

VOLUME I, ISSUE I

FALL 2007

Dragon Gate

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



Dharma Words

Dear Sangha members and friends:

This is our first newsletter! I've been putting it off as long as I could. But, the time has come! So, here it is!

Ok, so why *monastery*? And what's *monastery* got to do with everyday life for the person in the streets?

Here's an opening statement about *monastery* by the late Rev. Dainin Katagiri, the founder of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. He made this statement in 1978, just five years after arriving in Minneapolis.

"I wish to build a place and an environment to promote the quiet sangha life in unity...to practice the Way revering the Old Ways. Modern life is artificially protected. When the artificial environment collapses, for instance in a natural disaster or an economic calamity, people suffer severely. Modern people, therefore, need to live in direct contact with nature and find a practice method in tune with nature's rhythm. Old ways of life fit this purpose. Therefore I am convinced we

must build such a practice place in America."

In time his vision became my vow.

I began sitting with Katagiri Roshi in 1976. We called him "Roshi". It meant "Old Master". For me it was a time of transition. I remember the first time I sat a 40 minute sitting. I was hurting inside. But, I touched something calm. It was a new place.

When the earth shakes under your feet, you don't know where you stand. I needed to stand up where things were, instead of where I wanted them to be. It was a new beginning.

The Zen Center continued to be a part of my life for the next thirty years. I was ordained a Zen monk in 1985. Katagiri Roshi died in 1990. But before he died, he encouraged me to go to a Zen monastery in Japan for a year. By the time it was over, I ended up staying three years. My experience was very empowering!

I realized why every Japanese Zen monk goes to a monastery for a minimum of one year. Five years was best. Katagiri Roshi,

himself, attended Eiheiji Zen Monastery in Japan for three years. He knew the power of *monastery*! He told me it would be good to "...just taste the root."

Katagiri Roshi one time said, "You don't know real silence until you are boxed in a corner and can't move an inch." I liked that! It was my experience the first time I sat zazen (sitting meditation). It was also my experience in *monastery*.

Ever since I returned from Japan, I was convinced of the need to establish *monastery*. I've kept that vow warm in my heart over these years. I always remember (the poet) E.E. Cumming's statement, "You have to put the sail up, if you expect to catch the wind." Katagiri Roshi's vision for a monastery was the sail. I have just kept the sail up. Sometimes the wind comes. And sometimes it doesn't. My job has been just to continue.

The great Zen Master Tozan said, "If you can achieve continuity, this is called the host within the host."

In Gassho,



Kuin Dedication

Photo by Taiju John Robertson

Teaching from Gengo Akiba-Roshi for Shuso Ceremony



Photo by Kalen McCallister

Rev. Ryoten Lehmann, Shuso

“In a word, Buddhism is to keep in mind the practice of ‘ceasing from evil, doing all that is good’ and cultivating the virtues of kindness and goodwill.”

Akiba-Roshi

The following remarks were made by Rev. Gengo Akiba, the North American Soto Zen International Sokan (Bishop), on the occasion of the Shuso Tea Ceremony for Rev. Ryoten Lehmann on June 22, 2007. Akiba Roshi gave this commentary on a Koan from the Book of Serenity, Case 98.

Koan: “Always Close to This”

A monk asked Dongshan, “Among the three Buddha-bodies, which one does not fall into any category?”

Dongshan said, “I am always close to this.” (Translation by Thomas Cleary.)

Commentary:

“The main words in today’s case are ‘I am always close to this.’ In Japanese, we say ‘Ware, itsumo koko ni oite setsu nari,’ a well-known expression. I would like to explain this expression, leaving aside the difficult part. The presiding priest at my own Shuso ceremony was Hata Zenji, the 77th abbot of Daihonzan Eiheiji. He especially liked this expression, ‘I am always close to this.’ When he was asked a question, he would frequently respond by saying, ‘I am always close to this.’ When I was a young monk, it occurred to me that this was a meaningful expression.

“The Sino-Japanese character for ‘close’ in this expression is ‘setsu.’ This character has many meanings and is used in various ways: ‘to cut’, ‘to disconnect or sever’, ‘to dissect or slash’, ‘to polish or refine’, ‘to improve oneself by learning from others’, ‘sharp or piercing’, ‘imminent’, ‘urgent’, ‘eager’, ‘yearning for’, ‘finale’, and so on. In this translation, Thomas Cleary chose the word ‘close’, but it would be possible to use several other words in this expression. By the way, ‘to this’ in ‘I am always close to this’ means ‘in this place’.

“According to the characters, it is possible to express the meaning of Dongshan’s statement in the following ways: ‘I always cut this place off’, ‘I always cut this place open’, ‘I always try to improve myself by learning from others’, ‘I always keenly realize this place’, ‘I always feel a sense of urgency and expectation here’, ‘I always bring everything to a conclusion here’, and so on. What do you sense from these different expressions?

“This character ‘setsu’ is also used in such Japanese words as ‘shinsetsu’ (kindness or goodwill), ‘missetsu’ (close or near), and ‘tekisetsu’ (suitable, timely), and so on. If we take into consideration all of the meanings of this character ‘setsu’, then I think we could interpret Dongshan’s answer to the monk in these different ways.

“Dongshan’s answer was ‘I always cut off the ego, kindly applying myself closely with body and mind, living closely with the Buddha’s body and mind, living the way of Buddha with a sense of urgency by not being misled by useless words.’

“In a word, Buddhism is to keep in mind the practice of ‘ceasing from evil, doing all that is good’ and cultivating the virtues of kindness and goodwill. In our everyday life, the manifestation of the most fundamental Buddhist teaching is called ‘Bodhisattva practice’. This is to devote yourself to others: ceasing from evil and only doing good. It is to not be arrogant. It is to be compassionate to others. Taking the trouble to see that things are in a harmonious condition. Thinking quietly about things. Reflecting on the teachings of wise people; to actually practice common-sense virtues. Practice is to instill the Bodhisattva practice as everyday habits and customs. Whether or not a person who walks the Way of Buddha carries out the Bodhisattva practice is for each person a common-sense issue of choice.

“In Zen, it is often emphasized that our lives are concluded, here, right now, in this moment. This is ‘I am always close to this’. ‘To live now close to this’ doesn’t only mean to always live life in an earnest manner. Based on the behavior of ‘ceasing from evil, do only good’ as



Photo by Taiyu John Robertson

Ryumonji Lay Ordineses
August 19, 2007

Lay Ordination Ceremony

August 19, 2007

Congratulations to the following practitioners who received the 16 Bodhisattva precepts at Ryumonji on August 19, 2007. Each sewed the small Buddhist robe called “rakusu” which was presented at the ceremony and received a Dharma name. Pictured at left are:

Back row, left to right: Raymundo Rosales (Decorah, IA) – Donin – Way Man; Rev. Shoken Winecoff, Abbot; Chris Haugen (Des Moines, IA) – Taiken – Peaceful Manifestation.

Center row, left to right: Lynn Kammeier (Iowa City, IA) – Seiko – Pure Radiance; Richard Duus (Duluth, MN) – Keido – Honor Way.

Front row left to right: Louis Mahoney (Ft. Collins, CO) – Koshin – Spacious Heart; Bruce Espe (Des Moines, IA) – Eido – Reflecting the Way.

Kuin Dedication June 23, 2007

(Continued from page 2)

well as 'kindness and goodwill', this expression also has the meaning that on a daily basis, at each moment and place, we have the realization that we are always standing at the difficult place like a mountain pass between riding in the vessel of the Buddha's teaching or not. No matter how good the teachings are that we study, if we don't put them into practice, those teachings are only like a painting of a rice cake. In the same way that simply looking at such a painting would not satisfy our hunger, the favorable wind of 'cease all evil, do all that is good' and 'compassion' would not satisfy our minds and bodies.

"For example, the precepts 'do not lie', 'do not criticize others', and 'do not praise self and slander others', those people who aspire to walk the Way of Buddha will end up not encountering the Buddha-mind within themselves if they give in to the wisdom of the world, being pushed and pulled about by 'opinions of the ego'. In that case, they will only be riding in a secular boat, floating in the world of delusion. Then, the light of compassion within your heart will not shine forth. Zen calls our attention to the fact that we live standing at this difficult place right here, right now, where we must decide which side we will put ourselves on.

"This is the way I interpret the words of Dongshan, 'I am always close to this'."

Ryumonji Zen Monastery's new Kuin building was formally dedicated. About one hundred people were in attendance.

The Kuin offers residential living space for the teachers and dormitory accommodations for sixteen guest practitioners. It also offers commercial kitchen facilities, office, and library. It is heated and cooled by a geothermal system.

To mark the occasion, Rev. Gengo Akiba gave the following benediction.

"The abbot of Ryumonji has cultivated this ground as the Buddha's field. He has passed the green ears of grain to many people. The green ears of grain of Ryumonji's "continual practice" have begun to bear more and more, and are now being blown about by the golden wind of the Buddha's teaching. They are exposed to the sunshine of Buddha's light, bringing a beautiful landscape into view.

"Looking back over the past years, the abbot's disciples and the members of this temple have become one, supporting the abbot who has wanted for some time to build this monastery. Combining your energy and ef-

forts, you have succeeded in completing this building. Today, we feel the joy of completing this building with this dedication ceremony. The joy of the Dharma and the joy of Zen are overflowing.

"We dedicate the merit of this work to our original teacher and benefactor, Shakyamuni Buddha, to the Eminent Ancestor Eihei Dogen, to the Great Ancestor Keizan Jokin, as well as to the Three Treasures throughout the Ten Directions.

"We devotedly pray that the light of the Buddha's wisdom will increase, that the Ancestors' wind will blow eternally, that the people in this temple will be peaceful and healthy, that all the people who practice here will be peaceful and have good fortune, that the supporters of this temple will be prosperous and happy, that this Zen monastery will flourish, and that all nations will be at peace.

"Now I conclude with a word of congratulations: May the virtue and faith of the supporters throughout the Ten Directions eternally widen, and may the rich fields of this temple's blessings continue to bear fruit for all beings."

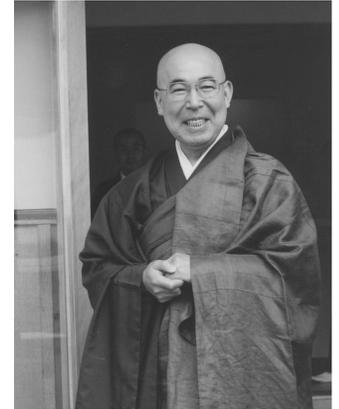


Photo by Kalen McAllister

**Rev. Gengo Akiba-Roshi at Ryumonji Zen Monastery Shuso Ceremony and Kuin Dedication.
June 23, 2007**

"May the rich fields of this temple's blessings continue to bear fruit for all beings."

Akiba-Roshi

Memorial for Jean Young

On Saturday, August 4, Ryumonji Zen Monastery celebrated the life of sangha member Jean Young. About 60 family members and friends gathered to honor and remember her. Jean passed away on June 28, 2007.

Jean was a friend, neighbor, and frequent visitor at Ryumonji and also at Decorah Zen Center. She strongly supported Ryumonji and served as a member of the Board of Directors. Jean was posthumously give the Dharma name Seiryu (Blue Dragon). She will be missed by all.

Impermanence is swift.



Jean Young
Nov. 24, 1933 -
June 28, 2007

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RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



2007 Schedule

Sesshin Schedule

Oct. 19-21 Sesshin—Fri., 7:30 pm – Sun., 12:00 pm
Nov. 16-18 Sesshin—Fri., 7:30 pm – Sun., 12:00 pm
Dec. 1-8 Rohatsu 7-Day Sesshin—Sat., 7:30 pm – Sat., 12:00 pm
Dec. 31 Year-end Sesshin—Mon., 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
New Year's Eve Celebration—7:30pm

Weekly Schedule

Tuesday evenings, 7:00 pm—Decorah Zen Center
Thursday evenings, 7:30 pm—Ryumonji

Sunday Morning Lecture and Sittings (3rd weekend)

9:00 am Public Meditation (Zazen)
10:00 am Lecture
11:00 am Public Meditation (Zazen)

Sittings and lecture are open to the public on the third Sunday of each month during sesshins. Lunch follows. (Please see sesshin schedule for exact dates.)

Zen meditation sessions are on a dana (free-will offering) basis.

Please register in advance for sesshin retreats (or for lunch on third Sundays) at 563-546-1309 or e-mail: shoken@ryumonji.org.

A TASTE OF RYUMONJI

Fall Festival Open House
Sunday, October 14, 2007

1:00—5:00 p.m.

All are invited to enjoy food, & live entertainment.

Art and craft items made by sangha members will
be available.

For additional information, please contact Shoken
at 563-546-1309 or e-mail: shoken@ryumonji.org.

If you would like to participate in preparations for the festival or if
you have items to contribute to the art sale, please contact Shoken
at 563-546-1309 or e-mail: shoken@ryumonji.org. Thank you!