Wind Bell

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Contents

Cover: Pine, a symbol of consistency and perseverance over time
Calligraphy by Robby Ryuzen Pellett

Robby Ryuzen Pellett, currently a Tassajara resident, is a priest and student of Hoitsu Suzuki, son of Zen Center's founder Shunryu Suzuki. He has undertaken a 12-year calendar project to raise funds to reinstall a collection of sutras into a revolving sutra cabinet housed at Rinso-in, his teacher's temple.

During the 1800s the temple's sutras were stolen. The revolving cabinet which housed them enables a person to incur the merit of having read all the sutras housed in it by revolving the cabinet once. Robby's intention is to offer the temple the 600 volumes of the *Dai Hannya Kyo*.

Robby is using his own calligraphy to illustrate the calendars. The phrases presented in the calendar are drawn from Zen, Chado and Budo.

You may purchase a calendar and support Robby's project by sending a check for $16.00 per calendar and your address to Robby Ryuzen Pellett, 9515 Linden Avenue North, Seattle WA 98103.

Hekizan Tom Girardot

Hekizan Tom Girardot, a priest at Zen Center, died June 29 at Seton Medical Center of a heart attack following emergency cancer surgery three-and-a-half weeks earlier. He was 65 years old.

A native of San Francisco, he worked as a cab driver and jazz musician, coming to Zen practice like so many others in the late 1960s. He was ordained by Richard Baker Roshi in 1980 and in 1984 was Shuso or Head Monk for the fall practice period at City Center. For two years before his illness, he served as Ino in charge of the meditation hall.

Hekizan also studied tea ceremony with Mitzu Suzuki Sensei of the Omoto Senke school and became a teacher of tea. He was active with the Hayes Valley Community and the Religious Witness with Homeless People and served on the Task Force on the Central Freeway.

The following statement by Abbot Sojun Weitsman was offered at Hekizan's memorial service.

Sojun Mel Weitsman's statement at Hekizan's funeral

We are gathered here today, your old friends and dharma companions, to pay our last respects to you Hekizan Shishin Osho, Tom Girardot and to share our feelings and memories of your life, and to express a little of how your life has touched each one of us.

I remember how excruciating zazen was for you in the beginning. I can't remember exactly how long ago that was, but it seems like the distant past.

Still, regardless of what was going on in your life, you always had a smile on your face. The death of your dear son in a swimming accident and later your wife was a heavy weight for you, but you always found it in your heart to pick yourself up and continue, rarely complaining.

I got to know you best when sometimes we had lunch at Greens with Bruce in the storeroom and later, when you moved into the Page Street building, you were happiest when you were serving tea, which was a great passion of yours. You loved to drink beer and eat noodles.

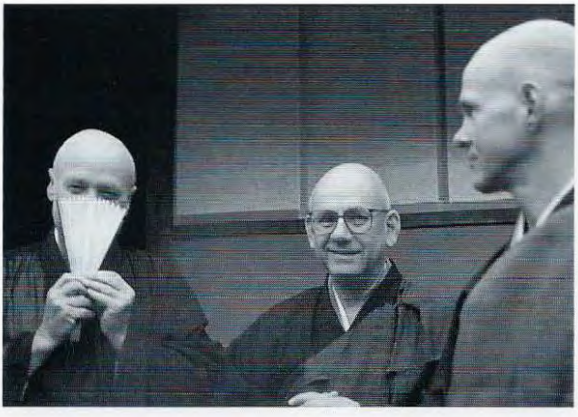
You were shuso twice and you served faithfully as Director and Ino of this practice place. You were a dedicated priest and Dharma brother. It was painful to feel your suffering toward the end, but now it is over and you have entered the great stillness, the pure land of radiant light.

I will truly miss sharing noodles with you. We grew up in the same era and shared our understanding of things that only our generation was able to experience.

Beatnik, cab driver, jazz musician, tea sensei, Zen priest, husband and father, you did your best and we all loved you for who you were.

Go straight. Your good karma will carry you. It won't be the same without you. But I am not worried. You are in Buddha's hands now. Let go and trust. Kwatz!

Hekizan played jazz saxophone in the '50s.



Hekizan as Tassajara Shuso with then-abbots Sojun Weitsman and Tenshin Anderson

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You Can't Make a Date with Enlightenment

Shunryu Suzuki Roshi
Sesshin Lecture, February 1971

The sixth patriarch (Daikan Eno) said that just to dwell in emptiness and to keep your mind calm is not zazen. He also said, "Just to sit in the cross-legged position is not Zen," even though we say that you have to "just sit." If you don't know what our practice is and stick to those words, you will be confused. But if you understand what Zen really is, you will see it as a kind of warning. Now our sesshin is almost ended and many of you will go back home and be involved in your previous everyday activity. If you have been practicing true zazen you will probably be glad to go back to your everyday life. But if you feel hesitant to go back to your everyday life, it means that you still stick to zazen.

That is why the sixth patriarch said that if you dwell in emptiness, and stick to your practice, then that is not true zazen. When you practice zazen moment after moment, you accept what you have right now, and what you have in this moment. You are satisfied with everything you do, and you don't have to complain because you just accept it. That is zazen. Even though you cannot do that, you know what you should do. Then, sitting zazen will encourage you to do something else. Just as you accepted your painful legs, you accept difficult everyday life. City life may be more difficult than your zazen practice. So zazen will encourage you to have more difficulties.

If you understand in this way, that is right understanding. If you have some real taste of practice after seven days of sesshin, without losing your practice it will be a great encouragement to continue your busy activity and you will have a taste of the calmness of your mind even if it is difficult. Not because you stick to it, but because you enjoy it. When you enjoy it, you don't have time to stick to it. So if you have the real taste of our practice you can enjoy it all the time, incessantly. Whatever you do, that taste is not something you have to stick to. It is not something you have to recall. That is true enlightenment.

So even though you think you attained enlightenment, when you are in difficulty and you think you need to recall that experience, that is not real enlightenment because that experience is something you need to stick to. Real enlightenment is always with you. There is no need to stick to some experience or even to think about it. So difficulty itself is enlightenment. Busy life is enlightened activity. That is true enlightenment.

Suzuki Roshi with his wife Okusan

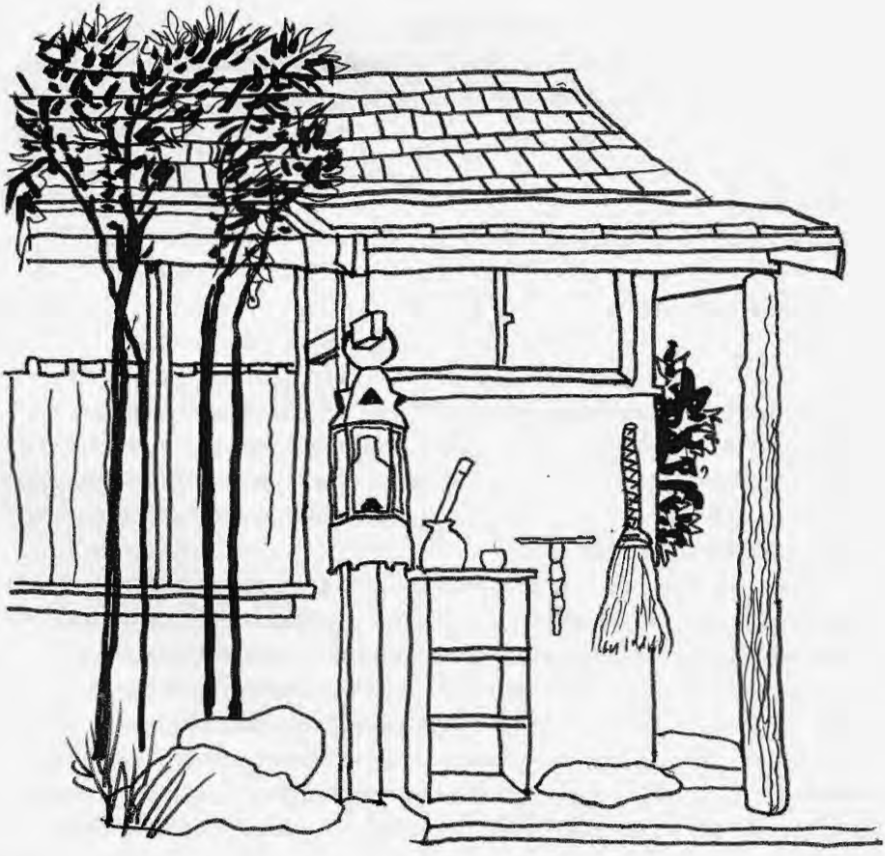
Although you may want to have a taste of true practice, it may be difficult to have it. The only way is just to continue right practice according to the right instruction and the right teacher. That is the only way. If you follow the right schedule in your practice, naturally, someday you may have a taste of it.

Nowadays, young people are making "dates." But enlightenment is not something you can make a date with. If you organize your life, get up at a certain time, take your bag lunch and go to work, then, if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, you will meet that person without any date. At a certain time she will come to the corner. You usually see her, you know. That is more our way. It is rather foolish to make a phone call. It is troublesome. "Hey, I'm leaving now." If she doesn't meet you at the corner you will be disappointed. If you don't make any date, and if she comes at some certain time to the corner, you will be really happy. It is not a laughing matter. I'm talking about something real.

Not to make any date means not to expect enlightenment, not to stick to some experience. Being encouraged by seeing her even though you don't say anything, even though you don't talk to her, just to have a glance at her is enough. All day long you will be happy. But if you are demanding too much of her, then already it means that you stick to enlightenment.

That is what the sixth patriarch meant when he said that just to dwell on emptiness is not true practice. Originally he attained enlightenment by hearing one well-known statement. Without dwelling on anything you will have this mind. If you stick to something you will lose your enlightenment. Even though you make an appointment or a date it won't work. If you attain enlightenment in that way, it will not be the enlightenment which is always with you and will always encourage you.

This point is very important. After sesshin we should continue our well organized life and have real enlightenment. When you practice hard according to the right instructions of your teacher, then that is how you will have real enlightenment experience.



The abbot's cabin at Tassajara, by Del Carlson

September Dharma Transmission

During the week of September 17th–September 25th, Jusan Kainei Ed Brown received dharma transmission from Abbot Sojun Weitsman. Ed first became a student at Zen Center in 1965 and received priest ordination from Suzuki Roshi in September 1971. From May 1967 until September 1969 he was the tenzo (head cook) at Tassajara, helping to establish its tradition of excellent vegetarian cuisine. He is the author of The Tassajara Bread Book *and* Tassajara Cooking. *Over his years of residence at Zen Center he was practice leader at each center and also served as president from 1974–1976 and as chairman of the Zen Center Board in the mid-seventies and again in the mid-eighties. Currently Ed lives in Fairfax with his companion Patti Sullivan, and they are starting both a sitting group and yoga classes.*

What follows are talks by Abbot Weitsman and Jusan Ed Brown on the occasion of the dharma transmission.

Entrusting the Dharma

by Mel Weitsman

I'm here at Tassajara this week with the help of Abbot Shunbo Blanche Hartman, Shosan Vicki Austin, and Kokai Roberts to give dharma transmission to Ed Brown. Some of you know him through your practice at Tassajara, some through long association, and some of you perhaps through his cookbooks.

Dharma transmission is given in our lineage to confirm someone as a full priest, able to give other people lay or priest ordination. Dharma transmission is perhaps a funny word, because it sounds like something is given from one to another, but I like to think of it more as entrustment or recognition. One recognizes the understanding of another. It is also like one lamp lighting another or a cup of water being poured into another cup. The light transmitted from one lamp to another is the same light and yet it's a different light. So we recognize each one's individuality and independence, and at the same time we recognize the oneness of that light.

During this week, I don't know if you've noticed, but early in the morning before the wake-up bell, Ed gets up and carries an incense burner and a bowing mat, and he goes to all the main altars here at Tassajara. He bows, offers incense, bows, and chants a gatha. He also chants while he's walking. He goes to all those places early in the morning before the wake-up bell while everybody's still sleeping, and he finishes by the time the wake-up bell starts.

Then he comes to my cabin after zazen and service, and our little entourage does a special service, and then we eat breakfast, and then every morning he enters the zendo, offers incense, chants the name of each ancestor, sounds the big bell, and does a prostration for each ancestor. For three consecutive days he has to complete one document each day on long pieces of silk with a brush and ink. He copies my documents, as I copied someone else's documents, and so forth. In the Zen school, dharma transmission is always one to one, from teacher to disciple. Since we don't rely on a particular sutra our teaching is entrusted from person to person, which is called face to face transmission. So he copies my documents; I copied my teacher's documents; my teacher copied his teacher's documents, and so on, way back. How far back, nobody knows for sure.

So, each day he has to complete one document and then I add my writing to the document and we fold it and seal it. Tomorrow he will complete his third document. Then the next night we will have the first part of the transmission ceremony, called *"denkai,"* which is a very special precepts ceremony. That's in the early evening.

The following night, at midnight, we transmit dharma, which is called *"dempo."* That ceremony is just one to one. We do those ceremonies in the kaisando, the founder's hall. The kaisando walls are covered with red cloth all the way around, so the room itself is red. This symbolizes the blood lineage, like being inside Buddha's blood vessel or being inside Buddha's heart.

I was given dharma transmission in Japan at Suzuki Roshi's temple, by his son Hoitsu. And when we set up the room there was one long piece of red silk that must have been about fifty yards long that we used to make a room. I won't tell you what we make our room out of here, but it's wonderful red color. Can you guess? We use our red tablecloths. But it's just red cotton, or polyester for 1996. That's what we've always used and it's worked very well. So we make this room and have these ceremonies in this special room.

Ed and I were Suzuki Roshi's students from the mid-sixties until December, 1971, when he died. We studied with him for about seven years. So I feel a very close affinity with Ed. We spent a long time at

Tassajara together, and we were trained as Zen students together. We've seen each other's painful moments and wonderful moments.

Suzuki Roshi had many fine disciples, of whom he ordained fifteen. I felt that each one of his disciples embodied some quality of Suzuki Roshi. He brought out in each one of his disciples some outstanding quality which reflected a quality of himself. My dream was that when Suzuki Roshi died, we would be like one body. And together we would propagate and develop his teaching. Not preserve like a pickle, but take care of his teaching and develop his teaching, closely allied and mutually supporting each other through his inspiration.

But, as it happened, after he died, a lot of the students and priests were scattered. His first successor, Baker Roshi, who had received dharma transmission, continued his teacher's tradition; but it was difficult for many of Suzuki Roshi's disciples because they didn't feel included.

I received dharma transmission from Hoitsu Suzuki in 1984, and in 1988 I gave Blanche Hartman dharma transmission. Later I gave transmission to Norman Fischer. Altogether, I've given dharma transmission to eight people, and Senior Teacher Tenshin Anderson has given dharma transmission to four people, so little by little we've been empowering teachers within Zen Center. I feel that Zen Center needs this kind of empowerment. In Japan, in the Soto Zen school, the system is different. It's a temple system, mainly, and the temple family sends its eldest son to the monastery for two or three years. Then the son comes back and receives dharma transmission from the father or teacher and eventually takes over the father's temple. It is pretty much done routinely, which is

Jusan Brown, Shunbo Hartman and Shosan Austin prepare silk for Jusan's calligraphy.

Sojun Weitsman and Jusan work together.

different than for us, since we do not believe in systematic dharma transmission, or systematic ordination, or a systematic end to your practice, like after a certain time you get a diploma.

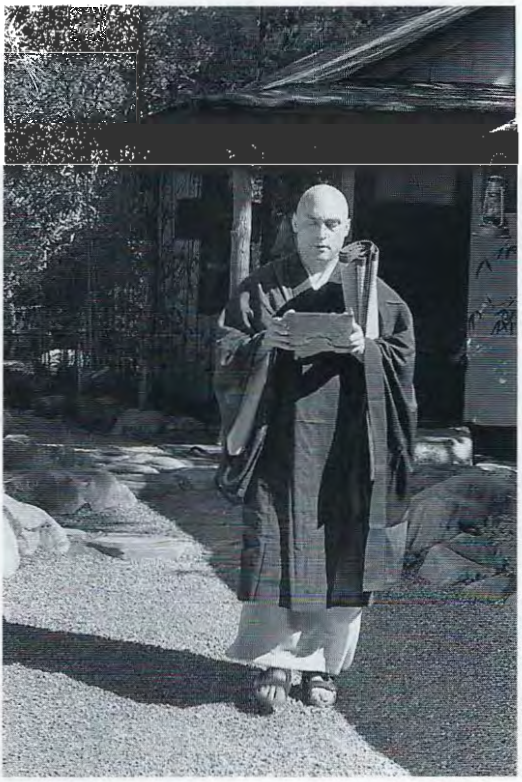
Traditionally a teacher will give dharma transmission to only one or maybe two people. But here, I've already given dharma transmission to eight people, which is a lot if you consider what they do in Japan. And there are still four or five people to whom I plan on giving dharma transmission. I feel that we need to do this to preserve our school, and also to send people out, not just to keep people at Zen Center. Dharma transmission empowers a person to be invited to teach somewhere, and legitimizes his or her teaching, and empowers one to ordain priests and do lay ordinations.

I can't tell you how happy I am to be giving dharma transmission to Ed Brown, who is one of Suzuki Roshi's old disciples. It's really wonderful to be able to do something for my dharma brother in this way. And I think that Suzuki Roshi would be very happy if there were more of his old disciples who were still practicing in this way. I've seen the difficulty that Ed has had, and yet he continued to practice and he earned this, a long time ago. It's way overdue. I mentioned this when I was at home, and my son who is fourteen said, "It's about time." I don't know how he knew that.

Suzuki Roshi gave Ed the name *Jusan Kainei*, which means "Longevity Mountain, Sea of Peace." It's like a venerable old mountain sitting in the midst of a sea of peaceful faces, teaching the dharma. Sometimes when you give someone dharma transmission or make them a priest, you give them a new name, but I wouldn't touch that one.

The Teaching That is Always There

Dharma Talk by Jusan Ed Brown
On the Occasion of Dharma Transmission at Tassajara
September, 1996



Good morning.

So I have a new robe. Since it is dark brown, we decided when we found the fabric that I could be known as Dark Chocolate Sensei, and that eventually I might become Espresso Roshi. Then I have a second robe that is a lighter brown, so when I wear that one, I will be Latte Sensei.

And in a couple of weeks for the fall practice period I'll be starting a little espresso stand in the first Pine Room. It will be a good place to spend your stipend, and over the espresso counter we can have dharma dialogues like the old tea ladies. Won't that be the day? With espresso stands at gas stations now, why not at the monastery?

I don't remember the last time I had such new shiny clothes. Before we came over here, Sojun adjusted my okesa for me, had me re-tie it, and straightened it out and tucked it in. He said, "I feel like your mother." And that's true, but he is also my dharma brother and dharma father. We have a lot of relationships here. I thank you for all of them.

Yet many people make an event like dharma transmission possible. Many people make any of us who we are, and we are all here making each other who we are. Thich Nhat Hanh mentions that it takes thirty leaves on the apple tree to make an apple. So we are all making each other into apples, but fortunately we get to use the same leaf more than once. We get more apples that way.

Helping to make this ceremony possible were Shosan Vicki Austin and Abbot Shunbo Blanche Hartman. Thank you. Many people have wanted to make this ceremony possible for me and helped to sew on my okesas. Also my companion Patti and another woman Valerie sewed a rakusu for me. Others of you also helped with the ceremony, and simply working here at Tassajara is helping all of us. Hopefully it is helping all sentient beings.

I first came to Tassajara in May of 1966. I had been a Zen student in San Francisco already, and my friend Alan Winter went on a Zen Center ski trip and heard about Tassajara from Dick Baker. So he came and got a job here and told me I could get a job here too, which I did, as the dishwasher.

The kitchen was where the pit is now; where the student eating area is now was the bar; where the kitchen is now was the dining room, and where the dish shed is was the staff dining room. So it was quite a bit different, and speaking of running up bills, you could go into the bar and have a Carta Blanca or Dos Equis, and your bar bill would just come off your paycheck at the end of the month.

As the dishwasher I couldn't understand why the cooks drank so much and why they got angry and upset at times, although actually all in all they were quite even-tempered. Halfway through the summer one of the cooks quit, and I was offered the job, and within a day or two I was screaming at people. And they started having meetings about what to do about Ed.

Suzuki Roshi and other people from Zen Center came down two or three times that summer. We all sat zazen together in cabin 3B, which isn't here any longer. It was quite powerful. Afterwards Suzuki Roshi said we were carrying water and gathering wood. Sure enough, here we are. We did not know then that we could buy Tassajara. That fall Zen Center had a thousand dollars in the bank and an annual budget of about six thousand dollars, but we had a fundraising drive and in two months we raised $25,000 for the down payment on Tassjara. Baker Roshi was a central person in this effort, but many people devoted themselves to accomplishing this goal.

Then that winter there were three of our people staying here, and they decided that they'd better get the kitchen torn down to get a good start on building a new one, because they had heard that before we opened the county had said we needed a new kitchen. So, while we up in the city knew nothing about it, the three or four people down here dismantled the kitchen. The phone wasn't working very well, so they were pretty much incommunicado.

When I came back in May of 1967 to be the cook, we had moved the

kitchen into what had been the staff kitchen, and there was a large deck out over the pit there with a couple of large sinks for doing the dishes. In that little kitchen we had to work in very close proximity with one another. Somehow we managed.

One of the things that strikes me now is that I don't think I have really learned anything new in all these years; the teachings are still the same. The teaching runs through our lives day after day, moment after moment. There's not some new teaching, exactly. Our life is a matter of receiving the teachings that are already there and putting them into practice, practicing what we already know. Someone said that to practice Buddhism is to begin and continue. And the only difference between myself and so many of the people who were here in the late sixties is that I stayed. And I kept coming back. And starting over. And now I am starting over again.

I believed the teaching was right here. I decided I wasn't going to go to Japan. I would prove that it is possible to practice Zen in America. Zen teachers would come from Japan and say, "You have a kindergarten monastery," and they were right, of course. Maybe now it is grammar school.

I asked Suzuki Roshi for some advice about cooking, and many of you have heard this—this kind of teaching is nothing new—"When you wash the rice wash the rice. When you stir the soup, stir the soup. When you cut the carrots, cut the carrots." And I tried to practice that, although it looked to me like other people were not doing that, and I found that annoying. So I complained to Suzuki Roshi that other people were talking a lot and taking long bathroom breaks, and he said, "If you want to see virtue, you have to have a calm mind." And I thought to myself, "That's not what I asked you." I had wanted some advice on how to get those other people to behave, but I kept my mouth shut and decided I'd better just receive this teaching. Especially if I criticized anybody, I would remind myself to look again and try to see virtue.

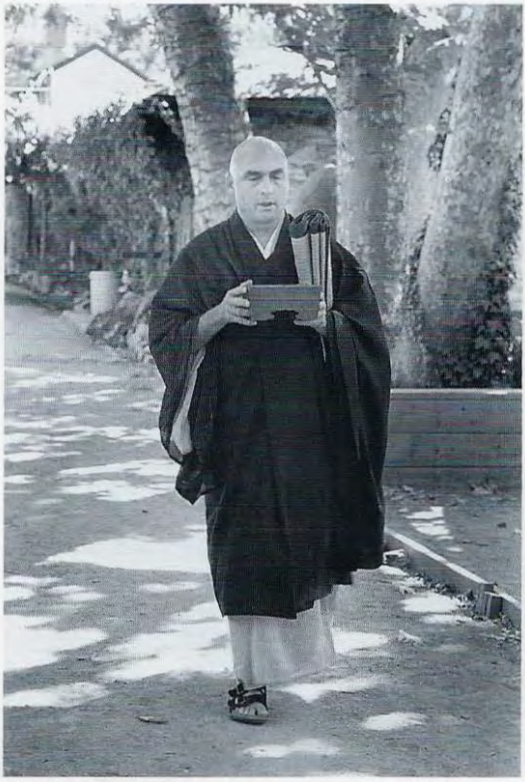
I had a very difficult time as a student then—I couldn't sit still in zazen. I had many involuntary movements that went on for several years. I was intensely angry much of the time and quite moody. Also when I compared myself to other students, everyone seemed better than me. Everyone could sit still but me. Even the worst student could sit still. Besides many of the students were smarter than I was, smarter and more articulate. All I could do was just to stay. And keep working and keep practicing.

One of my experiences while working in the kitchen turned out to be very important for me. After I had been tenzo for some number of months the kitchen crew got together and started a rebellion. Basically

they said, "We don't want to work with you anymore. You're too dictatorial, and you don't give us any credit, and you decide everything." We had a big meeting including the director Peter Schneider, and someone said, "You treat us like we were just another spatula in your hand, but we are not spatulas. You don't recognize that we also have taste and the capacity to cook with our own sensibility. But you want us to do everything your way." And another woman said, "You treat us just like you do the bread." Then she paused momentarily, reflecting on what she had said, and corrected herself, "Oh, you treat the bread really well, really lovingly. You treat us worse than you treat the bread."

After that meeting Peter said to me, "Would you like to change the way you do things or would you like another job?" That was pretty straightforward, but I was stunned. "I don't know how to do things differently," I replied. And he said, "Well, why don't you try it out for a while."

I came outside and ended up at the bottom of the cement steps where we just put in a new railing, and I didn't know what to do. And I sat there crying. Then Trudy Dixon came along. Many of you know that Trudy helped to edit *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. At that time she



Photos: Jusan makes the rounds of Tassajara's altars with incense burner and bowing mat.

was dying of cancer, a beautiful woman in the prime of her life. She stopped and asked me what was happening. So I told her. And she said, "Ed, I have faith in you." When I responded, "I don't see how you could," she just said it again.

After that I began looking at people differently, and in the same way that she had trust and faith in me, I started having trust and faith in other people. I had started cooking, trying to show what a good cook I was, and what a good Zen student. All these things, you know, compared to other people. If you want to be a good cook, other people have to be not as good. If you are going to be a good Zen student, you will find some fault with others. There's a saying though, "Each one is best," which is similar to, "Every day is a good day." Compared to what? If we understand like that, then everyone can be a good student.

Also when I thought about it, I realized that I wanted to prove what a good cook I was. If people liked my cooking it would show that they liked me. Then maybe I could like myself. Wouldn't that be convincing? But I realized that it was going to be up to me to find out how to like myself, and not up to others to convince me.

After a while I decided that the most important thing was to encourage other people to be cooks. Not to encourage other people to do what I said, but to actually take some responsibility for their own life and circumstances, for deciding what to do with the ingredients that came. There's not any recipe or directions. A cook actually looks at things and studies things, and dreams up what to do with the ingredients. It's different than doing what you're told.

So it was very important to me that people didn't like the way I was treating them. It helped me to understand that we all need to become cooks. Also I realized how important it was to find a successor. Instead of trying to show how important and indispensable I was, I needed to make myself completely dispensable. I hadn't noticed that when you're really important and indispensable, you're stuck, completely stuck! Then people will ask you stupid questions. All the time, "Should I put more salt in this?"

So I had to stop answering questions and let people take responsibility, and learn to trust their own taste. To trust your own experience, deeply and intimately, and be able to act on it—this teaching is basic

and not very complicated. Yet this teaching does not say you will be 'right.' Whatever you do, people will attach various labels to it: good, bad, right, wrong. Maybe so, we say, maybe so. Or tentatively speaking.

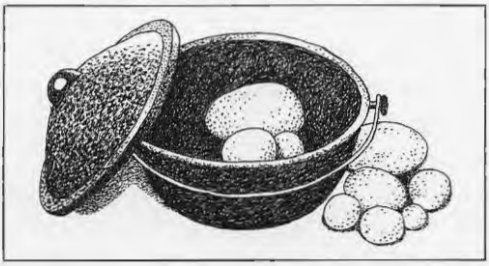
So I want to tell you a couple other stories or sayings. If you receive the teaching and practice it, it will transform your life. At Sojun's Shuso Ceremony, I asked him, "What is the difference between human nature and Buddha nature?" That was something I couldn't understand, since it is human nature to make mistakes, and we can do good and bad. We have various tendencies. And Buddha nature is considered to be sacred, or perfect, unborn. So he surprised me when he answered, "No difference." That was helpful for me, because it encouraged me to believe in myself and in practice.

Also I remember Katagiri Roshi saying, "Zen is to settle the self on the Self," and he would point, first to his head, then to his hara. That's a challenge all right, because our head has so many ideas and such a strong sense of how things should be, while the way the world actually is is extremely changeable. Yet we can settle in the midst of that, which is also called, 'self.'

Another of Katagiri Roshi's teachings was, "Let the flower of your life force bloom." People would talk with him and say, "I'm very tired," and he would answer, "That's the flower of your life force blooming, don't you think?" And they would be surprised, "Oh, I thought it was just my being tired." After that they would be happy, knowing that being tired was also the flower of their life force blooming.

So, again, I think all these teachings are still true. Zen is to settle the self on the self. Cooking is not just cooking. The most important point is to find out what is the most important point. And each of us is someone we can learn to trust, someone who needs to learn how to trust, what to trust. How to trust our self, our own experience, how to trust others. It's a kind of a gift we can give one another.

I am here because so many others believed in me. It's that simple and that profound. So I encourage each of you to find ways to empower others with your trust and confidence. And to rest in your own true nature.



An Auction: Making Stone Soup

by John Berlow and Furyu Schroeder

The Tassajara Stone Soup Auction is scheduled for May 11 at Fort Mason in San Francisco. Proceeds will benefit the Tassajara Stone Dining Room restoration project.

Several years ago Zen Center held its first auction at Fort Mason as a benefit for the Green Gulch Farm Zendo. The event was a lot of work and a lot of fun. All of you who attended know what a good feeling there was with old friends coming together as volunteers and dinner guests. A second auction in 1994 succeeded in raising $60,000 of much needed funds for the Tassajara bathhouse building project. And last year an Art Auction at the de Young Museum brought together well-respected Northern California artists and Zen Center friends in an elegant event to benefit the Stone Dining Room reconstruction project. Again, close to $60,000 was raised toward our estimated project total of $650,000

Inspired by our past success, we are busily planning the Tassajara Stone Soup Auction for May 11, 1997 to help raise the remaining funds for the Stone Dining Room project which is scheduled to begin next fall.

The Stone Dining Room is the oldest remaining building at Tassajara. Cobbled together from local soft shale, stucco and wood, it is our tie to rustic California of an earlier time. This building was formerly known as the "Club House." "Tassy" Olsen, who lived at Tassajara between 1906 and 1921, recalled in her reminiscences: "When the Tassajara Hotel burned down, other buildings were also destroyed. The one building that was not damaged by fire was the Club House, near the creek. That is the place where my brothers and I used to buy our 'goodies' when we were kids."

When Tassajara was purchased by Zen Center the first floor of the building had been made into a residence for the owners, Bob and Anna

Beck, and the second floor was being used for storage. One of the first things we did was to remove the downstairs walls and install a level wood floor, while upstairs we cleared everything out and converted it back to dormitory space. The downstairs was our meditation hall for awhile, while we remodeled the old bar into our new meditation hall.

Nowadays in the summertime, we use the first floor and screened extension as the guest dining room and the second floor as a student dormitory. During the winter practice periods, the dining room is used as a warm, dry place for study, classes, day-off meals, and sewing Buddhist robes.

As we prepare to celebrate Tassajara's thirty-year anniversary, we can have some perspective on its influence in the world. One part of this is in the realm of contemporary cuisine. We can see that the late 1960s provided the context for a remarkable convergence of Soto Zen's respect for food preparation, of hippie concern for naturalness and of food lovers' search for freshness, range of ingredients, and flavors. Many cooks and tenzos, among them Deborah Madison and Ed Brown, contributed to the flowering of a culinary culture at Tassajara. For guests, many of whom had never tried vegetarian food, the Stone Dining Room provided the satisfactions of healthful, tasty, elegantly-served food, fresh-baked bread and luscious desserts, served by attentive young Zen students. Deborah later worked at Chez Panisse with Alice Waters and was the founding chef at Greens. In various ways the influence of our efforts extended well beyond Tassajara Valley, contributing to the birth of California cuisine and the proliferation of European-style bakeries throughout the state. The Stone Dining Room, says a longtime friend, "is the dining room that launched a thousand restaurants."

Although the Stone Dining Room appeared structurally sound, the 1989 earthquake was cause for re-examination. Structural engineers determined that the Green Gulch Zendo and the Stone Dining Room were the two buildings most susceptible to earthquake damage.

In fact, the Stone Dining Room was lucky to have survived the earthquake of 1906. "Tassy" Olsen recalled her father's eyewitness account: "Papa thought the world was coming to an end there in Tassajara. Huge boulders and rocks tumbled down the steep mountain sides . . . "

The Stone Dining Room inspection revealed that the second floor was resting on logs that were rotted through by powder-post beetles. As a temporary safety measure new supporting beams were inserted,

Architectural rendering
of the planned Stone Dining Room renovation

but it was clear that considerably more work was necessary. Zen Center then began discussing various plans to renovate and stabilize the entire structure and fundraising began in earnest.

However, in the summer of 1993, the entire project was postponed by the necessity of relocating the bathhouse. Now, three years (and a beautiful new bathhouse) later, we can get back to restoring and stabilizing the Stone Dining Room.

Regarding architectural options, Zen Center President Barbara Kohn says: "We had three choices: to tear it down, to do a historic restoration, or to do a renovation, trying as much as possible to retain a feel for its gestalt." After much deliberation, Zen Center decided in favor of renovation both for reasons of cost and historical preservation. We also appreciated the ambiance of people gathering for meals in the courtyard area. The renovation has four major components: saving the stone walls,

stabilizing the building from within, and completely rebuilding both the second floor and the summer dining extension. During the renovation, the doorways from the courtyard will be enlarged to allow for wheelchair access, and plumbing for radiant floor heating will be installed.

Helen Degenhardt, architect for the Green Gulch meditation hall and the new Tassajara bathhouse, will be project architect. And Gene DeSmidt, who was contractor for the Stone Rooms renovation and the new bathhouse, will be general contractor. The plan is to use a combination of outside work crews and Zen student labor to do the work. Our hope is for the main work to be completed by November and for the project to be entirely finished in time for the opening of the 1998 Guest Season in May.

To accomplish this, we need your help! The current estimated cost of the Stone Dining Room and Dormitory renovation is $650,000. Past fundraising efforts raised $300,000. And an anonymous donor promised $150,000 in the form of a challenge grant. This leaves a balance of $200,000 that we need to carry out the work.

A cornerstone of the fundraising effort is the May 11, 1997 Stone Soup Auction. Celebrated novelist Isabel Allende is the honorary chair and many Zen Center members and friends have offered their time and talents to the success of this event. Among them are Marsha Angus, chair and Fu Schroeder, co-chair. Mark Lancaster is coordinating auction donations at City Center and Gloria Elissha is doing this at Green Gulch. Look for auction tables at both centers on Saturdays and Sundays respectively to volunteer your help, pick up donation forms or get more information. And don't forget to search your storerooms for those long-forgotten treasures. For further auction news and updates, contact Fu or leave a message for Marsha at the Zen Center Development Office at (415) 863-3136.

The Stone Dining Room is justly famous for fine vegetarian cuisine.

Dharma Eye Zen Center

by Myogen Steve Stücky

The following article is from a newsletter which Steve sent out in the spring of 1996—Ed.

To be present at the birth of something new is to witness the vitality of something ancient, as the ancient is always shedding its old skin and emerging fresh, wet and shining. The arising of our new dharma center expresses the old truth that from the very beginning there is no lack. Because the center of the universe is located at no distance from the arising of awareness, we can create a zendo, a magnificent dharma workshop right here, right in our own backyard.

Much work has been undertaken and accomplished to create our meditation space. Thanks to a core group of Zen students willing to tear out rotted wood, hammer and saw, nail up rows of fragrant cedar shingles, and contribute sweat and dollars to the project, the old collapsing garage became a new full time upstanding zendo. We opened with a three-and-a-half–day sesshin in January of this year and now have daily morning zazen, and a calendar of weekend events. It feels fitting to have opened up a peaceful dharma place in the midst of our busy lives. I want to thank all of you who assisted with your good–humored participation, your willingness to try something new, your shingle hammers and potluck offerings, and your donations. Thank you. Thank you.

While the zendo was taking shape a new organization was emerging. Volunteers formed an ad hoc Board of Directors which met, drew up papers, and named itself the Dharma Eye Zen Center (DEZC), which is now legally recognized by the State of California as a nonprofit religious organization.

The newly elected board members are: Judy Bunce who is president; Sandy Sherwood who is secretary; Christine Palmer who is treasurer, and Tim Ford who is member-at-large. A special note of gratitude to Annie Dorsey of Sausalito who gave so much of her time to the ad hoc Board which produced the high quality documents of our existence. We are finding that bits of organization help us take care of this practice together, and are continuing to discover the middle way between formalism and informality, structure and chaos, limitation and openness, Oriental restraint and American Jazz, trained mind and mind blown. The middle way does not reject the extremes, but rather includes the wide spectrum of possibilities in an open-armed perspective. Nothing is excluded.

The greenest leaves the size of book pages are growing on the old fig tree by the zendo door. Along the path grasses reach for the heavens compelled by radiant light and April rains to rise out of the earth. The path leads to a small deck and an ordinary sliding glass door. Then shoji screens, grass mats and zafus appear. It is clearly a beautiful room in which to sit deeply down. Sometimes we call it 'One Blade of Grass Zendo,' sometimes, 'Old Fig,' and sometimes, 'Sudden Mushroom,' because our neighbor Nina Wise observed that it seemed to appear suddenly from the ground like a mushroom. Others have called it 'Dharma Garage,' as in, "You can park your ancient twisted karma in the Dharma Garage Zendo." But whatever we call it, it is a place fashioned by true hands for the opening of true hearts. That much is clear.

Creating many small local practice centers is as important as continuing to develop our larger institutions such as the San Francisco Zen

Center. A small zendo can be an accessible place of nourishment for those who choose to weave formal zazen into the tapestry of life's varied activities. "A zendo as close as the nearest mailbox," as Ed Brown says, envisions a dharma community which is a network of seeds planted in the cracks and crevices of America. As many experienced students of Zen simply share their practice and invite friends and neighbors to join them, little vest-pocket zendos will emerge like figs on the tree, or like mushrooms appearing from bare ground. This is a basic and ancient way of awakening together.

Consider yourself already included. Please come and enjoy a room of peace to plumb the depths, clear the mind, and untangle the tangle. You are also invited to help in any way that you can. The important point is to realize your true mind and open your true heart right where you are. This is the primal seed of a dharma workshop. We are opening a green house and garden of true nature. Come check up on us when you can and support us as you are able. This is wonderful work. There is no hurry. Just sitting here, we travel at the speed of enlightenment.

I am deeply grateful for all the good work and everyone's profound benevolent intention. Deep bows to all.

The Dharma Eye Zen Center is located at 333 Bayview Street, San Rafael, California 94901. You may call them at (415) 258-0802 or fax them at (415) 258-0824.

Kinhin during a one-day sitting at Dharma Eye Zen Center

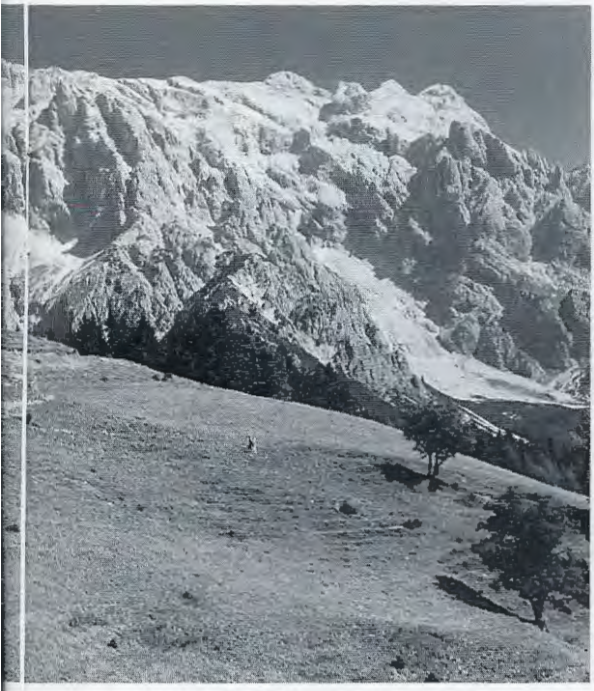
A Place to Center in Austria

by Vanja Palmers

Puregg is the name of a small farm in the Austrian Alps, located at 1,300 m. (approx. 4,000 feet). In the 16th century, it was the highest year-round lived-in residence in all of the archdiocese of Salzburg. Thus have I heard.

Today, Puregg is a year-round meditation center that is officially named, "Ecumenical House of Silence," reflecting the open spirit of our sitting practice and the backgrounds of its founders: Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B. and myself, Vanja Palmers. Brother David is a Benedictine monk with a longstanding relationship with Buddhism, Zen, and the Zen Center of San Francisco, while I grew up as a Catholic, lived at the Zen Center for ten years, was ordained by Zentatsu Richard Baker Roshi and received Dharma Transmission from Kobun Chino Roshi.

When we started remodelling the barn in 1989, Paul Discoe and his wife Gloria were in charge of the work and the practice. Ever since then people have felt supported and welcome in the harmonious simplicity of the zendo with its beautiful, sturdy tans. For starting the original garden and establishing the daily practice, we are greatly indebted to Günter Illner and Kosho Richard Ng, the second generation of caretakers/directors. Following them was Edgar Arnold, who had also received training at the Zen Center in San Francisco. Edgar helped create the financial viability of Puregg by scheduling retreat programs, and he was assisted by Volker Beck, as well as his wife. For the last two years Pepi Sinegger has been in charge. The first local person in this role, Pepi radiates the joy and warmth characteristic to genuine practice, which is much-needed on the long, cold and dark winter nights. Her efforts are supported by Dieter and Elisabeth.



Puregg, in the Austrian Alps

The core group of residents usually consists of three to four, often joined by short term guests. Every two to three weeks, a sesshin or other special event is scheduled. These have been lead by various teachers, among them: Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Phuong, Aya Khema, Brother David, Kobun Chino, Tomoe Katagiri, Fumon Nakagawa, Ermin Döll, Claude Durix, Ed Brown and Patti Sullivan, Paul Discoe, Dokko-An Kuwahara, Stan White, and myself. We are deeply grateful for their guidance and encouragement.

The daily schedule includes four to five periods of zazen, service, soji (cleaning), meals, study, work, and breaks. If you happen to be in Europe and get homesick for Zen Center, please feel free to come by and refresh yourself. The local language spoken is German, but it is not unusual to have a dinner conversation going on in English as well.

For many, Puregg has become a true haven or home. We have had Jukai and Tokudo ceremonies (lay and priest ordinations), and several local sitting groups have evolved, the grandchildren of Zen Center, one could say. So I wish to offer my thanks and gratitude to all of our Dharma sisters and brothers on the other shore.

For those of you who remember us from way back when: Lorly, my wife, is well. Simone, our daughter, who spent her first two years (including pregnancy) at Tassajara, is in her last year of high school. She has a mindboggling capacity to discuss the subject of boys with her girlfriends, especially on the phone, and has just caused her mom a minor nervous breakdown by cutting her beautiful long hair and bleaching the sad remains straw-white. As for myself, I am still pretty restless but lazy. Animal rights and meditation seem to be the two main themes that occupy

me. Still I roam the mountains a lot: in the summer with my goats and in the winter on skis, snowshoes and snowboard. Also, I'm still a student and practitioner of Go, a fascinating ancient Oriental board game.

I miss you all and the sincere spirit of practice I found at Zen Center, and hope to visit my home temple one of these days. Until then, a deep bow and Thank You.

Vanja Palmers may be reached at Reckenbühlstrasse 13, CH-6005 Luzern, Switzerland. Telephone (from USA): 011-41-41-240-5438. Fax: 011-41-41-240-6615 or Pirnbachhof, Hintertal 4, 1-5761 Maria Alm, Austria. Telephone (from USA): 011-43-6584-8119.

To contact Puregg the address is: Puregg, 5652 Dienten, Austria. Telephone (from the USA): 011-43-663-869754.

Puregg's caretakers: from left, Günter Illner, Pepi Sinegger, Edgar Arnold, Vanja Palmers, Kosho Richard Ng, Zen student Joni, and Paul Discoe

Life at Haratassa; or, Just Standing

by Roberta Werdinger

At Tassajara we have a longstanding tradition of skit nights—at mid-practice period and also around the 4th of July and the end of the summer. Roberta's skit, "Just Standing," premiered last July and was entertaining enough that I wanted to give readers a taste of the humor, vitality and creativity that can be associated with this event.—Ed.

Narrator: *How well I remember those days I spent at Haratassa, that great Zen Buddhist monastery deep in the mountains. I had come here as a seeker, to discover the causes and conditions of my own suffering and to learn the Bodhisattva Way. Every morning, the wakeup yell would be sounded by the Shuso, at 3:43 A.M.—give or take fifteen seconds.* [As narrator speaks, Seeker is lying on floor; upon hearing loud "Wake up!" backstage, sits bolt upright, hurriedly ties on robe.] *Every morning I would file into the zendo with the rest of the monks in our black robes. To immerse our bodies and minds wholeheartedly in the Buddha way meant that we must abandon the world and practice only one thing. Just Standing.*

[As narrator speaks, monks in robes file onto stage, very solemnly, take a place and shrug back and front to it; at sound of bell, they go into Just Standing posture: legs spread, shoulders hunched up towards ears, arms out from sides with palms up.]

Narrator: *What could possibly have inspired me—a relatively well-adjusted individual—to spend many hours of the day just standing? What could have driven me to give up all the comforts I had known in exchange for such a Spartan regimen—not to mention the varicose veins? Perhaps the question was not what—but who. For like many of the others at Haratassa, I was drawn by its abbot and founder, an extraordinary teacher who, it is said, held the key to enlightenment* [portentously]*: Sayanara Roshi.*

[Enter Sayanara Roshi, wheeled in by an attendant in a wheelbarrow, poised regally, fanning himself. He enters "zendo," hands in gassho. As he walks past each stander, they waggle their fingers in the air and move their arms up and down, like cheerleaders.]

Narrator [Change to next scene as narrator speaks. Seeker alone with Sayanara Roshi]: *Later, I had a chance to question Sayanara Roshi more closely about the meaning behind this difficult practice.*

Seeker: But, Roshi, my shoulders are getting all cramped from holding them up to my ears for so long.

Sayanara Roshi [indulgently]: Everybody feels that way when they first start standing. But you must persevere. This is the posture that the Buddha himself took when he achieved enlightenment under the bootie tree. He stood there for forty days and forty nights, trying to understand the causes of suffering, the meaning of birth and death, the origins of the universe, and the reasons it was so hard to hail a rickshaw in downtown Calcutta during rush hour. Finally, he realized that he didn't know anything, and that there was nothing to know, nothing to achieve, no mind with which to know that there is nothing to know, and no thing which is not knowing that there is no knowing. Upon this realization, he instantly became enlightened! We stand in this way to emulate this great and wonderful not-knowing. We put our bodies in the Cosmic Shrug, signifying our non-attachment to the outcome of all worldly matters. [Demonstrates] In this way we show that we, too, only don't know. When you stand like this, you are standing the way all Buddhas stand. This is a natural posture! [Seeker and Roshi shrug to each other and depart.]

Narrator: *To deepen our practice at Haratassa, Sayanara Roshi introduced us to that greatest, most basic and most difficult of all koans.*

[Sayanara Roshi rings bell. Seeker enters and they shrug in greeting, then remain standing.]

Sayanara Roshi: So, my fine young monk, you are settling into the schedule at Haratassa very nicely.

Seeker [eagerly]: Oh, yes, Roshi. The gnats, fleas, ticks, mucus flies, horseflies, rattlesnakes, woodrats, raccoons, mice, and my chilblains, poison oak, cracked heels and chest cold—why, it's all such a wonderful incentive to practice.

Sayanara Roshi: It is time to present you with the koan that holds the key to great understanding in our tradition. Are you ready?

Seeker: Oh, yes, Roshi.

Sayanara Roshi: In the *MuuMuukoan*, the great treasure-assembly of koans, the following case is recorded: Joo-Joo met Shao-Shu one day in front of the great assembly and asked him, "Does a goat have Buddha-nature?" Shao-Shu answered: "Nu."

Seeker [uncomprehending]: 'Nu?'

Sayanara Roshi: Yes. What is 'Nu?'

Seeker [doubtfully]: This is the key to great understanding?

Sayanara Roshi: I can see that you are still lost in the clouds of delusion, otherwise you would not even ask such a question. Our practice is simple. It is basic. It is beyond all rational understanding. Nu is your own original nature. Nu is the heart, marrow, bones, liver, kidneys, spleen and both large and small intestines of this practice.

Roberta Werdinger, who wrote this skit for Tassajara's mid-summer skit night, demonstrates the correct way to do the cosmic shrug.

Seeker: Y'know, Roshi, that reminds me of a question I've been meaning to ask you. Yesterday during lunch a server spilled soup on my toes and I wasn't sure what the form was to . . .

Sayanara Roshi [sternly]: What is Nu? What is Nu? This is the only question you need to ask! Just keep standing with firm determination and all else will resolve itself.

Narrator: *Months of frustration ensued, as I pondered the great koan Nu with all my body and mind. Yet no matter how hard I tried, Sayanara Roshi would always reject my answer.* [Seeker and Sayanara Roshi meet as before and shrug.]

Sayanara Roshi: So, you have been standing with great diligence . . .

Seeker: Oh, yes, Roshi.

Sayanara Roshi: Tell me, what is Nu?

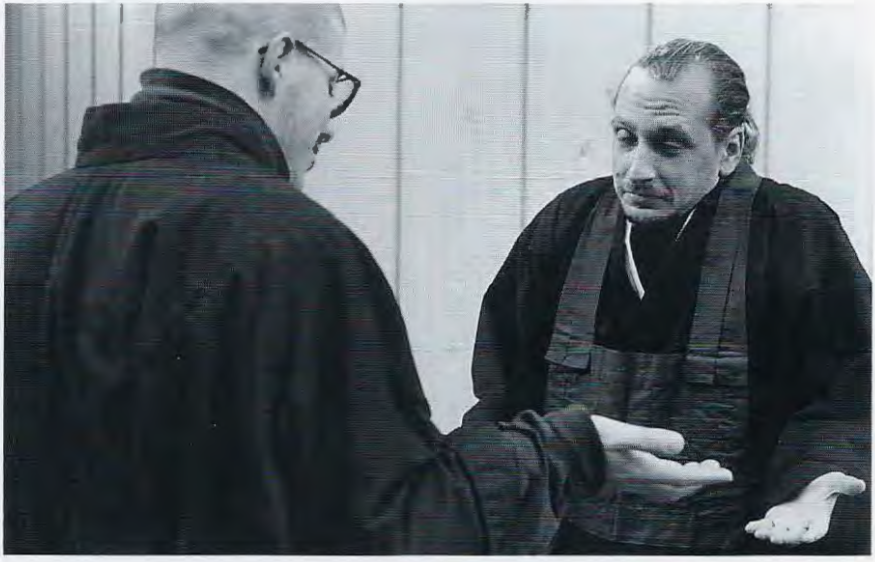
Seeker: *Well, the way I see it, Nu is a state of neither being nor becoming, nor is it exactly coming or going. it is a birthless and deathless state, and its quality of not-knowing is very highly developed.* [Fumbling a little] *Very highly developed, and . . . uh, ah . . .*

Sayanara Roshi: Stop! Go no further! You are thinking too much! It is obvious that you consider Nu as something outside yourself, and not as the nameless essence of your very being. You must study Nu much more carefully! Nu is not something special or extra. it is right there in front of your face!

Seeker [hopefully, trying to please]: Nu is this little piece of carpet fuzz, [picks up little speck in front of him] dark orange, uh, looks to be a synthetic blend . . .

Sayanara Roshi: Stop this nonsense! You are trying too hard! You must stop being so clever. Nu manifests itself in moments when you are least looking for it. You must show me Nu that is thoroughly assimilated into your body and mind. Show me Nu in the bathtub. Show me Nu in the volleyball court. Show me Nu looking for a parking space. Show me Nu frying tortillas in a shack on the outskirts of Las Vegas; show me Nu on a dog-day afternoon at a bus station in downtown Poughkeepsie. Show me Nu seeking compensation in small claims court for water-damage to a basement apartment. Show me Nu trying on a training bra in an indoor mall in Walnut Creek. Show me these things, and you will know the secret of Nu.

Charlie Pokorny and Jeremy Levy shrug to each other in one of the skit's dokusan scenes.



Narrator: *As I settled into my new life at Haratassa and puzzled daily over the great koan Nu, bit by bit I became more intimate with my beloved teacher. Like every Zen master, he had a very strong, some would say peculiar personality. Sometimes he would get angry over the seemingly most minor things.* [Seeker is raking gravel, humming to himself and moving the rake distractedly; Sayanara Roshi happens up the path and stops short.]

Sayanara Roshi [outraged]: Look at you! What are you trying to do?! [Seeker stops work and looks up innocently.] Raking like a madman, stirring up the dust for no reason. Where is your mindfulness in all this? [Seeker hangs head.] Do you not recall the words of our great ancestor Doggone, in his "Instructions to the Head Groundskeeper," that one should treat all rocks and pebbles as if they were one's own eyes? These pebbles are sentient beings. I'm not so sure about you! [Picks up pebble and holds it at eye level, cooing to it.] Poor little pebble! How much suffering do we cause each other by our thoughtlessness. [to Seeker] Please, my good monk: Honor the Buddha way in everything you do. Rake with compassion! [Strides off. Seeker looks chastised and impressed; starts raking with infinite slowness, barely brushing the ground.]

Narrator: *On other occasions, Roshi would surprise me by his great tenderness and fatherliness.* [Seeker is sitting eating cereal; as Sayanara Roshi passes by, gives out a small sigh. Sayanara Roshi hears it and stops.]

Sayanara Roshi [tenderly] What's the matter, Seeker? You seem a little tired. [Sits next to him.] You were up late last night standing, weren't you? Here, let me do that. [Takes spoon from Seeker and begins feeding him. Seeker looks embarrassed and starts to protest but looks too embarrassed to do that. Sayanara Roshi speaks encouragingly to Seeker, wiping his mouth occasionally.]

Narrator: *As I immersed my body and mind more deeply in the way, I changed in ways both subtle and profound. For one thing, it became harder for me to relate to my friends outside the monastery . . .*

[Seeker is met on path by two normal-looking (non-robed) friends]

Friend: Hey, Seeker! I haven't seen you around in ages! What's new?

Seeker: What's Nu? What's Nu?! Why, it's funny you should ask that. [Digs book out of pocket and flips through it while facing away from them.] According to our great ancestor Doggone, in Fascicle 5, Part 9 of the *Bozogenzo*, Nu should be regarded as the non-being of all things which have ever been. However, since not all non-things have never been anything but themselves, no thing can ever be such a thing, but also it can never not be such a thing as it once was. All this is perfectly clear, and yet the Thirteenth Patriarch puts a different slant on the

whole thing by saying, "The grass is green. The sky is blue even on cloudy days. Thus does Nu-ness make itself known throughout the entire world without the use even of a business card." Why, I remember just the other day when Sayanara Roshi said to me . . . [During this monologue, the friends look at each other in confusion and alarm, shrug their shoulders, and finally walk silently away. Seeker doesn't notice.]

Narrator: *And yet, this distance I felt from my old friends was more than compensated by the camaraderies that naturally arose between myself and my fellow monks as we explored the dharma together . . .*

[Seeker and another monk in robes come upon each other from different directions and bow.]

Monk: Greetings, Seeker-san!

Seeker: Greetings, Bamboo-san!

Monk [looks at sky]: Think it's going to rain today? [They both immediately go into Cosmic Shrug posture, then laugh together, pat each other on the back with great mutuality, etc.]

Narrator: *And slowly, little by little, my understanding increased, just by the simple acts of daily living.* [Seeker is sweeping path. After a few moments a little Munchkin-like voice calls out "Nu." Seeker stops, looks around, sees nothing, resumes sweeping. Then hears "Nu" again; looks up in wonder.]

Seeker: I get it! All this time I've been trying so hard to attain Nu, to grasp it with my reasoning mind—and all the time, Nu has been getting me! Nu is not separate from me. Nu is the vast unknowable me-ness which fills up even the swimming pool at the Busy Bee Motel on Highway 5 outside of Modesto. Everything I do is Nu, because Nu is just the all-pervading activity of the suchness which is the emptiness echoing through all the internal organs of all the Buddhas and ancestors through all space and time. I can't not be Nu because not-Nu is not a non-relational arising of the non-realized mind of the present moment and I can't not be present any more than a dog couldn't not wag its tail! Why, it's all so simple! I can't wait to tell Sayanara Roshi about this! [Beams and skips off]

Narrator: *I awaited eagerly my next chance to have dokusan with Sayanara Roshi and share with him my new realization. My mind was perfectly clear and empty as I entered the room; somehow, I knew I could convey Nu-ness to him without speaking a word.*

[As Narrator speaks, Sayanara Roshi enters, rings bell. Seeker enters room, shrugs, stands opposite him. Slowly and ceremoniously, Sayanara Roshi pours tea into two cups, then hands one to Seeker. Sayanara Roshi takes a sip or two of tea, then both look at each other. Seeker tosses tea into Sayanara Roshi's face.]

Sayanara Roshi [trying to suppress scream of pain]: Very good! Very good! It is obvious you are approaching a more complete understanding of Nu. Keep standing, don't falter even for an instant! [Hurriedly rings bell to dismiss Seeker, who shrugs and leaves room.]

Narrator: *After that, my relationship with Sayanara Roshi took a new turn. Soon, I was ready for the next stage of my initiation—receiving the precepts.* [Seeker is sitting on ground as Sayanara Roshi, very parental and tender in this scene, ties a blue baby bib around Seeker's neck.]

Sayanara Roshi: [As he ties] Now you just like Buddha at moment of liberation . . . you are born anew every moment. Now you really don't know . . . you wear this when you engage in Just Standing, to signify to the entire sangha that you don't know anything.

Seeker [just beaming]: Oh, thank you, Roshi.

Sayanara Roshi: I give you new Buddhist name, that expresses your true nature. Your new name shall be Hon-ki.

Seeker [totally in adoring groupie mode]: Hon-ki?! But what does it mean?

Sayanara Roshi [smiling mysteriously]: Better that you don't know this either.

Narrator: *And then, one day, my moment of great realization finally arrived. It all unfolded so naturally, so simply.* [Seeker is sweeping floor, making neat little piles of dust and whatnot; he sweeps the piles into a dustpan, starts to walk out, remembers one little pile at that moment and turns around to sweep it up; then suddenly stops, mouth open, staring at dust pile; then jumps up, arms over head, yelling.]

Seeker: NNNUUUUU!! [Continues bending down and then throwing arms over head, yelling Nu.]

Narrator *[over this commotion]: At last, the key to great understanding was mine! The doors of perception swung open, and I saw the world in all its original glory—Nu indeed. All separation between myself and Nu had utterly vanished. I was one with everything—one with Nu, one with Not-Nu, and also, of course, not one with not-Nu and the not-Nuness of Nu's unborn and undefiled true being, or lack of it. I was filled with gratefulness for the grass, the trees, the great earth, the delivery truck and the fire extinguisher . . . and most of all, for my teacher, Sayanara Roshi, who had guided me to this momentous occasion. Naturally, I rushed straight to him for confirmation . . .*

Seeker [bursting into room where Sayanara Roshi is sitting studying Fusty Old Tome]: Roshi, Roshi! I have it!

Sayanara Roshi [tone is very low-key throughout this whole scene]: Eh? Have what?

Seeker [can hardly contain himself]: Nu! I have Nu!

Sayanara Roshi [slow, nonchalant]: Nu? You have discovered Nu?

[Gets up, stretches, approaches Seeker; Seeker whispers in his ear. Roshi nods briefly.] Yes, that is correct.

Seeker [clasps hands]: Oh, Roshi! This is the happiest day of my life! To have finally solved the great koan Nu, after all this struggle and discouragement. Now the key to great understanding is truly mine!

Roshi: No, that is not so.

Seeker: It is not so?! What do you mean?

Roshi: Nu is not the key to great understanding. Is a very good koan, yes. But you must excuse me. I read the old sutra wrong. I am old now, my eyes are bad. [Retrieves another Fusty Old Tome from shelf and opens it. Dust flies out; he blows it off and strains to read. Runs finger down text; Seeker looks over his shoulder.] You see here? I have misread the first letter completely.

Seeker [aghast]: Nu is not the key to great understanding?!

Sayanara Roshi: [matter-of-factly]: So sorry. But you do get the key to the staff rest room. [Holds out large key.]

Seeker [almost crying]: The staff rest room?!

Roshi [a little offended]: Is a very nice rest room.

Seeker: All this time, all this effort, all this heartbreak, all this standing . . . all for nothing?!

Roshi: One should stand with no object but to stand. Besides, now you are ready to go on to the bigger koan, the one that really is at the heart of this practice. [Wipes away dust and peers closely at Tome.] What is Gu?

Seeker [still distracted]: What is Gu?!

Roshi: [deadpan] Yes. What is Gu?

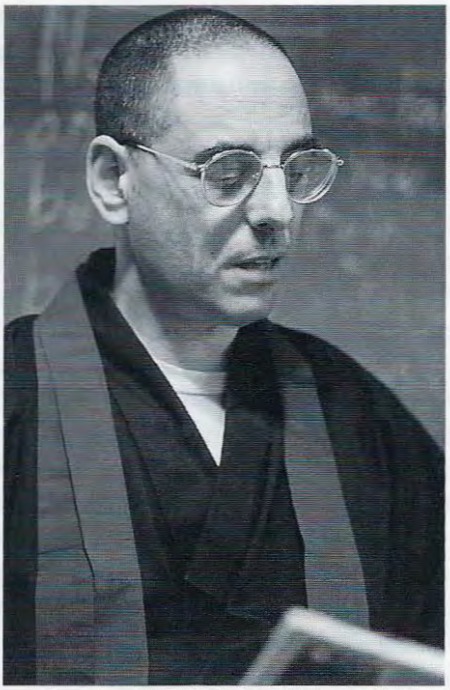
Seeker [agitated, but getting interested in spite of himself]: Well, Gu could be the noise a baby makes, which is often used in conjunction with the same word: to wit, "goo-goo." This repetition of the same sound is obviously used to show the sameness of all phenomena in the universe, even things that appear to be vastly different, such as daffodils and cattle prods. In the Song of the Amber Bead Mirror Samadhi, we recite that . . .

Roshi [back to his old vigorous self; shouting] Stop! Stop this nonsense! Have you not learned anything? You are still thinking too much! Back to the zendo with you! You must keep standing! [Pushes Seeker offstage. Seeker protests the whole way, while Roshi remains adamant, pushing Seeker's back. They continue this way until edge of the stage; then Seeker stops, all agitation gone, puts hand to chin.]

Seeker: Hmmm . . . What is Gu? [Exits.]

Stages of Monastic Life

A Dharma Talk by Abbot Zoketsu Norman Fischer



Religious texts make monastic life sound very deep and very constant, a life that has been the same for a thousand years, timeless and seamless. This may really be true, because underneath who any of us are is another person, the monk, who is living a true and perfect life. All of us have this monk in us. We want to live this life of silence and perfection. When we're completely out of touch with this wish we suffer a lot. We run around looking for something we can't seem to find, and our lives don't work. When we are in touch with it, as we are in a retreat or even in a few moments of practice or at the beach or alone under the stars, we feel whole. Then we can approach others and the complicated world with a measure of equanimity.

So this monastic life, a way of wholeness, a sacred way, an ideal, lives at the bottom of our hearts and is reflected back to us in religious experience and religious literature. But, as we know, ideals can be poison if we take them in large quantities or if we take them incorrectly; in other words, if we take them not as ideals, but as concrete realities. Ideals should inspire us to surpass ourselves, which we need to aspire to do if we are to be truly human, and which we can never actually do, exactly because we are truly human. Ideals are tools for inspiration, not realities in and of themselves. The fact that we have so often missed this point, accounts, I think, for the sorry history of religion in human civilization. When we believe in ideals too literally, we berate ourselves and others for not measuring up, but no one will ever measure up. That's the nature of ideals and their beauty. So at their best, and if rightly understood,

ideals ought to make us pretty lighthearted: they give a sense of direction, which is comforting, and since they are by nature impossibilities, why worry? Just keep trying.

The monastic life appears in the texts as this kind of an ideal. We stay in delighted obedience with our teacher forty years, living peacefully day by day. We are deep in meditation or prayer, living in harmony and calmness in the mountains among the clouds and forests. Well underneath it may be like this, but up above, in our conscious world where we live, it really never looks like that.

What is the monastic life really like? I'll tell you some thoughts I've developed on this subject. Of course our community isn't exactly a monastic community, but it is a residential religious community where people come to live for many years, and what we've experienced and come to understand over time turns out to be fairly typical of monastic or long-term residential religious communities.

I want to speak of the stages in monastic life as a way of describing what happens in that life and what kinds of problem come up. Of course there aren't any distinct stages, or the stages happen simultaneously or in no particular order, or one goes through them many times. After all, people are very different. No setting forth of stages could possibly do justice to the variety of people's experiences on the path; yet still, systematic thinking has its virtues, and there are some general tendencies most of us can notice and recognize. So let me speak of eight stages of monastic life.

The eight are: first, the honeymoon; second, the disappointment or betrayal; third, the exploration of commitment; fourth, commitment and flight; fifth, the dry place; sixth, appreciation; seventh, love; and finally, letting go of monastic life altogether.

The first stage, which is probably typical of the first stage of almost anything, is the honeymoon, a time when we're really thrilled with the life of the monastery. The contrast with what we're used to in the world, or what we're fleeing from in the world, is so great that we're in a state of ecstasy. We see the people we're living with as really kind and wonderful. The sounds of the monastery bells, the simple hearty food, the early morning meditation, the landscape, the weather, the brilliant teachers and teachings, nothing could be better. We're learning about ourselves at a great rate and we're learning about the Dharma too. So much of what we hear seems absolutely true, seems to be what we sensed inside ourselves all our lives without ever really being aware of it or having words for it. We feel relieved and renewed. We feel as if suddenly and unexpectedly, perhaps in the midst of a great sorrow, we turned around in the middle of our ordinary life and found to our amazement a brand new

life in which all the assumptions and behaviors were different and fresh.

This stage may last for some time but it usually comes to an end in fairly short order. We enter the second stage, the stage of disappointment or betrayal. Of course what happens is that we lose the sense of contrast with the world at large, and what's inside us becomes stronger than our perception of the newness of our surroundings. Whatever festering problems we have, known and unknown, that were held in abeyance while we marveled at the greatness of the religious life, now come out full blown, and rather than see them for what they are, our own internal contradictions, we project them outward onto the community.

We begin to see that there are plenty of imperfections. The food gets tiring. The people aren't as nice as they were a few months ago. The many restrictions on our life style becomes wearing. We begin to notice a lack of creativity and energy in our fellow practitioners, especially in some of the old timers. And we begin to notice that there are many baffling and unacceptable aspects to the teachings. In fact, on one hand, the teachings sound purposely confusing and incomprehensible, and on the other hand, they may sound suspiciously like the religion we grew up in and fled from. And the teachers turn out to be a lot less fantastic than we first imagined. We're seeing them stumble and make mistakes, and if we haven't seen it we've heard about it. If we haven't heard about it or seen it then the teachers appear a little too perfect—there's something suspicious and even coercive about their piety. Are they really real? Little by little a sense of disillusionment, of betrayal, comes over us.

All of these perceptions, as disturbing as they are, have some truth, so when we bring them up no one tries to talk us out of them. Old-timers in the community may become defensive, but they can't really disagree. Yet the truth of all this doesn't really account for what we're feeling: cheated and disappointed. The only thing that accounts for that is our inner pain. We were feeling, for a moment, better, redeemed, and now, suddenly we feel even worse then when we came. Eventually we realize that imperfect though the community is (and it may in some ways even be toxic), it's us, not the community, that is the source of our present suffering. It can take awhile to come to this, sometimes a very long time if there are, as there have been in many communities of all religious traditions over the years, flagrant cases of betrayal by leaders.

Whether it comes soon or only after many years, and whether its causes are spectacular or quiet, it is something we have to come to on our own. Because when we're deeply disappointed with the community it's hard for long-term committed community members to point out that it's our eye, not the visual object, that's cloudy. They can't tell us this because they know we won't hear it; they know that if they tell us this they

Jeremy Levy, Benji, and Christina Lehnherr, Shuso, are on their way to bathe Manjusri during the 1996 fall practice period at Tassajara.

will only appear to us to be defending the status quo, and we will mistrust them for it; and besides, many of them don't understand that this is the case anyway; many of them are themselves confused about the community and where it and they begin and end. So for all these reasons the older members of the community tolerate us and our views, and there is very little they can do to help us through this stage. If we feel this sense of betrayal or disappointment acutely enough, and especially if a difficult personal incident happens to us when we are in the midst of it, we may very well leave the community in a huff, which happens, though seldom, and when it does it's a real tragedy. If this doesn't happen and enough time goes by, we usually realize what's really going on.

We begin to get the picture that a lot has been going on in our lives that we were simply unaware of. We came to the community to find peace, to live in a kind of utopia where we will become enlightened and our problems will end. Few of us actually think these thoughts this

baldly, but most of us have some unexamined version of them in our minds as we arrive. Instead of this scenario we find an extremely flawed community and that we ourselves, far from being "not entirely perfect," are a raging mass of passion, confusion, hatred and contradiction. A state of anything remotely like enlightenment is very far away. In other words, we feel worse off now than when we began, and we have to acknowledge that the job we've undertaken is much larger than we thought. So part of what we need to do is to make up our minds that we're really going to do it, we're going to roll up our sleeves and stay: one or two or three thousand lifetimes.

So we enter the third stage, and we begin to explore honestly and without too much idealism the actual nature of our commitment to the practice and to the community. This is a very difficult thing to do because we find many attitudes in ourselves, and they're not always consistent with one another. We want to practice always, to take vows as a lay or priest practitioner, to devote ourselves completely to the path—there's absolutely nothing else to do. We may feel these things rarely or perhaps on a regular basis. But how strongly do we feel them? And how do we know whether or not to act on them? Because even if we feel a strong, clear sense of commitment, we may have other strong feelings. We want to get married, have a house, a career, children. We want to travel. To serve others more directly. Or maybe we're just restless or we know somehow this isn't the place or time—we need to go to another tradition or another teacher or group. And so on, on and on.

This is really a difficult stage, and it can go on for some time. In fact it should go on for some time. If we make a determination too soon about how our commitment really is, it's probably wrong. We probably haven't listened to ourselves enough. There are a lot of cases of people who leave at this stage and really shouldn't have; and there are cases too of people who make commitments that they regret having made. So it's good to take our time and to seek advice from teachers and other senior and junior students. The advice doesn't help all that much. In fact we've got to come to what we come to on our own. Sometimes following the view of someone else whom we admire can be a big problem, so our elders have to be careful to be sensitive to what they're hearing from us, and not to impose their wishes and views on us. Nevertheless, the advice can serve as a useful, and probably a necessary mirror.

The fourth stage I call commitment and flight, which sounds like an oxymoron, but is, I think, a good name for it. In this stage we have come to find solid ground under our commitment. We accept our wobbling and human mind and know now that underneath it there is something reliable, although we are often out of touch with it. Looking back, we

can see how much we've changed since we entered the practice; we see how much we are the same too, of course, but some change is apparent. We are calmer. We are quieter in our spirit and less apt to fly off the handle inside or outside. Not as solid or as calm as we had hoped to be, but we have by now given up that hope as unrealistic and we are more able to settle for how it actually is with us, and to find it good, or at least acceptable, with a degree of joy. So we feel ready to make a commitment to the practice and the community.

This commitment can only take one form: renunciation of some sort, a giving up of self and personal agenda, as we see that self and personal agenda don't in fact help us to get what we want and really need in our lives. They only cause suffering. As this becomes more and more apparent to us, we are more willing to enter into a serious commitment to the practice. In fact after a while we feel that without even choosing to do so we have already done so. There isn't any other way. We are committed; we have already renounced our life. Here is where we take on a responsible position and make a practical commitment to stay in the community for some time, or take initiation as a priest or lay practitioner. We feel responsible for the community.

But as soon as we feel settled in our commitment, particularly if that commitment is marked by a particular event such as ordination or entering the monastery on a long term basis, the demons of confusion return. Immediately our old interests and desires come back in force. Maybe we fall hopelessly in love the day before we are to go off to the monastery for an indefinite stay, or maybe we find ourselves roaring drunk two days after our ordination as a priest. Such things have actually happened. They catch us quite off guard. We had thought we had the thing figured out, but there were still a fair number of unopened doors in our heart. The power of the commitment we are now making is such that it violently throws open those doors, and we are shocked at what we find inside. We are humbled by the sheer power of our own, and therefore of human, passion. Humbled, shocked and amazed. We are reeling perhaps for some time with this. It is unusual I think for people to enter the monastery for a long stay or to take ordination as a priest without suffering some version of this. It is in many cases a rude awakening.

Sometimes our teacher and elders seem very knowing when this happens to us. They may even have a chuckle over it. This can be either comforting or maddening, depending on our temperament. At this stage sometimes there literally is flight. People take off, disappear overnight, run off with a lover, leave the monastery in the middle of the night. But such things are becoming more rare. More often it's an internal drama. You see it in people's faces, a kind of grim determination mixed with a

very pure innocence, even if the person is middle aged or older when this happens. The power and surprise of these feelings is enough to send any of us back to square one, with almost no identity left. In fact the work of this stage is the reconstitution of identity. This is why we often feel like children now, like babies; and this of course feels wonderful and terrible at the same time. Because we thought we were grown up, we thought we were advancing.

This uncomfortable state is cured only with the passage of time. Time will heal everything; this is its nature. Usually we hold onto the past and so don't allow time to do its real work in our lives. But those who get this far in the practice usually have enough concentration inside and enough support outside to avoid this entrapment, and so they allow time to work its magic and after a while they settle into their new commitment, go beyond the childlike stage, and begin to mature. They reconstitute their lives around their new commitments. They take on new practices, new studies, deepen their Dharma relationships, let go of all aspirations and fantasies and illusions and are content to just go on day by day with the practice. More time passes.

The fifth stage, the dry place, we get to bit by bit without knowing it. Because we are not perfect in our letting go to the healing winds of time. In fact in a subtle way we hold onto our life even while we have given it up entirely in renunciation. This subtle fact is not announced to us in a dramatic way, so we may not notice it at all. We go on practicing sincerely, seemingly going deeper and deeper with our renunciation, becoming more and more settled in the life of the Dharma. But this becomes exactly the problem. We are too settled. We seem to be getting a little bit dull, a little bit bored. We've lost the edge of our seeking and searching mind and are feeling fairly comfortable. We have a position in the community, we are an experienced person, a respected member. We have a good grasp of the teachings, or at least we have heard them so often that we seem to grasp them. We can't go back into our old life, and yet there seems nowhere to go forward to. So we are quite stuck.

Fear arises. Fear of never realizing or even glimpsing the path; fear of the world we have left behind; fear of what we ourselves have become. Sometimes none of this surfaces at all. We just go about our business in the monastery, feeling quite self-satisfied, but actually dying a little bit more every day. Up until now our path may have been difficult at times, yet we have always been growing and learning. But at this point we have stopped growing and learning, this is exactly the problem. And we have mistaken the laziness or dullness that cover our fear for the calmness that comes of renunciation. It's true that our mind is calm but it is a dark rather than a bright calm. Our creativity, our passion, our humanness, is

beginning to leave us, little by little, and often we have no idea that this is happening to us.

This is the hardest stage to appreciate and work with. Often no one, not even the elders and teachers of the community, can recognize that this is happening to us. Indeed, those very elders and teachers may themselves be in the midst of such a stage and be unaware of it. In this stage what we have seen as the cure for our lives, what everyone in the community has affirmed and has devoted their lives to, now becomes the very poison that is killing us off slowly.

I have tried to discern the signs of this stage in myself and in others, and it is not an easy thing to do. In one's self it may be too subtle to notice, and in others, though it is less subtle, they often do not want to hear it. To overcome this stage might very well mean leaving the community or otherwise doing something very radical to shift the ground. And most of us have a hard time, after going in a particular direction for ten or twenty years, a direction that has involved great effort and sacrifice, changing direction. Our fear, acknowledged or not, holds us back. And we may stay this way for a very long time, perhaps for the rest of our lives. This happens of course to anyone in any walk of life, and it may be no better or worse when it happens within the context of a religious community.

Still a religious community has a strong commitment to awareness and truthfulness, so when it happens within such a community, even if only to a few individuals, it is like a disease in that community. The effect of the disease can be felt in many ways. There can be a subtle occlusion in the flow of communication, an almost imperceptible dishonesty, a jarring or not so jarring sense of disjunction. Even though no one may recognize that a failure to discern the effects of this stage in a few community members is the cause of the disjunction, people can feel the disjunction, perhaps not at first, but after a while it becomes apparent. So it is very important for each individual to remain open to the possibility that this dry place may be arising in his or her life, and to have the courage to address it when it comes. Because it will come, and it must come. And it will come again and again. If one is willing to address it it becomes an opportunity to go deeper, a chance to let go a little more, and open up to time's healing power, and the love that comes only in this way.

After passing through the dry place, which is always done in the company of and with the help of others, then there is often an opening into the simple joy of living the religious life everyday. Even when the monastery has great controversies and problems, as any group of people will have, these no longer have a stickiness that catches us. We can enjoy

Abbots Norman Fischer and Mel Weitsman attended a celebration in Hawaii in honor of Robert Aitken Roshi's retirement. Front row: Ji'un Kubota Roshi; John Tarrant Roshi; Robert Aitken Roshi; Nelson Foster Roshi; Subhana Barzaghi Roshi. Back row: Ryozo Yamaguchi, Osho; Joan Sutherland, Teacher; Zoketsu Fischer Roshi; Sojun Weitsman Roshi; Joseph Bobrow, Teacher; Pia Gyger, Affiliate Master, and Soiku Shigematsu, Osho.

being with the others but don't need to feel compelled by them. The quiet meditation periods, the daily work, the sky and earth of the place where we live and practice, all of these things take on a great depth of peacefulness and contentment. We come to appreciate very much the tradition to which we now truly belong, we feel a personal relationship to the ancients and see them as people very much like ourselves. Texts that formerly seemed arcane or luminous now seem autobiographical. We have a great gratitude for the place where the monastery is located, for the whole planet that supports it. Our life becomes marked by gratitude. We delight in expressing it wherever and in whatever way we can. This is the sixth stage, the stage of appreciation.

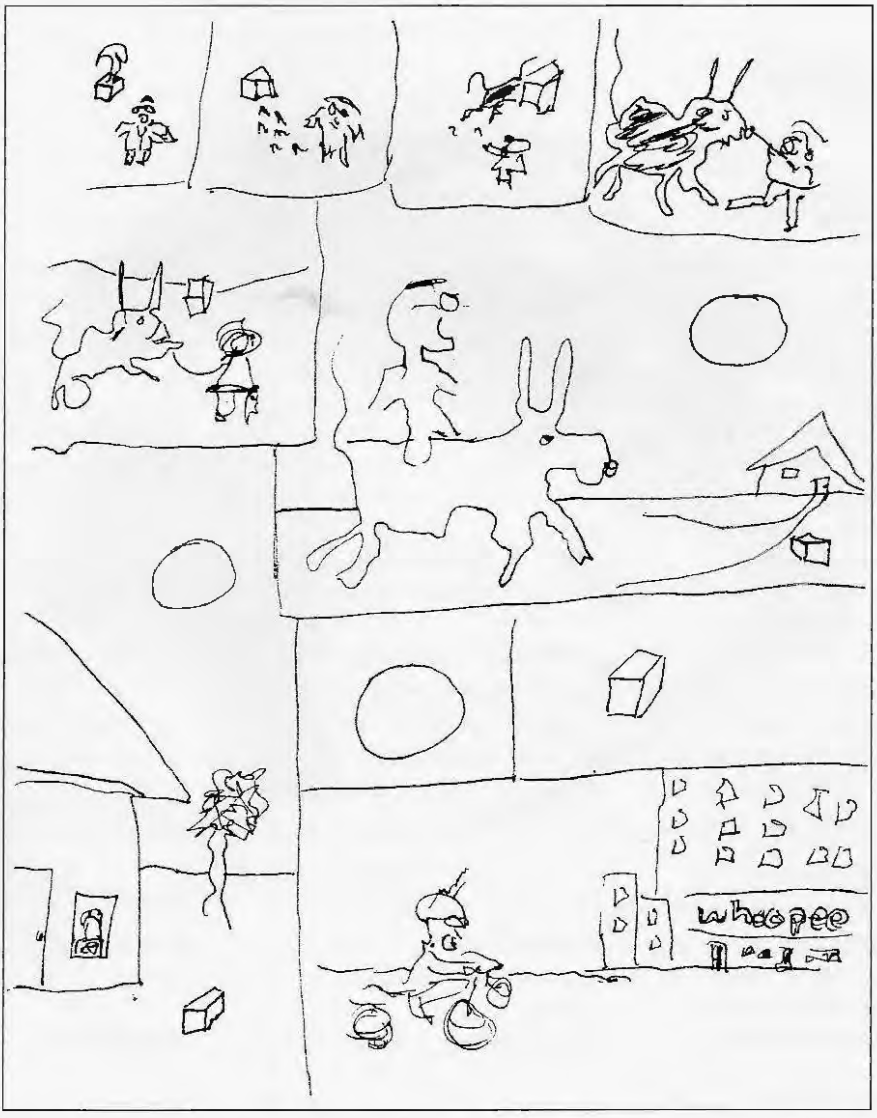
Little by little this appreciation, which begins as a religious gratitude and is private and quiet and joyful, becomes more normal and ordinary. We begin to take a greater interest in the practicalities of caring for the monastery and in doing so we begin to notice how marvelous are all the people with whom we are practicing. We see their many faults, of course,

just as we see our own faults, which remain very numerous. But as we forgive, and are even grateful for our own faults, we forgive and are grateful for the faults of others. We see others as they are, but despite this—or because of it—we love them deeply. We are as amazed by our community members as we are by the sky and trees and the wisdom of the tradition itself. In fact, we can hardly tell the difference between these. This is a different kind of love from the love we have known before, the love we have always understood as what love is. Because this love doesn't include very much attachment. We are willing to let people go. In fact this willingness to let them go is part and parcel of the love we feel. It doesn't include jealousy or attachment of any kind. We know that we will eternally be with these people and that wherever we go we will see these same people. So we don't need to fear or worry. We are willing even to see them grow old or ill, and die, and to care for them and to bury them and to take joy in doing this. We cover the grave with some dirt and chant a sutra and walk away full of the joy of knowing that even in the midst of our sadness nothing has in fact been lost, no one has gone anywhere. A beautiful life that was beautiful in the beginning and in the middle has become even more beautiful in the end, even to the point of an ineffable perfection. The brother or sister that we are burying is exactly Buddha, and how privileged we have been for so long to have lived with her, and to be able to continue to live with her in memory and in the tiny acts of our own lives in the monastery. And we know that we will go that way too, and very soon, and that in doing so we can benefit others, and give to others what we have been given in the passing of this brother or sister. This is the seventh stage, the stage of love.

The eighth and final stage—although I must repeat here that there are in fact no neat stages, that the stages are simultaneous, spiraling, both continuous and discontinuous—is the stage of letting go of everything, even of the practice. At this stage there isn't any practice or teaching or monastery or Dharma brothers or sisters. There's only life in all its unexpectancy and color. We can leave the monastery or stay, it doesn't matter. We can be with these people or any people or no one. We can live or die. We clearly want to benefit others, but how could one not benefit others? We certainly have plenty of problems, a body, a mind, a world, but we know that these problems are the media of our life as we live it. There isn't much to say or do. We just go on, seeing what will happen next.

Perhaps these stages of monastic life are stages for the human heart in its journey to wholeness, whether we live in a monastery or not, yet monasteries can help bring them into focus. So monasteries should be

open to all of us for at least some time in our lives, because all of us have a monk inside us. Once you spend some time in a monastery, to the point where you internalize and make completely your own the schedule and the round of monastic life, then you take that deep pattern and rhythm with you wherever you go. The world itself can be your monastery when the monastery is within your heart. But this takes time, and patience, luck, and some help.



The Ten Oxherding Pictures, by Hekizan Tom Girardot

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