

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

SPRING 2008

Dragon Gate

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



Receiving What's Offered

This past winter I did my first takuhatsu in Decorah. Takuhatsu is an ancient practice of mendicant begging which Buddhist monks have practiced since early times. Decorah, as most of you know, is a small town in northeast Iowa not far from Ryumonji Zen Monastery.

It was a film project that prompted my doing takuhatsu in Decorah. They picked about the coldest day in February with blowing snow to shoot the film. I was standing on a street corner in full monk's robes, wearing traditional straw begging hat, and holding a begging bowl in freezing hand.

As we were shooting the film, someone not part of the film script came by and dropped a \$5 bill in the bowl. At that point I realized that we were doing more than just shooting a film. It awakened in me the ancient practice that I had so often done in Japan.



Photo by Kyril Henderson

America does not have the tradition of takuhatsu. However, this ancient Zen tradition is a universal symbol. It represents the Way of a Buddha. A monk's life is not just to cultivate one's own garden. A monk's life is to cultivate the garden of the entire earth. We are all called to be monks of the Universe. The Universe is us! This is passing through the gate of your own world, and vowing to walk with all beings, and the earth itself.

I had someone tell me that America needs to see the figure of a monk with begging bowl. We live not just through our own effort. Our lives are interwoven with the earth and myriad beings. The life of a monk is to be content with what's offered, and to use what's offered for the benefit of others.

"Takuhatsu" literally means "entrusted giving bowl". When someone offers something to you, it is an entrusted offering which carries with it a responsibility of using it well and for the benefit of others. It's not just for yourself. The gap between rich and poor in our country and in the world is growing ever wider. To ignore this gap is to bring havoc upon ourselves and the world. Everything is intra-related.

The spirit of takuhatsu is to be content with what is offered. The Buddha said, "Those who are content may sleep on the ground and still consider it comfortable; those who are not content would be dissatisfied even in heaven."

A few weeks ago I was coming back from a Soto Zen Conference meeting in LA. My plane got into Minneapolis about 8:30 p.m. Instead of a cab, I was content

with taking the new light rail system into downtown Minneapolis, and then a local bus (all for .50 cents). It was nice to take in the night, and not be so fearful about being out there where the people are.

There was a little inconvenience with waiting. While I was waiting for the bus, there was a woman on her cell phone. When she finished I asked her what language she was speaking. She said Ethiopian. It was the first time I had really heard someone speaking Ethiopian. It was beautiful. She told me more about the languages of Ethiopia. Sometimes waiting is not just "waiting".

When I got on the bus, it was pretty full for 10:30 p.m. on a Sunday night. I sat next to a man about my age. After a while we got talking. He told me that he had just been released from ten years in prison, for a crime he did not commit. Someone confessed to the crime. So after serving 10 years for a crime he did not commit he was released! Can you imagine? There was something very beautiful about him—very serene without any bitterness. I knew that he had learned more about resignation than I. We shook hands as I got off the bus. He said "God bless you." As I walked home, I felt how fortunate I was!

Takuhatsu is a very simple way of living. It's a way of receiving what's offered. It's not passive. It's very positive. It's not always convenient, or to our liking. But it opens you to the world that is.

In gassho,

Shoken Wincoff

If you'd like to see the Ryumonji takuhatsu film, check out our web site at www.ryumonji.org.

Ryumonji Schedule of Events for 2008

May 16-18	Sesshin
June 20—August 17	Summer Ango. Full or partial participation is available.
June 20-22	Sesshin (includes Shuso ceremonies)
June 21	Shuso Ceremony for Jodo Cliff Clusen
July 18-20	Sesshin
August 16	Work Day
September 19-21	Sesshin
October 5	Taste of Ryumonji Fall Festival and Open House
October 17-19	Sesshin
October 19	Lay Ordination Jukai Ceremony
October 31- November 2	Women's Retreat led by Rev. Ryoten Lehmann
November 14-16	Sesshin
December 1-8	Rohatsu Sesshin
December 31	Year-end Sesshin and New Year's Eve Celebration

Weekly Schedule

Tuesday evenings, 7:00 pm—Decorah Zen Center

Thursday evenings, 7:30 pm—Ryumonji Zen Monastery

Sunday Morning Lecture and Sittings (First and Third 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 first and third Sunday of each month. Lunch follows.

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

Please register for sesshin retreats at 563-546-1309 or e-mail: shoken@ryumonji.org.



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Ryumonji Winter Practice



Photos by Kalen McAllister

Ryumonji Happenings

The new Kuin building has expanded the variety of services Ryumonji is able to offer to the local sangha and the general community.

During the last six months, Ryumonji has held two major community outreach events: the Taste of Ryumonji Fall Festival in October and the Winter Gala/Silent Auction in March. Both of these events were very successful and well-attended. They provided opportunities for newcomers to experience Ryumonji, and for long-time sangha members to come together.

In addition to our regular monthly sesshins, we have had several weekend retreats with groups and individuals, as well as weddings and funerals. And we have begun a regular first and third Sunday morning public sitting and lecture, in addition to our regular Thursday evening public sittings and Tuesday evenings in Decorah. (See schedule.)

We also have completed the ceramic floor tiling in the lower level of the Kuin. It makes a pleasant environment for our 16 dormitory bed sleeping spaces. This completes the building of the new Kuin!

We are deeply grateful for all the volunteers who worked on the ceramic floor tiling and other projects throughout the winter.

Priest Ordination



Photo by Taiyu John Robertson

Rev. Kalen McAllister
Priest Ordination
November 3, 2007

On November 3, 2007, Rev. Kalen McAllister received priest ordination from Rev. Shoken Winecoff, Abbot of Ryumonji Zen Monastery.

Kalen, a native of St. Louis, has practiced at the Missouri Zen Center for many years, and more recently at Ryumonji.

She is founder of Inside Dharma, a non-denominational Buddhist organization dedicated to offering information, support and encouragement to incarcerated and recently released individuals in a manner consistent with Buddhist principles. (Quoted from Inside Dharma web page.)

Memorial Service in Home Practice

This year several sangha members have lost one of their family members.

There is a tradition of placing a memorial card on your home altar (or dresser) for 49 days. The card is about the size of a 5x7 index card, folded in half. The deceased name is placed on the card along with her/his date of death, and there is a black line border drawn around the edges of the card. You can bow each day in memory of the deceased, and/or chant the Daihishin Dharani or Heart Sutra. These Sutras, along with a memorial dedication, can be found on our web page. This is also a good practice for Zen Centers to do when a sangha member passes away.

The loss of a loved one is a deeply moving experience. It is a difficult reality to assimilate. The 49 days is a healing practice to allow time for this profound life transition. It also is a way of honoring the life of the deceased and expressing your appreciation for their life.

Also every year, on the anniversary of the person's death, a similar memorial ceremony may be repeated. Observing this memorial helps us reflect on the reality of impermanence.

NOTE

If you would like to receive future issues of the newsletter electronically rather than by U.S. Mail, please E-mail: shoken@ryumonji.org

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