

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2

FALL 2008

Dragon Gate

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



Nowhere to Stand

It's where the farmer stands when his Spring fields are washed out with flooding, as the Upper Iowa River did in our area with the floods of '08 this Spring. Not just once, but again after a second planting. This is where a farmer becomes a farmer! Nowhere to stand!

It's where all of us stand when life savings are collapsing, and the world teeters on the brink of economic recession. Where do you stand?

Everything is impermanent. It's beyond like or dislike. Sometime you don't have a choice. It just is! If you experience this place, you really wake up. This is Zen practice! It's where Buddhism starts.

The late Katagiri Roshi (d.1990) introduced the teachings of Zen Buddhism in the Midwestern U.S. during the 70's and 80's. He founded the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. His life later also has had a strong influence on the founding of Ryumonji Zen Monastery. I often quote this mission statement of Katagiri Roshi:

"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."

These were the Ways of ancient monasteries and Zen practice. The focus of monastery is to live in direct contact with nature and find a practice method in tune with nature's rhythm. It's not trying to get somewhere artificially or hang on to some idea. Its focus is to stand up where you are...where there is no place to stand.

I read a passage the other evening about the role of monasteries in modern day life. The passage was from the ancient Chinese Zen monk, Paichang (8th C.) who said, "A monk should live in a mountain recess. It is the way of living in a quiet place, aloof from the five desires [(1) property, (2) sexual love, (3) food and drink, (4) fame, and (5) sleep]." And then Paichang said, "Just try to tell me what the words 'a monk should live in a mountain recess' mean."

Zen Master Dogen (13th C.) wrote, "The first step of Zen practice is to enter the Way of non-doing, and pursue it on a mountain, far from human habitation. Those in ancient times who aspired to the Way entered mountain recesses in order to find quietude and calm the mind."

The Way of 'non-doing' is not doing-nothing. It is the Way of serenity. It is standing up where there is no place to stand. And as for "mountain recesses, far from human habitation", again we should understand what living in mountain recesses, far from human habitation means. I live in a mountain recess (at Ryumonji). But, it isn't always necessarily quiet. Even though people who come here to Ryumonji often say, "Oh, how quiet it is here!"

It's interesting Zen Master Dogen says, "We should doubt this seclusion from the world...even the Imperial Palace, the streets, and the dumps are originally the free training monastery of the Buddha's teaching. How can you say that a house of prostitutes or a public house is not a proper place for practicing the Buddha Way?"

So wherever we are is the "mountain recess". Do I live in the mountain recess just because I live far from human habitation in a remote corner of Iowa? I don't think so.

I received a letter recently from an inmate

who is serving a life sentence in an Iowa state prison. Mountain recesses are wherever you are. This person is in 'monastery' deep in the mountains, far removed from human habitation. He sent me this poem from prison, which is from a book of Zen sayings:

Clinging is never kept within bounds.
The Way, calm and easy,
free from annoyance.
But when your thoughts are tied,
you turn away from the truth.
They grow heavier and duller,
and are not all sound.

This friend told me he does suicide watches for inmates that are in trouble. In one of his last letters he said it's not so bad now, but that they have lots of guys to watch when it gets closer to the holidays. Where do you stand when you are serving a life sentence?

Monastery exists to teach the basics of living. Sometimes there's nothing to say. Just take care of where you are. Enlightenment is right under your foot. Stand up where you are! That's where your monastery is!

I would like to conclude with this final quote by Dogen, "When young, I visited China to search for the Way; when old I lived on this mountain in the Eiheiji Temple. Foolish as I am, I aspire to this tradition of ancient practice."

I could say the same. Foolish as I am, I've been practicing zazen (sitting meditation) for 30 years. Nothing to be gained! No 'Enlightenment' to be had! It's good for nothing! It's just my way of getting up in the morning. It's a vow to live for all sentient beings! I hope I can continue for another 30 years! But, no guarantees! There's no place to stand. So, let's just continue walking together.

In Gassho,

**Ryumonji Zen Monastery
2009 Schedule**

Jan 1	Open House, 1-5 p.m.
Jan 16-18	Sesshin
Jan 16 - Feb. 22	Winter Ango
Feb 20-22	Nirvana Day Sesshin
Mar 1	Katagiri Roshi Memorial Day Sesshin
Mar 14	Winter Gala
Mar 20-22	Sesshin
Apr 17-19	Sesshin
May 3	Spring Work Day
May 15-17	Sesshin
Jun 19-21	Sesshin
Jun 21-Aug 16	Summer Ango
Jul 17-19	Sesshin
Aug 15	Summer Work Day
Sep 18-20	Sesshin
Oct 4	Taste of Ryumonji Fall Festival
Oct 16-18	Sesshin
Nov. 6-8	Women's Retreat
Nov 20-22	Sesshin
Dec 1-8	Rohatsu Sesshin
Dec 31	Year End Sesshin

Weekly Schedule

Sunday Mornings 9:00 a.m. Zazen 10:00 a.m. Dharma talk	Tuesday Evenings 7:00 p.m. Decorah Zen Center (510 Baker Avenue)
	Thursday Evenings 7:30 p.m. Ryumonji Zen Monastery



Dharma Transmission

for

**Rev. Ryoten Lehmann, Rev. Tesshin Lehmberg,
and Rev. Ichiryu Moran**

During this past year, Revs. Ryoten Mary Lehmann, Tesshin Paul Lehmberg, and Ichiryu John Moran received Dharma Transmission from Shoken Winecuff Roshi in the Soto Zen lineage. Dharma Transmission is the certification between teacher and ordained disciple of carrying on the teacher's Dharma.

In May of this year Rev. Winecuff accompanied these three priests to Japan for the Zuse Ceremony, the final step in the dharma transmission process. They visited the two founding temples: Eihei-ji, established by Eihei Dogen, and Sojiji, established by Keizan Jokin.

On this trip Revs. Lehmann, Lehmberg, and Moran each received designation as Honorary Abbot-for-the-day at these two founding temples. They also received certificates from the Abbot of these temples, stating that their Dharma Transmission has been officially recognized in the Soto Zen lineage of Zen Buddhism.

At this time their okesa robes are also formally changed from black to brown color as a symbol of their certification as Soto Zen teachers. Each of these priests has sewn their own brown okesas.

Thank you to all whose support contributed to this event.

Ryumonji Happenings

Shuso Ceremony—On June 21, 2008, Rev. Jodo Cliff Clusin was chosen as Shuso (Head Monk) for the Summer Ango (Practice Period). Rev. Clusin is head priest of the Prairie Mountain Zen Center of Longmont, CO.

Priest Ordination—On June 29, 2008, Rev. Eido Bruce Espe received priest ordination from Rev. Shoken Winecoff at Ryumonji. Rev. Espe lives in Des Moines, IA and practices at the Des Moines Zen Center and at Ryumonji.

Lay Ordination—The Jukai Precepts Ceremony will be given on November 16, 2008. The lay ordainees are: Scott Allen, Tammy Barton, Patrice Caux, Dustin Eaton, Brenda Reed, Rob Stephens, and Lee Zook.

Landscaping Project—A rock wall was completed on the north side of the new Kuin building. Next spring, it will contain flower beds and herb gardens.

Future Building Development—This fall site preparations will begin for new Sodo and Shuryo Buildings adjacent to the Buddha Hall. These are monk halls for residential training. This land filling needs to settle for a couple of years before construction.

Taste of Ryumonji Fall Festival—Ryumonji held its third annual Taste of Ryumonji Fall Festival on Sunday, October 5. About 75 guests enjoyed food, music and the beauty of autumn in northeast Iowa. The day culminated with a pie auction which was widely enjoyed by all!

New Sunday Morning Schedule

Beginning in 2009
Sunday Morning Sittings
and
Dharma Discussions
will be offered weekly
at
9:00 a.m.

Ryumonji Bell Project

Ryumonji has undertaken the casting of a new Bonsho—great bell—for the monastery bell tower. It will be a 400-500 pound bell. The clay model pictured here is the inner core of what will become this new bell.

A generous donation has made this project possible. Further donations will be gratefully accepted if you would like to be part of this undertaking.

Carl Homstad (pictured standing below) and Kelly Ludekin of Decorah have offered their services to design and pour this new bell. Sangha members, including Arden Street (pictured sitting), have volunteered their time to fashion the core model.

The casting of the new bell is planned for this year. The formal dedication will be New Year's Eve at the traditional bell ringing ceremony.

To our knowledge this is the first traditional temple bell of this kind in America. We hope it will resonate through the valleys of northeast Iowa and reach throughout the world. Its message is peace. Its way is serenity.



Photo by Chris McConnell

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



Pre-authorized monthly donations are a convenient method of direct bank transfer from your account to Ryumonji's account. It helps in the budgeting for our monthly mortgage payment. All the whole-hearted offerings of time, energy, work, and financial donations have limitless benefit. We appreciate your support of Ryumonji Zen Monastery. Donor and receiver both benefit.

To all those who have contributed to Ryumonji in the past year, we bow in deep gassho and gratitude.

Authorization for Pre-authorized Monthly Donations

I authorize **Ryumonji Zen Monastery** to initiate debit entries in the amount of \$_____ on the 10th day of each month, beginning ____/____ (month/year), to my ___ Checking/ ___ Savings account indicated below, and to initiate credit entries or adjustments to correct any debit entries that may be made in error. This authorization will remain in effect until cancellation is received in writing..

Please attach a voided check.

Name (please print)

Bank Name

Checking/Savings Account Number

Transit/ABA number (lower left hand corner of your check)

Signature

Date