



Prairie Wind

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BEING SICK

by Nonin Chowaney

This past April, I was hospitalized with diverticulitis, an inflammation of the colon. I spent two days hooked to an IV unit that pumped massive doses of antibiotics into my system to knock out the infection.

I didn't feel as if I was sick enough to be in the hospital, but because my doctor strongly recommended it, I went. Since I was wide-awake and clear all day, I was able to read, listen to music, and write in my journal. I also watched a night baseball game on TV – a rare pleasure, for we don't have cable at the temple – and was able to walk around the floor my room was on, pulling the IV unit along as I went.

On the first day, however, I spent some of the time laying in bed and thinking about things that I wasn't doing. I'd been ill for a couple of days before being hospitalized and hadn't been able to work much. I'd researched but hadn't started writing my next *Prairie Wind* article, student practice journals were waiting for my comments and return, e-mails needed answering, and a pile of "things to do" was lying on the table in the office. I'd also canceled a car appointment and a dental appointment, and they both needed to be re-scheduled. "How am I ever going to get caught up," I thought.

I also thought a lot – all right, worried a lot – about the future. The temple provides my health insurance, but it's a major medical policy with a high deductible, which I'm responsible for paying. I'm also responsible for half of the next five thousand dollars in expenses after the deductible. That first evening in the hospital, I thought a lot about how I was going to pay for all this.



Avalokiteshvara — Japan

continued on page 6

衆生無邊劫言願度
煩惱無尽劫言願斷
法門無量劫言願學
佛道無上劫言願成

The Four Bodhisattva Vows — Calligraphy by Nonin Chowaney

IN A DARK PLACE

by Tonen O'Connor

As a Zen teacher, I spend a lot of my time talking about kindness and compassion and was brought up short recently when a member of the sangha at Oshkosh Correctional Institution said, "What if you're in a dark place?" He went on to say "I have negativity all around. Negativity to the left, negativity to the right, negativity to the front, and an officer behind."

This prompted me to think about all the ways in which we can be hemmed in by negativity — sarcastic and mean-spirited co-workers, drivers waving the finger on the highway, horns blown abruptly the moment the light changes, complaints in the line at the post office, cynical holiday cards. None of these things are as violently negative as the anger, hatred, and violence of the prison atmosphere, or the wars and genocide bleeding our world, but they emanate from the same place.

That place is a dark place, and if we are surrounded by its darkness, we can be hard pressed to find light to illuminate the Way. Hard pressed, that is, if we require that it come from others. The prison sangha member continued, "What do you do if you're surrounded by tigers?" Obviously, the easiest thing would be to become a tiger yourself, and you certainly don't want to be a zebra. My answer at the time was that you must be an elephant, big and strong and yet an herbivore.

I later remembered that the Dhammapada has something to say about this:

Patiently I shall bear harsh words as the elephant bears arrows on the battlefield. People are often inconsiderate.

Only a trained elephant goes to the battlefield; only a trained elephant carries the king. Best among men are those who have trained their mind to endure harsh words patiently.

If you cannot find a friend who is good, wise, and loving, walk alone, like a king who has renounced his kingdom or an elephant roaming at will in the forest. It is

better to be alone than to live with the immature. Be contented, and walk alone like an elephant roaming in the forest. Turn away from evil.

It is we who must provide the light that will illuminate our Way. We cannot rely on getting it from others. And further, for us to be able to light our own way, we must train ourselves to stand upright, strong, and alone. The Buddha's teachings may point out the best path, but it is by no means the easiest.

However, if we become even a small source of light in a dark place, we may perhaps find that there are glimmers of answering light from unexpected sources.

There are, however, two sorts of dark places. The first is a dark place created by others. The second is the deeper, blacker darkness we create ourselves. As a member of the Wau-pun Correctional Institution sangha said, "What if I am the dark place?"

What, indeed? How can I find light when I myself am all darkness? Sometimes this is the darkness of depression that pulls us inexorably into the central darkness of our self. Sometimes this is the darkness of anger that lays waste to everything within reach and revels in the misery of others.

Perhaps the first step is to realize that it is I who create the darkness, and stop blaming it on my life. It is I who retreat from or attack the world around me. In short, this is *dukkha*, the deep unsatisfactoriness that the Buddha perceived as afflicting us all. We cannot absolutely control the world and so we retreat and hide in darkness or we spew forth dark flame to consume the possibility of hurt before it can reach us.

Nebraska Zen Center Officers

Ryoshin Joe Marshall	President
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Rev. Nonin Chowaney, OPW Abbot



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

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

In both cases, we have created steep walls of illusion shutting out the light. Kodo Sawaki Roshi describes our situation well:

Ignorance is an obscuring of the self by oneself. We deprive of light our own life

continued on page 8

NEBRASKA ZEN CENTER — SANGHA NOTES

Sangha members **Valdene Mintzmyer** and **Elizabeth Muia** completed **Lay Initiation** at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple in March. Valdene's dharma name is **Shuji** (Practicing Compassion), and Elizabeth's is **Eisai** (Outstanding Capability). **Congratulations to you both!**

Our annual **Prairie Wind Retreat** in June will be held at **Deep Spring Temple** near Pittsburgh again this year, so **Nonin** and temple resident **Eisai Elizabeth Muia** will be gone for the entire month. We will, however, be maintaining our regular schedule (printed on **page 12**), with two exceptions: there will be **no early (6:00 am) sitting on Saturday and Sunday**. Sunday dharma talks will be given by students on the dates specified in the box on the right.



Valdene, Elizabeth, and Nonin after the Lay Initiation Ceremony

Sangha member **Francesca Anania** and **Aaron Quinn** will be married in a joint Buddhist / Catholic ceremony at First Unitarian Church on May 27th. **Nonin** will officiate. **Congratulations in advance to Fran and Aaron!**

Many thanks to **Eisai Elizabeth Muia** for organizing the **painting and redecorating of the office** and for her tireless work on the project. Thanks also to **Kanho Doug Dittman**, **Ryoshin Joe Marshall**, **Julie Kellie**, and **George Patenode** for their help with the project, to **Koshin Bob Schenck** for the new curtains, and to **Kanho Doug Dittman** for the new ceiling light fixture, curtain rods, and switch plates.

Our hearty thanks to **Eisai Elizabeth** and **Kanho Doug** for patching and repainting the vestibule between the kitchen and Buddha hall and for wall repairs in the zendo and to **Ryoshin Joe Marshall** for installing the new computer, for ongoing computer help, and for donating a bell to Lincoln Zen Group.

Thanks also go to **Alex Parmelee** for donating a vacuum cleaner to the temple and to **Shuji Valdene Mintzmyer** for donating and embroidering the Chinese characters for Heartland Temple on a cloth we'll use cover the Buddha tray when it's not in use.

Lastly, **special thanks** to all those **sangha members** who've kept up with their temple jobs over the past three months! Our temple always looks cared for, thanks to all of you.

SESSHIN

There will be no sesshins at NZC this Spring. Our usual **Sesshin** in June will be held at Deep Spring Temple, near Pittsburgh, PA on **June** as part of our annual month-long Prairie Wind Retreat. **Contact Deep Spring Temple** for details. Their addresses and phone number are at the **bottom of page 5**.

JUNE STUDENT TALKS

On **June 4th**, we'll have **World Peace Ceremony** and monthly **Group Discussion**. During the rest of June, Sunday morning dharma talks will be given by **students** on the **11th, 18th, and 25th**. Students will focus on what brought them to Zen practice, what their joys and difficulties have been, and what has kept them at it over time.

OTHER SUMMER EVENTS

Jun 14	Precept Ceremony
Jul 2	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
12	Precept Ceremony
Aug 6	World Peace Ceremony
	Group Discussion
9	Precept Ceremony

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** 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. Also, consider participating in **June Practice Period!** Come for a week or the whole month. See our website for more details.

ZCP SUMMER EVENTS

JUNE

1-30 — OPW Practice Period

JULY

2 — World Peace Ceremony

6 — Intro to Zen**

11 — Ryaku Fusatsu*

20 — Ikko Narasaki's Memorial Day

22 — One-day sitting (5:30 am — 4:00 pm)**

AUGUST

6 — World Peace Ceremony

10 — Intro to Zen**

18-20 — Two-day Sesshin**

31 — Intro to Zen**

*After evening zazen

**Please register for this event

At our Annual Sangha meeting, **Hoetsu Leslie Hospodar** and **Taikan Doug Gouge** were appointed to the Board of Directors. Board officers are now: **Shogen Gary Crouth, President; Leslie, Vice-president; Mary Dieter, Treasurer; Doug, Secretary.** **Revs. Kyoki Roberts** and **Jisen Coghlan** are also board members.

Four sangha members sewed rakus and participated in a Lay Initiation ceremony on April 23rd. Congratulations to **Kogen** (Vast Plain) **Hernan Brizuela**, **Shikaku** (Child Enlighten) **Megan O'Donnell**, **Shinkai** (Deep Ocean) **Tom Persinger**, and **Manzen** (Complete As-it-is) **Jay Volk**. **Rev. Dao-Fa David Clippinger** from the Ksanti Zen Center, Mt. Lebanon, PA and over fifty sangha members and friends attended the ceremony.



Hernan, Jay, Kyoki, Tom, and Meghan after the Lay Initiation Ceremony

We welcome **Rev. Jisen Coghlan** home from practice period at Shasta Abbey, Mt. Shasta, CA, where she spent three months in partial fulfillment of her monastic training vow.

This Spring, ZCP hosted the **Unitarian Universalist Church** of Meadville, **St. Paul UMC** of the North Hills, and the **New Garden Friends School** from North Carolina. Kyoki and other sangha members visited and taught at **Penn State — Beaver University**, **The Dean Ornish program** at Allegheny General Hospital, **Carlow College**, and the **First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Pittsburgh**. Five sangha members attended the **Women in Buddhism Conference** in Chicago where **Kyoki** spoke and led a workshop. By the time you read this, **Kyoki** will be in Turkey on an Interfaith exchange hosted by the **West Penn Cultural Center**, a Turkish immigrant group in Pittsburgh.

Special thanks go to **Dan Kendgja** and **Taikan Doug Gouge** for their efforts finishing the new bathroom, to **Ryushin John Ott**, **John Groman**, **Bryan Ritti**, and **Joy** and **John Bray** for the garden, and to **Joe Roberts** for lawn-mowing and walking the Head Priest and her dog!

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

Being Sick

from page 1

Also, this was my second diverticulitis episode, and I began to worry about whether this is something that's going to happen regularly. A CAT scan done before I was admitted to the hospital showed that there was no blockage, so surgery is not needed now, but will it be needed in the future? I'll be turning sixty-five soon and will go on Medicare. I began to wonder whether Medicare would pay for surgery if it's needed but not an emergency. Also, if it gets so bad down the line that I need emergency surgery, it's a serious issue not to be taken lightly. I know a person who had emergency colon surgery and she had to wear a colostomy bag for a few months until her colon healed enough to re-connect the damaged parts. I imagined myself in that situation, and fear and loathing came up. "I don't want to go through that," I thought.

Sometimes, the mind races all over the place and we can spin and spin all kinds of disturbing scenarios. As I gazed out my fifth floor window at a cloudless, deep blue sky on the morning of my second day in the hospital, I began thinking about the upcoming Practice Period at Deep Spring Temple, our sister temple near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This month of monastic practice is the highlight of the year for me, for I love to go to Deep Spring in June and practice in a quiet, beautiful place with good dharma friends. I began to think, "It would be awful not to be able to go this year. It's only six weeks away. Will I be healthy enough?" I began to imagine a scenario of difficulties that would keep me from going to Deep Spring until thankfully, something Mark Twain once said came up: "My life has been a series of tragedies, most of which never happened." I chuckled to myself, picked up my journal, and began to thumb through it.

I've been keeping a journal for years. In it, I write about whatever I feel like writing about, and I also copy poems, sayings, and short sections from books I'm reading into it. I always take my journal with me when I travel, not only to write in but also

to go through and read whatever looks interesting at the moment. It's like my own edition of a mini-anthology of poetry and prose. That morning in the hospital, I came across something I'd written last summer after visiting the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh:

I went to the Carnegie Museum today. They had exhibits of fossils from as far back as the Permian era, remnants of ancient beings that lived millions of years ago. I was moved by them, and comforted. Life is deep and vast, deeper and vaster than we can ever conceive of. The universe is huge and incomprehensible. When we get all wrapped up in our small, little lives, we mentally disconnect from our huge, vast life, and then we suffer. What's the point?

Indeed; what's the point? Reading these words comforted me. I lay back on my pillow, looked out the window for a while, and enjoyed where I was in the middle of this vast universe. People were getting in and out of their cars in the parking lot below, trees were swaying in the breeze above the houses in the development across the street, cars were flowing in a steady stream both ways down the highway in the distance, and a deep blue sky hung above it all. I felt truly at peace for the first time in a while, and I began to feel much better. No matter what happened to me, I knew deeply that everything would be okay.

For the first time in a few days, I felt that I'd started healing and was on the way to getting well. This was made possible by accepting my illness and the limitations it had placed on me, by fully being where I was, and by dropping momentary concerns and connecting with the larger parts of my life, which is the life of the whole universe.

My master, Dainin Katagiri, once said, "When you're sick, just be sick; that's all." This is good advice. Actually, what else can we do? Well, we can worry about the future, feel sorry for ourselves,

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

WHITE LOTUS SANGHA

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

complain about our fate, or think about what we're unable to do. None of the above does any good, however. In fact, by doing so, we only disturb ourselves and make ourselves sicker, for we fail to cultivate the inner peace that allows the body to heal.

I've passed on Katagiri-roshi's advice to others many times over the years. During my hospital stay, I passed it on to myself quite a few times! After accepting the advice, I would return to breath and do a little lying-in-bed zazen, which is essentially the practice of being where you are and how you are completely. For me, it was in the hospital, being sick.

Being Sick

from page 6

Zen Master Dogen said, "Take care of this body; it is the fruit of many lives." Because it is the fruit of many lives, we should not take it lightly or treat it poorly, for because of this body, we can awaken to who and what we are. To me, taking care of this body means to treat it well, to eat sensibly and healthily, to get enough rest, and to exercise regularly. However, even though I had been doing all of the above, which is necessary for someone with my history of intestinal problems, I still got sick. When we get sick, taking care of the body means to do whatever is necessary to heal ourselves.

Sometimes, no matter what we do, we don't heal. We have to live with illness as best we can, and ultimately, we have to die. No matter how well we take care of the body, it will give out someday and will become the last thing we have to let go of in this lifetime. When I take my last breath, I hope that I can take it willingly, with a calm mind, with the understanding that life is beginningless and endless and that we are not separate entities cut off from the rest of the universe. This understanding is what Katagiri-roshi called "spiritual security," the feeling of

deep peace that arises in the midst of difficulty when we set aside the ups and downs of life and live from a deeper place.

The British poet William Blake wrote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, 'til all he sees is through narrow chinks of his caverns." This closing up especially happens when we're sick, either physically or mentally. The practice of zazen opens those doors so that we can see out of the cavern of our little selves into the vastness of the universe and be at peace with who, what, and how we are.



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 **Nebraska Zen Center**

on **Saturday, July 29th**, from **10:00 a.m. till 1:00 p.m.**

Cost: **\$20**

For further information or to register, either e-mail NZC at **heartland@prairiewindzen.org** or call **402-551-9035**.

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.

ZEN MASTER DOGEN'S VOW

*From this life throughout countless lives,
we vow with all beings to hear the true Dharma.
Hearing it, no doubt arises, nor is faith lacking.
Meeting and maintaining it, we renounce worldly affairs, and
together with all beings and the great earth
realize the Buddha Way.*

*Past negative actions accumulate and cause the arising of many
obstacles to the practice of the Way.
May all Buddhas and Ancestors who have realized the Way ex-
tend their compassion and free us from these karmic effects,
allowing us to practice without hindrance.
May they share with us their boundless compassion,
and fill the universe with the virtue of their enlightened
teaching.*

*Buddhas and Ancestors of old were as we.
In the future, we shall be Buddhas and Ancestors.
Revering Buddhas and Ancestors, we are one Buddha and one
Ancestor.
Awakening Bodhi-mind, we are one Bodhi-mind.
As they extend their compassion freely to us,
we are able to realize Buddhahood and let go of the
realization.*

*The Chan Master Lung-ya said:
Those unenlightened in past lives will now be enlightened.
In this life, take care of the body, the fruit of many lives.
Before Buddhas were enlightened, they were the same as we.
Enlightened people of today are exactly the same as
the ancients.*

*This is the exact transmission of a verified Buddha,
so quietly explore the far-reaching effects of these causes and
conditions.
Repenting in this way, one never fails to receive help,
deep and unending, from all Buddhas and Ancestors.
Revealing before Buddha one's lack of faith and failure to
practice dissolves the root of these unwholesome
actions.
This is the pure and simple manifestation of true practice, of the
true mind and body of faith.*

In a Dark Place

from page 3

and that of all beings in the universe.
He who goes from darkness into dark-
ness is an ignoramus.

The ordinary man consumes his time
and his life in the service of ignorance.
To put it another way, in the service of
illusions. He lives in darkness.

The "Great Dharma Wheel" is the
Wheel-Jewel which, in turning, conquers
our imagined world and pacifies it. With
a terrifying noise, it rolls before the Ten-
rinjo-o kings, crushing all enemies in its
passage, as if it leveled high mountains.
The enemies are not warriors armed with
swords and javelins. The enemies that it
reduces to dust with a crash are illusions.
Ponderously, slowly, it opens a luminous
world. The light is there where the
Dharma Wheel is found, and darkness
where ignorance is found.

To find the light, we must question our
own darkness. We must see how rooted
it is in illusion. And we must be coura-
geous enough to look beyond ourselves
to the luminous dharma world that
awaits our clear vision.

This is not easy to do. We cling tightly to
our illusions and their darkness makes us
feel safe. Yet the darkness cuts us off
from others, from life and from living.

In the dark places, whether created by
others or by ourselves, we must find our
own light, reach out and grasp life. This
is by no means an easy task, yet right
here in January, this darkest of months
that begins a new year, let us have confi-
dence that the light is there as surely as
the coming of spring.

*Tonen O'Connor is Head Priest at Mil-
waukee Zen Center in Milwaukee, Wis-
consin. The above article originally
appeared in the newsletter of that tem-
ple and is reprinted here by permission.*

To Nonin and The Sangha at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple

Nonin, please accept our humble gratitude for all you have done to make possible sewing our rakus and taking the precepts this past December 23rd. Your patience and perseverance are appreciated beyond words. "Thank you" seems inadequate, but, thank you. Your gifts are treasures to each of us.

Of course, without your skillful mentoring, Marcia, our sewing rakus would have been nothing much more than a first-aid exercise in applying bandages and Bactrin. We had been told before beginning that it is common for those sewing rakus to be surprised at meeting the person doing the sewing. Marcia, your gentle encouragement and meticulous instruction allowed each of us to have and develop our practice through this crucial experience.

Elizabeth and Vicki, thank you for assisting with the Lay Initiation Ceremony and for honoring us with your joy and presence.

To all of our teachers over the years — Larry, Mark, John, Keith, and Jeff — thank you. We have learned and grown through you all.

And to all at Heartland Temple, thank you for your support, for allowing us to belong, for sending compassion our way.

Along with Anthony and Owen, again, thank you. All the best.

Gassho,

Doc

Doc, Anthony, and Owen practice with the White Lotus Sangha at Tecumseh State Correctional Institute in Tecumseh, Nebraska.

Calligraphy For Sale



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.

From the editor:

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

LETTER TO A FRIEND

by Koshin Bob Schenck

Koshin Bob Schenck practices at Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple. The following letter was in response to a friend who asked how and why Bob came to Buddhist practice and what it was like for him. Our thanks to Bob for allowing us to print it here.

Dear Takako,

I got interested in Buddhism in 1974 through a good friend who was a follower of Stephen Gaskin. Gaskin's creed was an eclectic Buddhist-based blend of world religions and philosophies. Basically, Gaskin taught nonviolence, honesty, and service to all humankind — a kind of broad Mahayana Buddhism. I began practicing with friends — mainly we committed to telling the truth — in a kind of informal sangha without an actual Buddhist teacher. I gave it my all and immediately experienced overwhelming understanding and joy, so much so that I continued to practice on my own for the next twenty-five years. Two close friends at that time also made a commitment. One moved to the commune led by Stephen Gaskin known as The Farm, where he remained for eight years, and one, after ten years of practicing on his own, made a formal commitment to the Tibetan Buddhist organization Shambhala, the group founded by Chogyam Trungpa. This friend, Billy, and I continued to talk and correspond about Buddhism and what it meant, and we continued to practice in our own different and personal ways.

About six years ago, my friend Billy told me he thought I should find a teacher, and since Billy was my closest and most trusted Buddhist confidante, I began looking around. Had there been a Shambhala temple in the area, I probably would have joined that, but since there was not, I decided to check out Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple and the teacher there, Nonin Chowaney. Heartland is a Soto Zen Buddhist temple, and I've now been prac-

ticating there under Nonin for five and a half years. I began by taking a meditation class from Nonin — it met one evening a week for six weeks — and I liked him and trusted him. I've been practicing there under his direction ever since.

It's not easy! The teacher / student relationship can be demanding for any student who commits to the practice, and I have done that. What Nonin offers is a consistent fixed standard. He never sloughs off. I don't always agree with him, but I have never doubted his integrity nor his commitment to the practice. He is no hypocrite. He has absolutely no

I sit forty minutes every day — usually first thing in the morning — and on some days more than that. After sitting, I do a short chanting and bowing service. I also sit at the Temple one evening a week. I attend every Sunday morning zazen and service and our monthly Precept Ceremony. Two hours a week, I do temple housework and chores.

interest whatsoever in personal wealth or fame. Nonin challenges his students constantly, for Zen Buddhism is not an easy or soft or "feelgood" religion. It's about accepting oneself as one is and the world for what it really is in the here and now. No glossy make-believe. None.

The basic goal is to wake up — to the present moment, moment after moment. We try to be fully present in the present and not drift off and away in our heads to the past or to the future. Daily sitting meditation, or zazen, is the core practice and discipline. I sit forty minutes every day — usually first thing in the morning — and on some days more than that. After sitting, I do a short chanting and

bowing service. I also sit at the Temple one evening a week. I attend every Sunday morning zazen and service and our monthly Precept Ceremony. Two hours a week, I do temple housework and chores.

Buddhism changed my whole life in 1975. It basically transformed me. It made me a better person — more mature, more responsible, less interested in me, more caring, less egoistic and selfish. Of course it's immodest for me to say that of myself, and many who know me might disagree, but I still think it's true. Needless to say, I'm no saint. But I'm also not the adolescent I was till the age of thirty-two. I sometimes say I remained sixteen for sixteen years.

Practicing with Nonin and daily zazen filled the last remaining hole in my life, or so it feels to me. I love zazen. I rarely miss a day. Trying to be fully awake and present in the present is almost a habit and the effort is almost automatic, but like everybody else, I fall asleep and slip back into ego and daydream all the time. But it's not long before I wake up and return to my breath and the present. That's the practice. Wake up. Be here. Be kind. Do some good.

Partly because of my practice and partly because of my age, I don't have many fears or desires anymore (although lately Nonin has been disagreeing with me about that) and I don't really have any goal or purpose other than trying to do and to give everything I can to help others in the world who have not had my good fortune. Teaching college English is a wonderful profession for a freethinking Buddhist like me! Every day I have enormous opportunity to help others and to teach others, and at the same time it is so difficult to help others that I am reminded every day of how little I can really accomplish in that regard, and those failures usually keep me relatively humble and often humiliate me entirely. My Buddhist commitments and aspirations — do no harm, do good, serve all beings — really permeate every aspect of my life, or so it feels to me, and have for many years now. Thirty years ago Buddha

PRAIRIE WIND PRACTICE PERIOD

The annual **Prairie Wind Practice Period** will be held at **Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple** for the entire **month of June**.

Rev. Nonin Chowaney, Abbot of Nebraska Zen Center / Heartland Temple and **Rev. Kyoki Roberts**, Head Priest at Zen Center of Pittsburgh / Deep Spring Temple, will **co-lead practice**.

We will follow a daily schedule of **zazen, services, formal and informal meals, work, dharma talks, and classes** based on Soto Zen Buddhist practices in the tradition of **Zen Master Dogen** that were transmitted to America by 20th century masters **Shunryu Suzuki** and **Dainin Katagiri**.

We invite you to join us, for either all or part of this practice period.

For further information, cost inquiries, or to register, please contact **Zen Center of Pittsburgh** at either
124 Willow Ridge Road, Sewickley, PA 15143,
kyoki@prairiewindzen.org, or
412-741-1262



Letter to a Friend

from page 10

handed me an oar — to borrow an expression from Stephen Gaskin — and I've been rowing ever since.

Like the person who originally inspired me and my friends, Stephen Gaskin, I have selectively adopted and adapted the teachings and principles of prophets, teachers, and sages of many world religions and philosophies, including Buddha, Lao Tsu, Socrates, Plato, Mahavira, Jesus, Gandhi, Bertrand Russell, Martin Luther King, Patanjali, and countless other sages, saints, artists, poets, and philosophers. I'm an odd kind of freethinking student of peace in that I see no important contradictions between any of these brave, inspiring people. The answer — if there is one — is selflessness, nonviolence, compassion, kindness, and generosity. They all agree on that. When I decided to commit to nonviolence, my tiny life in the vast mystery of the infinite universe was suddenly transformed into an amazing and astounding adventure!

It was the horrible violence and war after war after war in the world that initially led me to philosophy and to art and then to Buddhism. Thanks to Buddhist practice, I'm now able to acknowledge — and even experience some understanding of — the unimaginable cruelties and horrors of the human world and to feel empathy for both the victims and perpetrators.

My goodness! I've written so much! My apologies, my friend, and my best regards,

Bob

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

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