



What's Under Your Foot?

What's under your foot is the essential thing!

This was the core teaching of Zen Master Dogen, founding Japanese Zen master who transmitted the Soto Zen lineage from China to Japan.

What's under your foot is the *essential thing* because what's under your foot interfaces with endless future. How you handle this moment is the essential matter. It has a ripple effect that penetrates all time. It's a pivotal point. The issue is: do you see what's under your foot and do you handle it? This is wholehearted practice.

Zen Master Dogen had a life of learning how to handle what was under his foot. He was not coddled by life. When he was two years old his father died. When he was eight years old his mother died. He had to stand up in life and death. He learned that what's under your foot is not always what you expect or want it to be. It's not always easy to handle.

Dogen heard this core teaching when he encountered an old tenzo (zen monastery cook) on his travels to China. He first encountered this tenzo when he was delayed (for immigration reasons) from disembarking from the ship that brought him across the Japan Sea to China. While he was still on board this ship, a tenzo came on board to buy shitake mushrooms from Japan. Dogen was overjoyed to meet this tenzo as he went to China to learn about the Ancient ways that had been transmitted from Shakyamuni Buddha's time in India, and then to China.

Here is a personal account of this meeting written by Dogen in early summer 1223. (Translation of Eihei Shingi by Taigen Leighton and Shohaku Okumura.)

"I was on my ship at Quiguan. While I was talking with the Japanese captain, an old monk arrived who looked about sixty years old. He came straight on to the boat and asked one of the crew if he could buy some Japanese shiitake mushrooms. I invited him to drink some tea and asked him where he lived. He was the tenzo at the monastery at Ayuwang Mountain.

"The tenzo said, 'Tomorrow is a big celebration, and I do not have any special food to serve. I want to make noodle soup, but I do not have any mushrooms. Therefore I came here to try to buy shiitake to offer the monks from the ten directions.'

"I said, 'What time did you depart from there?'

"The tenzo said, 'After lunch.'

"I said, 'How far distant from here is Ayuwang?'

"The tenzo said, 'Thirty-four or thirty-five li' (about twelve miles).

"I said, 'When are you going to return to the temple?'

"The tenzo said, 'As soon as I finish buying the mushrooms I will go.'

"I said, 'Today unexpectedly we have met and also had a conversation on this ship. Is this not a truly fortunate opportunity? Allow Dogen to offer food to you, Tenzo Zenji.'

"The tenzo said, 'It is not possible. If I do not take care of tomorrow's offering it will be done badly.'

"I said, 'In your temple aren't there some workers who know how to prepare meals the same as you? If only one person, the tenzo, is not there, will something be deficient?'

"The tenzo said, 'During my old age I am handling this job, so in my senior years I am doing this wholehearted practice. How could I possibly just give away my responsibilities? Also, when I came here, I did not ask permission to stay away overnight.'

"I then asked the tenzo, 'Venerable tenzo, in your advanced years why do you not wholeheartedly engage the Way through zazen (meditation) or penetrate the words and stories (koans) of the ancient masters instead of troubling yourself by being tenzo and just working? What is that good for?'

"The tenzo laughed loudly and said, 'Oh, good fellow from a foreign country, you have not yet understood *wholeheartedly engaging in the Way*, and you do not yet know what *words and phrases* are.'

"Hearing this, I suddenly felt ashamed and stunned, and then asked him, 'What are words and phrases? What is wholeheartedly engaging the Way?'

"The tenzo said, 'If you do not stumble over this question, you are truly a person of the Way.'

"I could not understand at the time. The tenzo said, 'If you have not yet fully gotten it, sometime later come to Ayuwang Monastery. We will have a complete dialogue concerning the principle of words and phrases.'

"After saying that, the tenzo got up and said, 'It's getting dark and I am going now.' Then he left to return home."

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Ryumonji Happenings . . .

2014 Winter Ango Practice Period

Ryumonji held its annual winter angō for two months during January and February, 2014. This is a traditional time for residential practice. Rev. Kogetsu Summerford served as Shuso (Head Priest for the angō). Rev. Shohaku Okumura gave a lecture on Koan study from the Blue Cliff Record.



Family Weekend

Ryumonji held its second annual Family Weekend April 5-6. Several families gathered under the leadership of Kathleen Sweet and Wendy Verhulst to enjoy activities and time together. The weekend culminated with a celebration of the Buddha's Birthday. Families are always welcome for Sunday morning public sitting, 9:00 a.m.



Spring Work Day

The Spring Work Day was a beautiful day on Saturday, May 10. Kids and adults gathered together to plant the garden with food we use throughout the year. We also planted three new oak trees which will shade the monastery buildings and the cemetery area near the Peace Pole. Upcoming work days are Summer (Saturday), August 16 and Fall (Saturday), October 25.

Upcoming 2014 Calendar Events

2014 Summer Ango will begin on June 20 with the June sesshin (June 20-22) and conclude August 17. Rev. Taiju Wilimek will serve as Shuso. The Hossenshiki Tea will be held on Saturday evening, June 28th and the Shuso Ceremony on Sunday morning, June 29. Rev. Shohaku Okumura will also offer lecture on Case #9 from Blue Cliff Record.

Partial registration is permissible for angō attendance. Please join us if you can.

Also on Sunday, June 29, Rev. Eido Espe will be installed as Vice-Abbot of Ryumonji. Rev. Espe is a Dharma heir of Shoken Roshi.

The **Jukai Lay Ordination Ceremony** for this year is scheduled for Sunday October 19. This is the traditional precept ceremony and receiving of rakusu and kechimyaku lineage papers of lay disciples of the Buddha. Those who are interested in taking the precepts and receiving the rakusu should make contact with Shoken Roshi to arrange a personal dokusan interview and schedule for sewing of the rakusu. These arrangements must be made at least two months in advance of the ceremony.

Ryumonji will offer its first **Men's Retreat** the weekend of August 29-31. The retreat will be facilitated by Rev. Taizen Verkuilen and Rev. Shoken Winecoff. It will feature study of the Song of the Jewel Mirror Awareness.

Ryumonji will also offer its annual **Women's Retreat** the weekend of Oct. 31 – Nov. 2. Rev. Renshin Verkuilen and Rev. Jinen Conway will facilitate the weekend.

What's Under Your Foot? - Cont.

Dogen couldn't understand and felt stunned and stupid. He was being told by an old tenzo that he didn't know the first thing about koans, nor did he know what wholeheartedly engaging the Way (Zen practice) was about.

Dogen wrote extensively in his journal about this encounter. He continues, "Later in the summer of the same year, I rested my monk's staff at Tiantong Monastery (Tendoji). At that time, this tenzo came to visit me and said, 'After the summer practice period (ango) was over I retired, and I'm returning to my home village. I happened to learn at my monastery that you were here. How could I not come to see you?'"

"I was deeply touched and overjoyed to welcome him, and during our conversation I brought up the issues that we had mentioned before on the ship concerning words and phrases and wholehearted engagement of the Way. The tenzo said, 'People who study words and phrases should know the significance of words and phrases. People dedicated to wholehearted practice need to affirm the significance of engaging the Way.'"

"I asked, 'What are words and phrases?'"

"The tenzo said, 'One, two, three, four, five.'"

"Also I asked, 'What is wholeheartedly engaging the Way?'"

"The tenzo said, 'In the whole world it is never hidden.'"

Later Dogen said, "I realize that this tenzo was a true person of the Way. Accordingly, what I previously saw of words and phrases is one, two, three, four, five. Today what I see of words and phrases is also six,

seven, eight, nine, ten. My junior fellow practitioners completely see this in that, completely see that in this'."

"One, two, three, four, five" is to see the concept of Buddhism (*All is One, or Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form*). But to really take care of "All" or "Form" is "six, seven, eight, nine, ten." It's the practical side of taking care of and attending to what's under your foot. It's easy to talk about Buddhism, but do we wholeheartedly take care of "six, seven, eight, nine, ten?" This was the old tenzo's life.

Dogen was amazed and later said, "*Completely see this in that and completely see that in this.*" Things may seem menial and sometimes not to our liking, but it's the issue at hand. It's the reality under your foot. See this in that and that in this. "*In the whole world nothing is hidden.*" Even the smallest atom manifests the whole.

What's under your foot *is* the practice. So practice secretly working within, like a fool or like an idiot. Be one with what is. When it's time to get up, get up. When it's time to eat your breakfast, eat your breakfast. When it's time to do your dishes, do your dishes. That is "*wholeheartedly engaging the Way*". Sometimes we call this "24 hour zazen".

Even the most difficult things may turn out to be a black dragon's pearl. Even at midnight the white moon sets into the myriad waves of the dark ocean. Whole world manifests in each of life's myriad waves. It's all right under your foot.

In gassho,

Shoken Winecoff, Abbot

2014 Ryumonji Calendar

Jun 20-22	Sesshin
June 29	Shuso Ceremony & Vice-Abbot Installation
June 20-Aug 17	Summer Ango
Jul 18-20	Sesshin
Aug 16	Summer Work Day
Aug 29-31	Men's Retreat
Sep 19-21	Sesshin
Oct 12	Taste of Ryumonji
Oct 17-19	Sesshin
Oct 19	Jukai—Lay Ordination Ceremony
Oct 25	Fall Work Day
Oct 31-Nov 2	Women's Retreat
Nov 21-23	Sesshin
Dec 1-8	Rohatsu Sesshin
Dec 31	End of Year Sesshin New Year's Eve Celebration

Public Sitzings

Thursday Evenings

7:30 p.m.

Sunday Mornings

9:00 a.m.

For orientation to zazen

arrive 15 minutes early

To register for sesshin
e-mail: office@ryumonji.org
or call: 563-546-1309

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



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Solar Project

We are pleased to announce that Ryumonji has made a commitment to move toward the installation of solar panels for its electrical usage. This will be a three year project that will begin early this summer with a Solar Fund Drive.

Use of solar energy will greatly reduce Ryumonji's fossil fuel footprint as well as our yearly energy consumption. It will reduce our fossil fuel energy source to virtually zero, except for the kitchen cooking stove (propane). These panels will also provide the power which runs the geothermal pumps and heat exchangers that heat and cool all monastery buildings.

Our ultimate goal is to offset 100% of our yearly electrical usage. In 2013 Ryumonji's yearly usage was 50,000 kwh.

The total number of solar panels needed to generate this amount of energy is 40 panels, to be arranged in four rows of ten. Our hope is to have the first row of solar panels installed by the end of this year as well as the infrastructure for the remaining three rows of panels.

We have taken several initial steps already:

- Ryumonji has commissioned an energy audit, designed to reveal ways of reducing our current energy usage. AmeriCorp has volunteered time to implement changes that were recommended by the energy audit. There are also rebates for making these changes.
- Ryumonji has solicited bids and selected a contractor who will work with us for installation of the solar panels.

The next step will be the Solar Fund Drive. Please watch for it. It will include more detailed information about this exciting project. Your help will be greatly appreciated.