

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2

FALL 2009

# Dragon Gate

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



## Wabi Sabi

“Wabi Sabi” touches something at the core of human living. It is an interesting Japanese phrase that is a bit hard to explain, but you can feel it when you see it. There’s a children’s book called Wabi Sabi, written by Mark Reibstein. I’ve used it a couple of times in Dharma talks. I’ll tell you the story and maybe add to it as well.

Wabi Sabi is the name of a cat that lives in Japan. She is an ordinary little cat that sets out to find the meaning of her name. She asks her master, who simply tells her that her name is hard to explain.

So Wabi Sabi asks her friend, a big white fluffy cat, who tells her “Wabi Sabi” is a kind of *beauty* like an old straw mat, rough on cat’s paws. It pricks and tickles ... hurts and feels good, too. Old tatami mats can have their own special kind of beauty. This made Wabi Sabi feel pretty good. So she purred and purred ... as she laid on the old tatami mat.

Wanting to find out more, Wabi Sabi asked her dog who also lived in the house with her if he knew the meaning of her name. He was a kind of snippy little dog and just said, “Oh, Wabi Sabi, you are just so *ordinary*. Like a brown leaf, so ordinary!” This sort of hurt Wabi Sabi. She didn’t like feeling so ordinary.

Wabi Sabi was having a hard time understanding. How could her name mean *beautiful* and *ordinary* at the same time? Then a little bird told Wabi Sabi that there was a wise old monkey who lived in the forest who could tell her the meaning of her name. So, Wabi Sabi went to the forest and met the wise old monkey. The wise old monkey served her a bowl of tea. The bowl of tea was warm in her paws and very comforting. It was an old clay bowl and the steam was gently rising in the morning sun. It was something Wabi Sabi could feel without the wise old monkey saying anything.

Still Wabi Sabi asked the wise old monkey if he could explain her name. The monkey simply served her the tea and told her an old haiku poem, “The pale moon resting on foggy water. Hear that splash? A frog’s jumped in.” Hmm! Wabi Sabi scratched her head, but couldn’t understand.

Finally she met an old monk named Shoken who also lived deep in the mountain. Wabi Sabi asked the old monk Shoken if he could explain the haiku poem. Shoken just asked Wabi Sabi, “What is the *pale moon*?” Wabi Sabi said, “A pale moon is really the sun reflecting the light of the entire universe.” Wabi Sabi was a very smart cat. Then Shoken asked Wabi Sabi, “What is the *foggy water* that the entire universe is resting on?” Wabi Sabi thought for a moment and said, “The foggy water is our day-to-day living.” Then the old monk Shoken asked Wabi Sabi, “What is a *frog jumped in*?” Wabi Sabi simply said, “Nothing to be said, the frog just jumped in!” We’re always looking for explanations.

Alive and dying too is like this, like the damp autumn leaves curled beneath your feet... just coming, just going. It just is! The truth to live is just to live.

I asked my granddaughter if she understood. She said, “I understand, Papa Shoken!” And fell asleep against my arm. Papa Shoken also went to sleep that night thinking how Wabi Sabi human life is. Just ordinary and yet so beautiful, if you can just live it!

In gassho,

Shoken

## Ryumonji Zen Monastery 2009-2010 Schedule

### Weekly Schedule

#### 2009

Dec. 1-8 Rohatsu Sesshin  
Dec. 31 Year End Sesshin

#### 2010

Jan. 1 New Year's Day Open House  
Jan. 15-17 Sesshin  
Jan. 15-Feb. 21 Winter Ango  
Feb. 19-21 Sesshin  
Mar. 19-21 Sesshin  
Apr. 16-18 Sesshin  
May 1 Spring Work Day  
May 21-23 Sesshin  
June 18-20 Sesshin  
July 16-18 Sesshin  
June 18-Aug.22 Summer Ango  
Aug. 21 Summer Work Day  
Sept. 17-19 Sesshin  
Oct. 15-17 Sesshin  
Nov. 19-21 Sesshin  
Dec. 1-8 Rohatsu Sesshin  
Dec. 31 Year End Sesshin

#### Tuesday Evenings

7:00 p.m. Decorah Zen Center  
(510 Baker Avenue)

#### Thursday Evenings

7:30 p.m. Ryumonji Zen Monastery

#### Sunday Mornings

9:00 a.m. Ryumonji Zen Monastery

**To register for sesshin,  
please e-mail**

**office@ryumonji.org or call  
563-546-1309**

*If you would like to receive future issues of the  
newsletter electronically, please E-mail:  
office@ryumonji.org*



Photo by Deborah Jacobi

## Ryumonji Happenings

**Rev. Kalen McAllister**, one of the priests of Ryumonji, was recently hired as the first non-Christian chaplain in the Missouri prison system. Congratulations, Kalen!

**The Ryumonji Bell Project** is moving along as planned. A clay model has been taken to a foundry in the Twin Cities where a cast has been made to receive 300 lbs of molten bronze. It will be the first traditional Japanese temple bell to be made in this country. When the bell is completed, we will dedicate it at our New Year's Eve bell ringing ceremony. Mark your calendars!

**The Annual Taste of Ryumonji** fall festival and open house was held on October 4<sup>th</sup>. It was a wonderful event, with music provided by Pine Wilson and Ann Streufert, delicious buffet cooking by Toni May, pie auction with auctioneer Charlie Langton, and a great effort by the coordinating committee and the many others who contributed pies, tasty food and art/craft items.

**Priest Ordination** was given at Ryumonji by Rev. Shoshin Bob Kelly on October 10<sup>th</sup> to two members of his sangha group from Bemidji, MN. Congratulations to Rev. Kogetsu Denise Summerford and Rev. Taiju Geri Wilimek.

**Lay Ordination Ceremony** was conducted at Ryumonji by Rev. Shoken Winecoff on October 18<sup>th</sup> for William Gray from LaCrosse, WI, Reiko Demura from Japan, Erika Kohoutek from St. Louis, MO, and Patrice Caux from Manchester, IA. (Pictured below, left to right, with Rev. Shoken Winecoff.)



Photo by Deborah Jacobi

October 18,2009 Lay Ordination

## New Developments

**Ground breaking news!** The concrete footings have just been dug and poured this fall for the new Sodo Monks' Hall. It will be a 46' x 46' building located on the south side of the Buddha Hall. The Sodo and future Shuryo buildings are the next stage of Ryumonji's development. They are an integral part of Ryumonji's effort to provide training for priests and monks in the future. Please support this effort if you can.

**Geothermal heating/cooling** ground water loop systems have also been installed for retrofitting the Buddha Hall. It will eliminate all propane fuel for heating Ryumonji's monastery buildings.

**Timber framing** work has begun for the interior structure for the new Sodo building. The trees for the timber framing will come from a thinning of the pine trees at Hokyoji. These are from trees that were planted with Katagiri Roshi in 1978 when the Hokyoji land was first purchased. For a long time Hokyoji has wanted to thin this timber planting. Both Hokyoji and Ryumonji will benefit.

**Funding for the new Sodo** comes from donations of members and construction mortgage approved by Decorah Bank and Trust. Ryumonji launched a major fundraising drive earlier this fall to raise money for the new Sodo. In addition, Shoken did takuhatsu fundraising during a trip to Japan this year, as seen in the photo below. If you can contribute to the new Sodo, your contributions will be appreciated.



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# RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



## Regular Sunday Morning Schedule

Public Zazen at 9:00 a.m.

Heart Sutra at 9:40 a.m.

Dharma Talk/Discussion at 10:00 a.m.

Community get together with tea and cookies. Orientation provided 15 minutes before the sitting. Children Welcome!

**Please consider a Pre-authorized Monthly Donation to Ryumonji.** It is a convenient method of direct bank transfer from your account to Ryumonji's account. It helps in the budgeting of our monthly mortgage payment. This is especially important as we begin construction of the new Sodo Monks' Hall. We appreciate your support of Ryumonji Zen Monastery. Donors and receivers both benefit. Please complete and return the form below to authorize your monthly donation.

## Authorization for Pre-authorized Monthly Donations

I authorize **Ryumonji Zen Monastery** to initiate debit entries in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ on the 10<sup>th</sup> 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