



Prairie Wind

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ROHATSU SESSHIN AT ZUIOJI

by Nonin Chowaney

From 1987 to 1990, I practiced Zen Buddhism as a monk in Japan at two monasteries, Zuioji and Shogoji. Zuioji is a long established training monastery in the city of Niihama, on the island of Shikoku. When I trained there, it housed thirty to forty monks. When I practiced at Shogoji, it was a budding international monastery in the mountains of Kumamoto Prefecture, on the island of Kyushu. There were never more than six of us in residence there at any one time. The abbot of both monasteries was Rev. Ikko Narasaki, one of the most respected Soto Zen Masters in twentieth-century Japan. Narasaki-roshi died in 1996 at the age of seventy-five.

I first went to Japan to practice at the suggestion of my master, Rev. Dainin Katagiri. At that time, Shogoji was barely getting started, and I would be the first Western priest in residence there. However, Narasaki-roshi had decided, and Katagiri-roshi had agreed, that it would be best if I began training at Zuioji. The practice there according to Zen Master Dogen's way had been established in the 1950's. Narasaki-roshi felt that practicing at Zuioji with a large group of monks would ground me in those daily practices. I would then be well-versed in them before I went to Shogoji, where there were only three monks in residence.

It was very difficult for me at Zuioji. Although I had spent two years at Tassajara Zen Monastery in California before going to Japan and was not a monastic rookie, the practice at Zuioji was much different – the pace was quicker, the winter temperatures colder, the work load heavier, the practice forms different, the physical

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Buddha and Friends — India



Insight — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

LETTER FROM JOE

by Ryoshin Joe Marshall

Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple sangha member Ryoshin Joe Marshall corresponds with a prison inmate in California. The following is a letter concerning Zen practice that Joe wrote to that inmate.

Hello Dan,

I've been thinking about the questions you've asked in your letters. I feel a responsibility to give you clear and useful answers.

You mentioned that you don't like bowing and chanting things that you don't understand. If you ever study Buddhism properly, with a teacher, you are certainly going to be required to do both. When you find a teacher, he or she will explain any chants in languages you don't know; don't hesitate to ask questions. Buddhism is very new in the U.S., particularly new for non-Asian people. We are beginning to accumulate quite a lot of writings in English, but our Buddhist heritage is still primarily Asian. So, we have a number of traditions, writings, and artifacts of Asian origin. Also, we learn a great deal from bowing and chanting. I'm not going to explain that right now, but I assure you that there is a great deal to be learned from these practices.

You say that you don't like b.s. Well, I don't either. It is our practice to answer sincere questions with sincere answers. I am not interested in deceiving you or anyone.

You asked for my opinion of TM. Sorry, but I don't know anything about Transcendental Meditation apart from a vague outline of its history in the U.S.

The biggest obstacle for you as a beginner is that you don't have a teacher or a group to practice with. As I believe I mentioned in my first letter, working face to face with a teacher is fundamental.

You ask me to help you find a path you can agree with. The best I can do is to tell you how we practice. If you don't like it,

no one is going to try to convince you otherwise. You will make your own decision.

You've asked a lot of questions about reincarnation and the next life. I can't help you with this. You need to work in this life. Here and now. Now is the only time there is. Your actions are important. Ethical behavior is extremely important. If we continue to correspond, I'll talk about these things more.

To follow Zen Buddhism, you will need to practice sitting meditation. It doesn't matter whether you like it or not. The practice will work whether you like it or not, as long as you continue to do it. I suggest sitting on least five days per week.

You talk a lot about your interest in Zen philosophy. Philosophy is interesting, but practice is far more important. There is much to learn that is not learned from words. Words are tricky. Things change. Yesterday's clever words can be today's ignorance. I've found that the longer I practice the more the teachings mean. Practice is important in developing your understanding of written teaching.

It's important to practice "with no gaining idea." The book I will order for you from Amazon in a couple of days, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, will explain more about this.

You ask how long I've been practicing. I've practiced for six years now. I practice sitting at home and at Nebraska Zen Center. You also ask how my practice has changed my life. I'm not sure how to answer that. It's a tricky question because I don't want to imply that your experience will be the same as mine. So much depends on how much effort you are willing to put into your practice. There are likely to

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

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

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

be personal challenges to overcome. Zen practice requires serious commitment. My life has certainly changed. I came to this practice looking for "Peace of Mind." I've gotten a good measure of that. But it didn't happen the way I expected it would.

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

Nonin writes, “I’ve returned from my mini-sabbatical and am in full swing again at the temple. I was so pleased when I drove in last week to see the grounds in such good shape. **Many thanks** to **Chuko Jean Bailey**, who organized the yard work, and to **George Patenode** and all the others who worked outdoors during my absence.”

A **heartly welcome** to **Elizabeth Muia**, who has begun a **one-year residency** at Heartland Temple. For the past year-and-a-half, Elizabeth has practiced with **Rev. Kyoki Roberts** and the **Deep Spring Temple sangha** at Zen Center of Pittsburgh. **Many thanks** to **Kanho Doug Dittman**, **Noshin Marcia Prideaux**, **Zenryu Vicki Grunwald**, and any others who worked on the walls and painted the small guest room, where Elizabeth is now living.

FALL PRACTICE PERIOD will begin with a **Two-day Sesshin** on **September 10th and 11th**. Practice Period is designed to **provide structure for people who wish to intensify their practice and their sangha connections in three areas for a specific period of time**. Those three areas are: (1) **daily practice at home** (sitting and devotional services), (2) **regular involvement at the temple** (e.g., specific morning or evening sittings, Sunday morning practice, or work practice), and (3) **attendance at special events** (e.g., sesshins, study groups, or precept ceremonies). Practice Period students will also keep a **daily practice journal** and will **meet with Nonin as a group** two or three times during the period, which will end with **Rohatsu Sesshin**.



We will be working this Fall on our **Temple Expansion Project** by consulting with the **City Planning Board** to make sure our building plan is within all code restrictions. We’ll also **contact builders** and **solicit bids**, so we’ll know what our fund-raising target is when we resume Expansion Project **fundraising** early next year.

Nonin’s travels this coming Fall include a return trip to **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** to attend **Myoen Margaret Coghlan’s Priest Ordination**, performed by **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**, on September 18th. On the following weekend, Nonin will travel to **Milwaukee Zen Center** for a meeting of the **Soto Zen Buddhist Association’s Priest Training Committee**. In November, Nonin will travel to **New York** to lead a Study Seminar on **Zen in Japanese Poetry** at **Empty Hand Zendo** in New Rochelle.

Three inmates at Tecumseh State Correctional Institution in Tecumseh, Nebraska have finished **sewing rakus** and will participate in a **Lay Initiation Ceremony** at the prison late this Fall. **Many thanks** to **Noshin Marcia Prideaux** for helping the men with their sewing..

SESSHIN

There will be three sesshins at NZC this Fall, a **Two-day Sesshin** on **September 10th and 11th**, a **One-day Sitting** on **October 22nd**, and **Rohatsu Sesshin**, from **December 1st through 7th**. Fees: \$30 per day for members; \$40 for non-members. Lower rates are available for those with limited income. **E-mail** heartland@prairiewindzen.org or **Call (402) 551-9035** to register.

DHARMA STUDY CLASS

Nonin will led a **Dharma Study Class** at the temple this Fall. It will meet on four successive Saturday mornings from **10 a.m. till noon**, on **October 15th, 22nd, and 29th**, and **November 5th**.

The class will focus on **Zen in Japanese Poetry** and will examine the dharma in poems by Ryokan, Muso Soseki, Basho, and others. The class is **free to members**. The fee for **non-members** is **\$15 per class**. For further information, **e-mail** heartland@prairiewindzen.org or **call (402) 551-9035**.

OTHER FALL EVENTS

Sep 4	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
14	Precept Ceremony
Oct 2	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
19	Precept Ceremony
Nov 6	World Peace Ceremony Group Discussion
16	Precept Ceremony

ZEN CENTER OF PITTSBURGH – SANGHA NOTES

ZCP FALL EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

- 4 —World Peace Ceremony; Work Day
- 15 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 18 —Priest Ordination
- 20 —Ryaku Fusatsu*
- 21 —Int'l Peace Day sit (5:30 am-5pm)
- 22 —Intro to Zen; “Endless Practice” Discussion***

OCTOBER

- 2 —World Peace Ceremony
- 13 —Intro To Zen; “Endless Practice”***
- 18 —Ryaku Fusatsu*; 5-week Buddhist Studies Class begins***
- 20 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 21-23—Two-day Sesshin***

NOVEMBER

- 6 —World Peace Ceremony
- 10 —Intro to Zen; “Endless Practice”***
- 12 —One-day Sitting***
- 17 —Sitting at Mt. Alvernia**
- 23-25 —ZCP Closed
- 26 —Intro to Zen (9 am - noon)

*after evening zazen

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

***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 - Saturday

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

It has been a busy summer at Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple. A special thank you goes to the Head of our order, **Rev. Nonin Chowaney**, who spearheaded the exterior painting project during practice period. Nonin recently finished his six week mini-sabbatical at ZCP. **He is surely missed!**

ZCP sangha member **Elizabeth Muia** has moved to Omaha, NE. She is beginning residency and studying with Nonin at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple. **We wish her the best!**

The Board of Directors and the Sangha of Deep Spring Temple invite you to the **ordination** of **Myoen Margaret Coghlan** as a Soto Zen Buddhist Priest by **Rev. Kyoki Roberts, OPW** on **Sunday, September 18th at 10 a.m.** **RSVP appreciated.**



Myoen Margaret will lead an **OPEN DISCUSSION GROUP** called *Endless Practice*, beginning **Thursday, September 22nd at 7:15 p.m.** The group will meet monthly to sit and to discuss practice within the workplace, the family, and other aspects of daily life. Early arrivals are invited to attend the **Intro to Zen class at 6 p.m.** Suggested donation: **\$15 for Intro and class.** **Free to pledging members.**

DHARMA STUDY CLASS — **Kyoki** will teach a **five-week class** on the **Heart Sutra**, which we chant at Deep Spring Temple every morning, beginning **Tuesday, October 18th, at 7:15 p.m.** Suggested donation: **\$50; free to pledging members.**

Plan now to join **Kyoki** and other ZCP sangha members **Nebraska Zen Center** for **Rohatsu Sesshin**, from **Dec. 1-7**. This seven-day sesshin commemorates Buddha's enlightenment. **ZCP will be closed** that week, except for **Dec. 4th**, when we'll have **regular Sunday services.**

Many thanks to **Ryushin John Ott** for all his garden work, to **Dan Kendgia** for his many volunteer hours, and to **Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar** for her work as office manager.

In July, **Kyoki** attended the Soto Zen Buddhist Association board meeting in California, led a Communication Workshop in Texas, and attended an American Zen Teachers meeting in Vermont. Later, she took a train trip to Newfoundland for a much-needed vacation, returning in mid-August.

Rohatsu Sesshin

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expectations higher, and Japan culture impenetrable, at first, to foreigners. Also, I spoke no Japanese when I began, and although there was a Canadian monk in residence at Zuioji who acted as my translator, he wasn't immediately available at all times. None of the Japanese monks were anywhere near fluent in English, so the language barrier was formidable, and sometimes impenetrable.

To make things worse, I had been practicing at Tassajara with people who were there because they wanted to be there. Many had left careers and families, at least temporarily, to pursue the spiritual path in a monastic setting. We were all serious monks. It was also exciting at Tassajara. Zen Buddhist monastic practice was still quite new in America, and like most new enterprises, a vibrant, fresh spirit permeated the place. Many different teachers visited Tassajara, and we looked forward to their dharma talks. No one missed them. At Zuioji, the monks were, with few exceptions, the sons of temple priests. They were mostly young men in their early twenties who were there to gain certification allowing them to take over their fathers' temples. Most of them didn't want to be there and were counting the days until they could leave. Dharma talks were regarded as nap time, and although there were a few serious monks at Zuioji, most of them were more interested in discussing the varieties of food available on American supermarket shelves than they were in discussing the Buddhadharmas. I was forty-five when I arrived at Zuioji, and I was there because I wanted to be there. I felt like a graybeard trapped in a boys' boarding school.

My biggest difficulty, however, was my inability to accept that relatively little zazen was practiced at Zuioji. There was a heavy emphasis on ceremony and ritual. At that time in American temples, there was relatively little ceremony and ritual practice. Most Soto Zen rituals had not been transmitted to America yet. Consequently, American Zen Buddhist practitioners judged the seriousness of a

practitioner and the viability of a practice place by the amount of zazen sat on a daily basis. At Zuioji, evening zazen was frequently canceled for one reason or another. Either we had been working too hard, or we had to practice for special ceremonies that were coming up practice, or there was some special instruction scheduled. Sometimes, we'd sit only one short zazen period in the morning. It was much less zazen than I was used to, and I had a hard time accepting it.

I stayed at Zuioji for three months, under protest – *severe* protest. In fact, I protested as much and often as I could! Looking back on it now, I'm a little sheepish at how much trouble I caused, for my attitude toward practice at Zuioji has completely changed. Fortunately for me, Narasaki-roshi and the other monks at Zuioji returned my frustration, anger, and hostility with kindness and generosity. Their behavior was to their credit, but to me, it was frustrating. I gave them a hard time, and they were extremely kind to me. The nerve of them!

However, life at Zuioji was not always bad. Japanese monks also have difficulties adjusting to monastic life. I and the other newcomers were in it together, and I made some good friends there. Some of it was even fun, and I was learning a lot in spite of myself. When I left Zuioji for Shogoji after three months, however, I swore that I'd never set foot in that place again!

At Shogo-ji, things were better for me. It was more relaxed, deep in the mountains, and the language problems weren't as severe. Although I was the only Westerner there, I had practiced in America with the Head Monk, who was Japanese. We were good friends, and he spoke fluent English. Another Shogoji monk, Daiji, spoke very little English, but he was eager to try, and my Japanese was improving in direct proportion to the necessity of speaking it. Daiji and I were determined to communicate, and he helped me a lot. With one exception,

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 **dougditman@earthlink.net** (402-783-2124). Zazen Instruction is available for newcomers if arranged in

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

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

the four monks already there were committed to the practice and to zazen, so we sat more. Things smoothed out for me at Shogoji, and my crises came and went less frequently.

One crisis, however, arose with regularity. Since I had been ordained four years before, I had been focusing my practice on daily zazen and on *sesshin*, concentrated retreats of from two to seven days. When I was practicing in Minneapolis with Katagiri-roshi, we sat either a two-day or seven-day sesshin every month. This type of practice was also followed at San Francisco Zen Center, where I practiced when I first went to California, and also at

Rohatsu Sesshin

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Tassajara. Even though I had been constantly admonished by my teachers not to seek after any particular state of mind and not to hold onto any state of mind that arises, I had become particularly enamored of the broad, spacious state of mind that arises during long, concentrated sitting. Whenever things got unsettled in my monastic life at Shogoji, I'd get desperate for sesshin, as I always did when life got sticky and I became un-balanced and un-grounded.

At Shogoji, sesshins were non-existent when I began there, and after a time, we sat evening zazen less and less. We were working very hard to get the place in shape. Until two Zuioji monks came to Shogoji a year before I got there, there had been no residents there for many years and the condition of the buildings and grounds had deteriorated. We could sit zazen in the evening if we wanted to, but I was the only one who ever wanted to. It got pretty lonely after a while, and at that time, more loneliness was *not* what I needed.

In the Fall of my first year in Japan, a severe crisis developed for me. We had begun sitting modified three-day sesshins once a month in the Summer, but in September and November, both sesshins were canceled, once because the Head Monk felt we had to thoroughly clean the place for one of Narasaki-roshi's infrequent visits and once because of a begging trip coordinated with monks from Zuioji. Once again, I began to deeply question why I was there. Because I was not doing well, I began to long for sesshin. Zazen was the only thing that ever helped me make sense of my life, and sesshins always helped me get my bearings.

In December, Soto Zen practice places all over the world sit Rohatsu Sesshin, a seven-day retreat that ends on or near Buddha's Enlightenment Day, December 8th. I had reluctantly accepted missing the second mini-sesshin in a row at Shogoji, but when I heard that we were not sitting Rohatsu because there were too few of us, I strongly protested. It got me nowhere,

and I went into a deep funk. I finally decided that *somehow, somewhere*, I was going to sit Rohatsu sesshin, and I asked the Head Monk to speak to Narasaki-roshi and tell him that I wanted to sit Rohatsu sesshin at Hosshinji, a Soto Zen monastery far to the north of Shogoji, on the main Japanese island of Honshu. One of my dharma sisters – another disciple of Katagiri-roshi's – was practicing there, as were other Westerners, and I'd heard good things about Hosshinji sesshins.

I knew that this was a somewhat radical request, but I didn't know how radical. When I first asked, I didn't realize that it would be completely out of the question. To sit at Hosshinji, I would have to formally leave Shogoji! This would mean giving up Narasaki-roshi's support, which I needed to live in Japan, and causing major embarrassment for both Narasaki-roshi and Katagiri-roshi. In other words, if I went, I couldn't come back.

Narasaki-roshi was not quite so blunt, however, although I heard through the grapevine that he was not pleased with my request. He told the Head Monk to tell me that if I wanted to sit Rohatsu Sesshin, I was welcome to do so at Zuioji.

Well, I had sworn six months earlier never to set foot in Zuioji again, so I was faced with a dilemma. It soon became clear that if I were going to sit Rohatsu Sesshin, which I desperately needed to do, it would have to be at Zuioji. So, I was trapped. I reluctantly decided to go back to Zuioji and sit sesshin there. Surprisingly, it became one of the pivotal experiences of my life.

The day before the beginning of Rohatsu sesshin, I arrived at Zuioji apprehensive and tense. My previous experience there was not a good one, and I knew that one particular issue was sure to arise. I've never been a limber person, especially from the waist down, and I've had trouble with my knees and

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

ankles ever since I started sitting zazen. I injured one knee cross-country skiing many years before, shortly after I started daily sitting. Also, I had previously sprained and strained my knees and ankles many times over the years playing various sports. When I began sitting with Katagiri-roshi, I sat in a kneeling posture (Jap. *seiza*) for three years because my legs were not limber enough to sit cross-legged. It was only after a year of

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concentrated exercise that I was able to begin sitting in Burmese posture and after another year of exercise that I was able to begin sitting half-lotus.

When I first came to Zuioji, my knee and leg problems were exacerbated, because mainstream Soto Zen Monasteries in Japan, and Zuioji was one, do not use *zabutons*, large square cushions on which we place a round cushion (*zafu*). We sit on the round cushion and our legs from the knees down rest on the square one. At Zuioji, they place the *zafu* on *tatami*, large woven grass mats. They are much harder than *zabutons*. Because of my physical problems, I found sitting on *tatami* for long periods of time excruciatingly painful.

I had previously spoken to Narasaki-roshi many times about my problem, and at Shogoji, I was allowed to use a zabuton. Shogoji's Head Monk, whose name was Ekai and who was accompanying me to Zuioji, assured me that I could use one there.

Shortly after arriving at Zuioji, I put a zabuton at my sitting place. When I arrived for evening zazen the day before sesshin, however, it had been removed. When I saw this, I left the zendo and angrily stalked back to the room where I was staying with Ekai and blurted out, "They took my zabuton; you *assured* me I could use one!"

He replied, "Narasaki-roshi said no."

"What the hell do you mean he said 'no.' When did he say no? You told me at Shogoji that I could use one."

"He told me a little while ago."

"A little while ago! Didn't you ask him before we came? If I'd have known I couldn't use one, I wouldn't have come! And I won't stay if I can't use one."

Ekai got up, and as he left the room, he said that he'd talk to Narasaki-roshi about it. So, I went back to the zendo and suffered through a painful period of

zazen.

That night before bed, I asked Ekai if he'd spoken to Narasaki-roshi.

"No," he replied.

"Well, you'd better because I'm not sitting sesshin tomorrow without a zabuton."

"Get a good night's sleep," he replied, as he once more left the room.

The next morning, I went to the zendo early and again found no zabuton. I went back to the room and told Ekai. He said, "I talked to Narasaki-roshi last night, and he said you couldn't have one."

"You talked to him last night?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

Silence

"You knew last night, and you didn't tell me?"

More silence

"I told you. No zabuton; no sesshin. I'm going back to Shogoji."

I began to angrily pack my things, and Ekai left the room.

My mental state was not the best as I was throwing my clothes into my traveling bag. I had been reluctant to come back here anyway, and I was angry with myself for doing so, angry at Ekai for talking me into it and not checking about the zabuton before we left Shogoji, angry at Narasaki-roshi for being insensitive to my physical problems, and angry at Katagiri-roshi for sending me to Zuioji in the first place.

As I was stuffing my belongings into the bag, I came across an envelope given to

me by Toshiko, an old woman who lived in a small house on Shogoji's grounds and who had served as caretaker there for many years before it was activated as a monastery. The envelope was a fancy Japanese gift envelope. In it was a "*senbetsu*," a monetary gift given before a journey. I knew there was money in it, so I hadn't opened it before but put it in my bag and forgot about it. When I came across it, I remembered what Toshiko had said when she gave it to me: "This is from me and Kimi [an old woman from the village below Shogo-ji who helped Toshiko take care of the place.] It's wonderful you are going to sit Rohatsu sesshin. Please do your best for all beings." I opened it, and found a five-thousand yen note, a sizeable amount for two old women living alone in the mountains.

As I looked at the money, many things began to come up. How could I go back? These two old women, who cannot sit sesshin, gave me a gift to help me. How can I go back now? I'm supposed to be sitting for them also, not just for myself. Katagiri-roshi used to say: "You don't sit zazen by yourself; you sit with and for all beings."

I began to feel terrible. I thought: If I go back, I have to face those old women. My days at Shogoji and Zuioji will be over, and I'll have to go either to Hosshinji or back to America. Both moves would disappoint Katagiri-roshi immensely. He has high hopes for Shogoji and for me. I'd be letting him down, and I'd also be letting down everyone who has supported me here, Doctor Yamaguma (my Japanese sponsor), Zuioji's Godo-roshi (the teacher responsible for daily training), who had been so kind to me and so helpful, all the temple supporters at Shogoji, and even Narasaki-roshi, who established Shogoji to help Katagiri-roshi by providing a place for American priests to train. What could I do? I couldn't stay, and I couldn't leave. I began to cry.

As I was sitting in the middle of the floor drying my tears, Ekai came in.

"Narasaki-roshi has spoken to the Godo-roshi," he said. "Godo-roshi said you could use a blanket to sit on for sesshin."

ZEN MEDITATION WORKSHOP

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

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

at **Heartland Temple**

On **Saturday, November 19th**, from **10:00 am till 1:00 pm**

Cost: \$20

for further information or to register contact:
Nebraska Zen Center, 3625 Lafayette Ave, Omaha, NE 68131
(402) 551-9035

CALLIGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Practicing with brush and ink, we bring quiet attention into each moment, expressing our innermost creative spirit. In this workshop, you'll learn traditional Asian brush skills and enter the creative process by working with selected ideograms. Instruction will include everything from ink preparation to creating a finished piece.
No prior experience is necessary.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, abbot of Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple, will lead the Workshop at the **Unitarian Church** in **Lincoln, NE** on **Saturday, October 1st** from **10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

For further information or to register, call Kim Beyer-Nelson at (402) 483-2231 or e-mail her at Kbeyernelson@netscape.net

Calligraphy For Sale



Suchness

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.

From the editor:

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

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

Rohatsu Sesshin

from page 8

"A blanket."

"Yes, a blanket."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"Fold it up and put a zafu on top of it."

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard of. "Why can't I use a zabuton?"

"They're not allowed."

"I used one at Shogoji, and you said I could use one here. If I knew I couldn't, I wouldn't have come."

Silence.

"I want to talk to Narasaki-roshi," I said.

"He is preparing to go to the zendo."

"Well, go tell him that I'm not, and I want to tell him why."

Silence

"Are you going?" I asked.

"All right," he sighed.

After Ekai left, I remained slumped in the middle of the floor. A blanket we weren't using caught my eye. I folded it in quarters, put a zafu on top of it, and tried to sit zazen. Surprisingly, it wasn't bad. The dear old Godo-roshi had come through for me again. More surprisingly, it was warm, not a small thing in December, where the zendo temperature at Zuioji lingers around 35-40 degrees mornings and evenings. The blanket was made out of a synthetic material that reflected my body heat back to me, and I thought, "Maybe I can do this." I got another blanket, folded it in quarters, and put it on top of the other one. Now, it was almost like a zabuton.

I got up, put things away, and waited for Ekai to return. He reported that Narasaki-roshi would see me. Narasaki-roshi is a formidable person, and in a bad mood, he can be even more so. As I walked to the

meeting room, I thought, "This is the beginning of Rohatsu sesshin, the most important practice event of the year. Narasaki-roshi has postponed entering the zendo at the start of sesshin to talk to me, a troublesome American monk who has annoyed him often in the past. This is not going to be easy."

It was never easy talking with Narasaki-roshi. He never really carried on a conversation. He talked and you listened. He was used to monks saying, "Yes, yes, I understand" whenever he said something. Also, we always used a translator, who usually only translated a fraction of what Narasaki-roshi said, for he spoke fast and long, with little pauses. As my Japanese improved, I began to realize that whoever the translator was, he wouldn't translate something I said to Narasaki-roshi if he thought it would upset him. So, I was not looking forward to this conversation.

When we started, Narasaki-roshi reiterated why I couldn't use a zabuton. He also said that the Godo-roshi had suggested a blanket, and that I could use that, so we should go to the zendo now and join sesshin, which was just starting. He got up and began walking to the door. I interrupted – something he wasn't used to – and told him, through the translator, that I wanted to explain why I was having problems. He sat back down, and I told him the history of my physical problems. I could tell that he was listening to the translator and that he was genuinely concerned, for the hard edge that he brought to the meeting had softened. I decided to go for the jugular, so I said, "One blanket is very helpful, but if I could have two, it would be very close to a zabuton. I could sit sesshin much more easily." He stiffened and said, "Nonin, Godo-roshi and I have decided that you can use ONE blanket during sesshin. So, are you coming to the zendo or not? I realized then that I had gotten all that I was going to get, so I said, "Okay, thank you very much; I'll go to the zendo."

I had decided, however, that what

Narasaki-roshi didn't know wouldn't hurt him, so before I went to the zendo, I found a slightly smaller blanket in my room that would fit neatly under the blanket placed in the zendo for me. I took it with me, and when I put it underneath, I felt as if I could get away with it. I was sitting on what's called the *gaitan*, a small sitting area outside the main zendo used by lay people, non-temple-resident monks, and senior resident monks who needed to leave often to do their jobs. Narasaki-roshi rarely went by there, so I figured that he wouldn't notice!

I'm pretty sure, however, that he knew what I'd done. After lunch on the first day, he gave me a seat in the zendo proper that was usually occupied by a monk who was working in the kitchen during this sesshin. Letting me sit there was against procedure and was a very gracious and generous gesture by Narasaki-roshi. I'm sure he felt that I would benefit more from being inside rather than outside. When I was told during after-lunch break that my seat had been moved, I blanched and thought, "Oh no, I've been found out!" When I went back to the zendo the zafu and both blankets were the same as I was using on the *gaitan*. I sat nearly opposite Narasaki-roshi the whole sesshin. He had to have known.

As sesshin unfolded, things began to change. I began to see clearly that this was the place I was supposed to be, and I began to appreciate Zuioji practice deeply. All of Narasaki-roshi's priest disciples had returned to sit Rohatsu sesshin, and although silence is usually observed during such retreats, they would gather during breaks and chatter and laugh together like a bunch of kids at camp. There were nuns and lay people sitting with us; some were disciples of Narasaki-roshi, some not. They, too, were light and joyous; everyone was clearly very happy to be there.

During lunch on the second day, a group of lay people, men and women who had donated and cooked the meal being served circumambulated the zendo, bowing with hands palm-to-palm. All the monks put their hands together and bowed in return. When a very old woman hobbled by in front of me, I began to cry, and all my resistance to

Rohatsu Sesshin

from page 10

practice at Zuioji and to Japanese culture in general dropped away. I saw the young monks who were having such a hard time being there, and whom I formerly resented, as no different from me. I saw the relationship of monks and nuns to lay people played out in beautiful ways, and I began to fully experience the intimacy of practice life in a Japanese monastery without being limited by my own views of how it *should* be.

Rohatsu sesshin at Zuioji became a joyous experience for me all the way to the end, and I was profoundly grateful to Narasaki-roshi for inviting me to do it and to the Godo-roshi for solving the *zabuton* impasse!

After the end of sesshin, we had a *shosan* ceremony, during which all the monks ask a question of the abbot. Narasaki-roshi had to leave to go to a meeting, so the Godo-roshi officiated at the ceremony. As I stood in line to ask my question, I thought of the couple of times during my first three months at Zuioji when I was having a particularly hard time, and Godo-roshi had sent his attendant to bring me to his room. When I got there, he was watching American-style professional wrestling on tv and drinking a beer! He waved me in, told me to sit down, offered me a beer, and began to point out, in Japanese, the intricacies of the wrestling match. I didn't understand much of what he said, and he knew it, but we had a great time for about an hour, and when I left, it was in a great mood!

As I walked up and knelt before the Godo-roshi during the *shosan* ceremony. I began to cry. He looked down at me with infinite kindness, and said through a translator, "Nonin, this has been an important sesshin for you. Your wisdom eye has been opened, and you now see things clearly. I hope that after you return to Shogoji, you will come back to Zuioji many times." And I did. I came back, however, as one of the guys, not as a disgruntled outsider, and it *always* felt good to return.

After I returned to Shogo-ji, I re-read a letter Katagiri-roshi sent to me in

response to a complaining letter I had written to him during my first three months at Zuioji. He wrote:

Dear Nonin,

If you forget the practice of no self or egolessness, Buddhist practice does not make sense for human beings. It means how to use and manifest a self on a large scale and in a creative way. It is just like a skydiver who shows a very productive art in the sky on the basis of no self or egolessness.

From this point, I don't know exactly whether or not American Buddhism today is correct or whether or not Japanese Buddhism is wrong. If no self or egolessness is not actualized in one's life, Buddhism is nothing but an abstract teaching where no peace or no repose and bliss is found in one's daily life.

It is beyond imagination how difficult your practice is in a foreign country. But please do not flounder in an emotional morass. Please deal with yourself and others calmly in current circumstances because our mission is to find out what is the true significance of Buddhism for all living beings, not for a particular being, in a long span of our future vision. There are many, many things or issues waiting for us to learn deeply.

I always pray for your health and your practice to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas every morning.

Gassho,

D. Katagiri

When I first received this letter at Zuioji, it wasn't what I wanted to hear, so I filed it away. Re-reading it at Shogoji after I returned from Rohatsu sesshin, I fully understood what Katagiri-roshi had written. I'll always be profoundly grateful to him for sending me to Japan and to Narasaki-roshi for providing me the opportunity to sit Rohatsu sesshin at

Zuioji.

Letter from Joe

from page 3

I've slowly but markedly changed the way I live. I continue working to face my shortcomings and deal with them. My life is simpler, more orderly, more ethical, and more disciplined than it was before. I've literally "changed my mind." I see many things differently as a result of practice and working with my teacher.

Take care, Dan. Hope to hear from you soon.

Hand palm-to-palm and bowing,

Joe

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