markings now illegible.

My first impulse was to get rid of all this extraneous stuff. Who needs it? I wanted to throw it all out and get on with my job! However, the mortar was already mixed, so I reluctantly ignored this impulse and set to work. When I picked up the trowel it nestled in my hand — a good fit. When I came to a tight corner, I found that an old bent striker was perfect for the spot.

## 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 weekly on **Thursday evenings at 7:00 pm at Branched Oak Farm, 17015 NW 70th St, Raymond, NE 68428-4041**. For further information, e-mail or call **Kanho Doug Dittman** at [doug@windstream.net](mailto:doug@windstream.net) (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in advance.

## Dean's Tool Box

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The bricks had to go up before winter, so after I started, I stayed with it until the job was done. By the time I laid the last brick, I had used every single tool in the box! Looking back, I laugh at how arrogant I was to think that I knew better than Dean what tools are of use and what are not.

This whole process is very much like Zen practice. My sangha friend George says that the first time anybody shows up at a Zen Center or temple, they probably think that the teacher and everyone else is nuts. Meditation might make a little sense, but chanting and bowing? — No way! What good are these strange and anachronistic practices?

Luckily for us, our teacher, Nonin, is no push-over, and the practice is clear and fully in motion, no hesitation. Newcomers and long-time practitioners alike join in and practice in the same way. Immediately, we step onto this well-worn path and begin, just as so many have done before. We pick up the same worn tools and use them, whether we recognize their value or not. Setting aside our likes and dislikes, we allow experience and time itself to determine their intrinsic value. But mostly we temporarily quiet this clamoring “I” that insists on being heard, and instead experience a much broader, ancestral way, old and worn yet fresh and new.

***Kanho Doug Dittman is a long-time practitioner at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple.***

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Let me use the following as an example. When I was studying with my master, Dainin Katagiri, in Minneapolis years ago, I supported myself by painting houses. One day, I was coming home from work on a Friday afternoon in a particularly good mood. I had left early and had plenty of time to take a leisurely shower, have a nice dinner, and relax with the paper before I went to the zendo for evening sitting. Life was good!

As I drove into the alleyway behind my apartment building, however, I found the way blocked by a large truck with its back-end open. I glanced over to the nearest garage and saw three men sitting on boxes smoking cigarettes. I looked over at them, raised my hands questioningly, and asked, “Hey, could you guys move the truck so I can get through?” They looked through me, as if I didn’t exist, and then turned back toward each other and continued smoking.

This is not right, I thought. In Minneapolis, most of the streets are separated by alleys; garage-doors face toward them. Everyone knows not to block the alleys. It quickly became clear that, however, that these guys had no intention of moving, and I got angry. Or, as the early Buddhist texts say: Anger arose in me! I put my car in reverse and pulled back into the street, wishing I had a big, armor-plated truck that I could ram into the back of theirs and push the damn thing all the way to the other end of the alley! I visualized the three of them running

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out between their truck and mine and smashing them, too. In a few seconds, I was hopping mad, jamming my car into first gear and squealing away down to the corner. I’d have to go around the block and get to my garage from the other end of the alley.

Normally, I would have continued raging, pulling into my garage with a screech and carrying that anger into the house, maybe even slamming the back door, stomping up the stairs, and bitching at my roommate because he hadn’t vacuumed the apartment as he said he would!

But this time, I didn’t. After I screeched away from the alley, I thought, “Wow, are you angry. Here you were in a great mood coming home from work early, and all it took was a couple of guys blocking the alley to send you into a rage, on a tire-screaming tear down the street. Isn’t that silly?” As soon as I said this to myself, the anger dissolved. I started chuckling and calmly drove down the street to the other end of the alley. I thought about how quickly anger came up and how quickly it went away. Once I acknowledged it, it dissolved. “How wonderful,” I thought; “I don’t have to be a slave to this.” Anger is amazingly brief, if you let it be. I thought of the many Buddhist teachings I’d read, such as. “It is the nature of all mental states to arise and pass away; they are empty of own-being and have no substance in and of themselves.” As I drove down the street, I thought, “So *this* is what that means.”

That moment was pivotal for me, for in it, I realized the nature of anger, and by extension, all mental states. It is their nature to arise and pass away. What is behind them? Nothing. Who is thinking them? No one. They are just thoughts arising and passing away. As I drove into the other end of the alley and saw the truck still sitting at the far end, the anger was gone. I pulled into my garage and thought, “How quickly that played out, and now, I’m free of it.”

In yet another ancient teaching story, the third Zen ancestor in China, Seng Ts’an, addresses the issue in this way:

A monk asked Seng ts’an, “Master, show me the way to liberation.”

Seng ts’an replied, “Who binds you?”

The monk responded, “No one binds me.”

Seng ts’an said, “Then why do you seek liberation?”

I love these ancient koans. They are concrete examples of the means used by Zen masters to bring their disciples to moments of insight into the nature of their difficulty and the way out of it. When we say “Ah!” to ourselves after reading or hearing one of these stories, we are responding to their “rightness” from deep within.

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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](http://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.

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](mailto: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.**

## Knowing Mind

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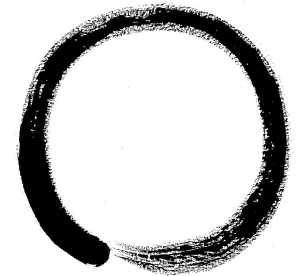
When we begin Zen practice, we regard enlightenment, or awakening, or realization – whatever we want to call it – as something outside of our selves, some mental state or condition that we need to attain. We want to get something we don't have, to acquire something we think we lack. But this is not the case, and these ancient stories point us toward this understanding. I heard Dainin Katagiri say on many different occasions, "You are perfect exactly the way you are." But then he would always add, "But there's plenty of room for improvement!" For me, the greatest "room for improvement" lies in cultivating an understanding of what keeps us from realizing that we are perfect exactly the way we are. This means knowing the nature of mind and how it functions. According to this understanding, awakening means stripping away delusion, not acquiring something special. As the sutra says, "there is nothing at all that can be attained."

How do we cultivate knowing the mind? The *Fukanzazengi (Universally Recommended Instructions for Zazen)* is our basic instruction for zazen (sitting meditation). In it, Zen Master Dogen says,

Put aside the intellectual practice of investigating words and chasing phrases, and learn to take the backward step that turns the light and shines it inward. Body and mind of themselves will drop away, and your original face will manifest. If you want such a thing, get to work on such a thing immediately.

"Getting to work on such a thing" means to sit down and practice zazen. Turning the light and shining it inward means to let things unfold, not by carrying on an intellectual inquiry or trying to puzzle things out but by just sitting zazen. If we practice diligently in this way, we come to know mind "as it really is" by just sitting still in the middle of it, right in the middle of thoughts arising and passing away. We begin to "know the inside from the inside," and gradually our understanding of *who* we are and *how* we are deepens and our true nature is revealed.

*Rev. Nonin Chowaney is the abbot of Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple.*



# SAWAKI-ROSHI'S ZAZEN

by *Koŝho Uchiyama*

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 wholeheartedly. I practice in this way. Everything 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 *Sho-*

## *Sawaki-roshi's zazen*

from previous page

*bogenzo 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 rela-

tionship 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 the Sawaki-roshi taught.

***Koŝho Uchiyama-roshi was a dharma heir of Kodo Sawaki. The above essay is from The Zen Teaching of Homeless Kodo.***



# AROUND NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER



**Buddy Catching the Breeze Near the Back Door**



**Nonin, Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer, and Toze Hal Holoun in the Office**



**Nonin and Ryoshin Joe Marshall**



**Nonin Chanting at the Buddha Hall Altar**



**Manjushri (Bodhisattva of Wisdom) — on Zendo Altar**



**Buddha Hall Altar**

## SUTRA ON LOVING KINDNESS (*Metta Sutta*)

*The work of those who are skilled and peaceful, who seek the good, is thus:*

*May they be able and upright, straightforward, of gentle speech, and not proud.*

*May they be content and easily supported, unburdened, with their senses calmed.  
May they be wise, not arrogant, and without desire for the possessions of others.  
May they do nothing mean, or that the wise would reprove.*

*May all beings be happy.*

*May they live in safety and joy.*

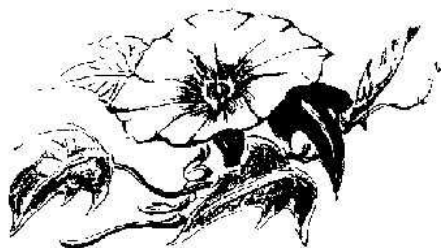
*All living beings, whether weak or strong, tall, stout, medium, or short, seen  
or unseen, near or distant, born or to be born, may they all be happy.*

*Let no one deceive another or despise any being in any state, let none by  
anger or hatred wish harm to another.*

*As a mother watches over her child, willing to risk her own life to protect  
her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living  
beings, suffusing the whole world with unobstructed loving-kindness.*

*Standing or walking, sitting or lying down, during all one's waking hours,  
may one remain mindful of this heart and this way of living that is the best  
in the world.*

*Unattached to speculations, views, and sense desires, with clear vision, such  
a person will never be reborn in the cycles of suffering.*



## NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER 2011 PRACTICE SCHEDULE

|                 |                                 |                |                                 |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Jan 1-15</b> | NZC Closed                      | <b>25-26</b>   | <b>Two-day Sesshin</b>          |
| <b>19</b>       | Dainin Katagiri's Birthday*     | <b>Jul 3</b>   | World Peace Ceremony            |
|                 | Precept Ceremony                |                | Group Discussion                |
| <b>26</b>       | Zen Master Dogen's Birthday*    | <b>13</b>      | Precept Ceremony                |
| <b>Feb 6</b>    | World Peace Ceremony            | <b>20</b>      | Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day*   |
|                 | Group Discussion                | <b>Aug 7</b>   | World Peace Ceremony            |
|                 | Rakusu Sewing Begins            |                | Group Discussion                |
| <b>12-13</b>    | <b>Two-day Sesshin</b>          | <b>10</b>      | Precept Ceremony                |
| <b>15</b>       | Buddha's Parinirvana            | <b>Sep 4</b>   | World Peace Ceremony            |
| <b>16</b>       | Precept Ceremony                |                | Group Discussion                |
| <b>Mar 1</b>    | Dainin Katagiri's Memorial Day* | <b>10-11</b>   | <b>Two-day Sesshin</b>          |
| <b>6</b>        | World Peace Ceremony            |                | Fall Practice Period Begins     |
|                 | Group Discussion                | <b>14</b>      | Precept Ceremony                |
| <b>12</b>       | <b>One-day Sesshin</b>          | <b>29</b>      | Zen Master Dogen's Parinirvana* |
| <b>15-20</b>    | Lay Initiation Week             | <b>Oct 2</b>   | World Peace Ceremony            |
| <b>16</b>       | Precept Ceremony                |                | Group Discussion                |
| <b>20</b>       | Lay Initiation                  | <b>12</b>      | Precept Ceremony                |
| <b>Apr 3</b>    | World Peace Ceremony            | <b>15</b>      | <b>One-day Sesshin</b>          |
|                 | Group Discussion                | <b>18</b>      | Bodhidharma Day*                |
| <b>8</b>        | Buddha's Birthday*              | <b>Nov 6</b>   | World Peace Ceremony            |
| <b>20</b>       | Precept Ceremony                | <b>4</b>       | Group Discussion                |
| <b>23-24</b>    | <b>Two-day Sesshin</b>          | <b>9</b>       | Precept Ceremony                |
|                 | Practice Period Ends            | <b>Dec 1-7</b> | <b>Rohatsu Sesshin</b>          |
| <b>May 1</b>    | World Peace Ceremony            | <b>8</b>       | Buddha's Enlightenment Day*     |
|                 | Group Discussion                | <b>14</b>      | Precept Ceremony                |
| <b>8</b>        | Remembrance Day                 |                |                                 |
| <b>18</b>       | Precept Ceremony                |                |                                 |
| <b>Jun 5</b>    | World Peace Ceremony            |                |                                 |
|                 | Group Discussion                |                |                                 |
| <b>15</b>       | Precept Ceremony                |                |                                 |

\*Special services commemorating these days will be held before dharma talk on the Sunday nearest the date indicated.  
Precept Ceremony follows evening zazen.  
World Peace Ceremony precedes monthly Group Discussion.

### *New Year's Eve At Nebraska Zen Center*

All are welcome to join us for New Year's Eve services at Nebraska Zen Center. 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.

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