

OCTOBER 2005

GREEN MOUNTAIN ZEN CENTER NEWSLETTER



Gary says: Here is one of my all-time favorite “Zen” poems, quoted in one of my all-time favorite “Zen” books, “Nine-Headed Dragon River” by Muryo Peter Matthiessen. The poem was written by Soen Nakagawa Roshi, a master influential in bringing Zen to this country.

I went to the mountain seeking enlightenment

There was no enlightenment on the mountainside.

In desolation

I cried out and there came an echo.

I shouted again.

The echo came again.

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O-HIGAN SUNDAY , September 22, 1963

O-Higan is the time twice a year when we stop to remember our deceased relatives and friends and to take a good look at this life we so cherish, but which is so fleeting. O-Higan is the time when we strengthen our faith in Zen and find the way to Enlightenment. At O-Higan, whether in the Spring when the world is just awakening, or in the Fall when it is about to die, we stop to evaluate ourselves and to ask if we are truly living a life of Zen.

On this special day, we are asked to reflect upon the nature of Life and on the path we travel through it. We remember that life is momentary — that we can only live in the present moment. The past is gone and distorted; the future is unknown. “We know no other moment than the present moment. It is always dying, always becoming past more rapidly than imagination can conceive, yet at the same time, it is always being born, always new.” Our lives are no different. In a moment, we can be the Buddha, but also in a moment, we can lose the Truth.

So that we do not lose our way, the Buddha instructed us in the path to be traveled to Enlightenment. He told us of the nature of Life —

suffering — and of its cause, desire. The way to rid our lives of its suffering is to rid it of its cause. The Eightfold Path and the Six Noble Deeds of Zen (Paramitas) are the way to extinguish the desire in our lives. The Buddha taught us that this is the world of illusion — we see ourselves as something apart from the rest of the world and we look at our lives as something that should go on forever. But as we live and form attachments to the past, we find that it can be no more, and the present, we discover gone in a moment. Attachments to the desires of the future fail to come, or arrive as something we did not expect. Our desires in this life are not “bad” in themselves. It is the attachment to the things of life or to our desires that cause pain. The Buddha taught the Middle Way in his search for Enlightenment and did not abandon it when he became enlightened. He gave up the austerity of starvation for health; he did not cease to want food when he hungered. Instead, he ate whatever he was offered or what was prepared for him. He instructed us to see through the illusion of the phenomenal world and of time. To see the illusion of our lives, we were instructed in meditation, and to find the Enlightened world, we were told to keep persevering in meditation and to keep the precepts.

But, the Buddha did not want us to think that this Enlightened world was far from our lives, and he proved it to us when he became enlightened and continued to live an earthly life. He was a living example to us that the world of Enlightenment is to be found in this world. On O-Higan we tell ourselves the same thing — we must cross over the shore of illusion to the shore of Enlightenment — as did the Buddha when he sought Wisdom, but we sometimes fail to see it within ourselves. The Buddha saw it that morning as the dawn quietly broke and the last star disappeared from the heavens. He showed us that it was to be found in the knowledge of the true nature of ourselves; by sitting in meditation. But, his compassionate life also taught us that without living a daily life of keeping the Precepts, our meditation would not be complete.

In Buddhism, all is One. Our lives each day and their morals cannot be separated from its spiritual strength — meditation. This world of illusion cannot be separated from the world of Enlightenment. It is an illusion to think it is elsewhere! The world of Enlightenment is right here for each person to discover for themselves. O-Higan is set aside for each individual to look at their life and to perfect it. If one truly understands Life, one will know that it cannot be done at any other time. This moment holds the world of Enlightenment. This could be the moment you see through the illusion to the truth.

It is hoped that each of you here will grow this way into Zen until

your life is Zen. Zen cannot be separated from your life just as Enlightenment cannot be thought of as a yonder shore. Zen is a way that must be lived now. When it is, the happiness and power it brings is boundless. Although each of you must experience it for yourselves, it is also good to listen to the experiences of others. Miss Alexa Roy has written from Japan about her life since she discovered Zen. As she arrived in Japan on her way to Toyama, Japan, and the Lunbini-en Orphanage she wrote: "They showed me a film of Lunbini-en...when I saw some of the children, tears came to my eyes. My Life has become so full and meaningful since I started attending the Zen temple in Chicago. It is like being reborn. The warm and wonderful people I have met — three years ago, I wouldn't have believed that people like this existed. I am so fortunate to have the opportunity of living among these people — I have so much to learn from them...so much." She also wrote her greetings to everyone who is attending here. But, in her letter from Japan, she gave more than greeting. Again repeating what she had said of the temple in San Francisco, Miss Roy wrote about her adjusting to the mannerisms of the Sojiji Zen Monastery, where she is temporarily staying. She wrote that it can be difficult — "We westerners don't know the merest beginning of discipline or behavior; I am so fortunate to have this opportunity of learning so many valuable things." Miss Roy is now surrounded by people who have lived all their lives in Zen and she is able to feel its real depth. She is urging us to live our lives in this way — a life in true accord with the spirit of meditation and the wisdom of the Buddha.

It has been mentioned to you several times before that the way of the Buddha is one of peace and compassion. The internal strife in Vietnam has been pointed out as an example of the opposite. Because of the cruelty the Vietnamese government has shown towards its people and the intolerance of its ways, a letter of protest was sent to President Ngo Dinh Diem on behalf of this congregation. In the return mail, President Diem sent two government-printed pamphlets on its attempts to peacefully negotiate with the Buddhists and the discourses that have occurred between the government and top Buddhist leaders. Of course, the material is favoring the government, and the accusations of the Buddhists who have been beaten and jailed are denied, but the accusations themselves are worth reading if there is an ounce of truth in them. They reveal a country where the principles of Buddhism are being transgressed and which the Secretariat of the United Nations, U Thant, called "chaotic" and "getting out of control". When such religious persecution, or persecution of religious persons and disrespect for their property, to hunt down

suspected Communists, becomes an occasion for its leaders to cheer, and be joyous, it is time for a world protest, especially from Buddhists. Buddhism is a way of peace and tolerance — for the other races, creeds and nationalities — and, it is also a way of compassion. Tolerance of differences is admonished in Buddhism, but not cruelty or persecution and inequality. Day by day, a Zen Buddhist must live their life in a compassionate way, treating all others equally. All are welcome to attend this Temple to learn about Zen, and no one should be made to feel unwelcome by another.

The opportunity to learn about Zen and to find its world of Enlightenment is there for each of you to find. On this O-Higan, it is hoped that each of you will be able to remain here for the remainder of the day and join in the Japanese O-Higan Memorial Service at 2 P.M. and the refreshments to be served afterward. Attending here as much as possible to learn the Zen way of life in its minute detail will reveal a world to you where illusion does not exist and the true nature of All is alive to you. At that time, you will have reached the shore of Enlightenment.

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Last month, the Atlanta Soto Zen Center held its monthly Sesshin/Retreat from the evening of Friday, September 2, through noon on Wednesday, September 7. The theme for September was "Upadana," the Pali word that is generally translated as *clinging* or *attachment*. GMZC's own FuSho Eric Beck and Kawa Jim Gordon were the guest speakers, providing dharma talks on Saturday and Sunday. The talks were well received. In concert with the theme, Sensei Elliston provided a series of dharma talks related to the "Lankavatara Sutra," a sutra given by the Buddha in Sri Lanka, generally on the Mind System: Discriminating Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Universal Mind. We may be visiting some of these subjects in our monthly dharma discussions.

A good number of changes to the ASZC's procedures have been implemented in an effort to make the ASZC's services more comfortable for visiting Soto Zen Buddhists, whether from the United States or from abroad. Accordingly, we'll try adapting ourselves to some of the ASZC's new procedures to make visits to Atlanta more comfortable for members of our sangha. *

some offerings after the Zazenshin:

The essence of all Buddhas is revealed in the functioning of the Patriarchs.
Inherently complete, this essence is revealed in non-thinking.
"No gap" reveals the intimacy (with all things).

Without thoughts to interfere, there is the experience itself!
Fish move in water.
Sky! Can you possibly see the end?
Birds move in air.

*

Buddha's pure essence.
Enlightenment so subtle;
Birds, fish – no limits.

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Central nature of every Buddha
Necessary part of every Patriarch
Things untouched, but known
Thoughts, complete and mysterious
Knowledge – present and illuminated
Subtle and undefiled
Truth, clear and unfettered
Rivers and skies are filled with life
And stretch to infinity

With essence so pure,
Realization is a breeze;
Birds and fish go free.

*

The practice of every Buddha
The practice of every patriarch
Knowing without touching
Understanding without thinking
Knowing beyond thought and no thought
The understanding is subtle but always present
Uncorrupted throughout time
Unitary understanding must come through
Right practice
The water is clear but the bottom of the ocean
Can not be seen
Fish are fish
Never needing to stop swimming
Birds are birds
Flying forever

*

Crucial operation of Buddhas,
Operating crux of Ancestors,
It is realized without thinking,
Illumined without struggling,
In realization without thinking,
Subtlety inherently contained,
In struggle-free illumination,
Its truth is already present.
When subtlety is contained inherently,
Purity is present at all times;
With already-present truth,
It is empty of distinctions.

With ever-present purity,
Intimacy neither arises nor ceases,
Being empty of distinctions,
Truth appears without contrivance.
No obstacles in the water,
Fish can be fish;
No barriers anywhere in the sky,
And the bird goes the way of the bird.

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The engaged potential of the All,
And the active truth of all the Forefathers,
Is here without thought, without physical
perception; yet, in reality, always ready.
It is whole without communication, without
motion, without contradiction, and
further than disruption; yet, in reality,
has existing speech.

It is here without thought, without physical
perception; yet, in reality, always
ready.

The spirit of the engaged All is, in truth, subtle
and intimate: naturally, always ready.

It is whole without communication, without
motion, without contradiction, and
further than disruption; yet, in reality,
has existing speech.

Its existence is, of course, a verifiable mystery,
and a perfectly natural happening.

The spirit of the engaged All is, in truth, subtle
and intimate: naturally, always ready.

All is without discrimination, disease, or
pollution.

Its existence is, of course, a verifiable mystery,
and a perfectly natural happening.

All is without direction.

All is without discrimination, disease, or
pollution.

Its existence is oneness in motion.

It is without direction.

Its existence sees; effortlessly, it is here.

The water is clear right to the bottom.

The fish, as fish do, swim evenly.

The sky is infinitely spacious and clear right to
the heavens.

The birds, as birds do, fly far and away.

