

ZEN NOTES



From its legendary beginnings through the historical periods of Zen records of the lives of the Masters have been kept with particular emphasis on lineage, that is, on the details of the transmission of the teaching from master to disciple, for the establishing of the credentials of a responsible teacher in orthodox succession is held to be of prime importance in a study which to dedicated Zen students is no "lukewarm" curriculum but a life-and-death effort to penetrate the core of Reality. The following sketch introduces to you the Zen Master Miura Isshu, who, in the next two months, will honor the First Zen Institute of America with his presence and will help inaugurate the Institute's program for its second twenty-five years, now beginning. The story of Miura Roshi's Zen training, told in his own words, will appear at a later date.

Living Zen

MIURA ISSHU ROSHI

A Biographical Sketch
By RUTH FULLER SASAKI

Miura Isshu Roshi¹ was born on April 10, 1903 in a mountain village in Gifu Prefecture, Japan. When he was ten years old, his father took him to Kotoku-ji (the Temple of Extensive Virtue), a temple belonging to the Kencho-ji sect², outside of Tokyo, where he became the personal disciple³ of Seigen Hogaku Roshi, its then priest. Seigen Hogaku had taken his Zen practice under Shaku Soyen Roshi in the sodo⁴ of Engaku-ji, Kamakura, and later became one of Soyen-Zenji's⁵ heirs.

When Miura Roshi was twenty, Seigen Osho⁶ sent him to Tenryu-ji Sodo, on the outskirts of Kyoto, to begin his real Zen practice. Two months later the Roshi of Tenryu-ji resigned his position and many of the monks left the sodo as an expression of their regret at his going. The youngest among them was Miura Roshi.

In the autumn of the same year, 1923, he entered Nanzen-ji Sodo on Higashiyama in Kyoto to resume his Zen practice there under the stick of Nanshinken Roshi, known as the most difficult and demanding Roshi of his time. For twelve years Miura Roshi studied koans and practiced zazen at Nanzen-ji, spending his vacation periods at Erin-ji (The Temple of the Forest of Benevolence), a famous temple in Yamanashi Pre-

MIURA ISSHU fecture, of which his personal teacher Seigen Hogaku had become the priest and Roshi.

Upon the death of Nanshinken Roshi in 1935, leading fourteen other monks from Nanzen-ji Sodo, Miura Roshi went to Koon-ji (The Temple of Extensive Gardens), a country temple at Hachioji, some forty miles west of Tokyo. In feudal times Koon-ji had been an important sub-temple of Nanzen-ji, with its own sub-temples and sodo. It had fallen into serious disrepair during the years and its sodo been closed. Shortly before his death Nanshinken had undertaken the task of restoring Koon-ji, and to that end had sent his Dharma-heir Nakamura Taiyu Roshi to repair the buildings and reopen the sodo. Miura Roshi remained at Koon-ji for two years. They were strenuous years. The temple had few supporters, so food was scarce. The roofs leaked rain and snow and the gardens had become a wilderness. At the end of two years he completed his Zen training and received his *inka* as an heir of Taiyu Roshi.

Miura Roshi's first appointment as a temple priest came in 1937. This was to Kogen-ji (The Temple of Lofty Origin), a temple of the Myoshin-ji sect, deep in the mountains of Hyogo Prefecture. Kogen-ji, also, had been a renowned temple in feudal times, with its own sodo and sub-temples. Its founder Onkei-Zenji, the friend of emperors and Shoguns, had inherited his Dharma from Chuho-Zenji in China. When Onkei-Osho returned to Japan determined to establish his own temple, he selected a mountain site closely resembling Tenmokuzan (The Mountain of the Heavenly Eye), the home of his teacher in China. So Kogen-ji is still often called the Western Tenmokuzan. Today it is a solitary temple, famed for its wild cherries in spring and maples in autumn. It became Miura Roshi's favorite temple.

Seigen Hogaku died in 1940, and Miura Roshi was appointed his teacher's successor at Erin-ji, a magnificent temple with famous gardens and many treasures. At that time the life of the priest of Erin-ji still resembled that of a feudal lord. There were monks in the sodo to instruct, lands to administer, great ceremonies to conduct and distinguished visitors to entertain. The war brought an end to this era, but though the responsibilities of administration were different, they were no less arduous. Monks were called from the sodo to enter the army, troops and bombed-out civilians were quartered in the vast reception rooms, and young soldiers sent for short periods of instruction in zazen before leaving for the front. With the restoration of peace came adjustment to a new manner of life. Gone was the flock of novices and monks, gone were the lands, gone was the vast wealth of donors who had kept Erin-ji in feudal splendor.

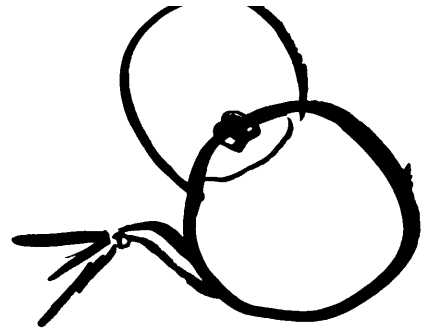
In 1946 Nakamura Roshi resigned as the Sodo Roshi of Koon-ji and retired to his home temple in Yamaguchi Prefecture in western Japan. He asked his Dharma-heir to take his place, and for three years Miura Roshi



Miura Roshi, strictly trained, as has been noted elsewhere, "under the stick" of Nan-shinken in the matter of temple cleaning, found the quickest way to get rid of the weeds which had overgrown Erin-ji when he came there as master was to pour kettles of boiling water over them.

DIALOGUE: "Roshi, when you come to New York all you'll need will be your stick."

"Oh no. The stick is too good. All I'll bring will be my kettle."



commuted between Erin-ji and Koon-ji, instructing the monks, now seriously diminished in number, in both sodos. Finally, in 1949, he was appointed priest of Koon-ji as well as its Roshi. He left the fading glory of Erin-ji to make his home again in the country sodo where he had gone through his final Zen practice.

Koon-ji is still a far from flourishing temple. Though the rain and snow do not now leak through the roofs, the winter wind still blows through the wide cracks in the walls of the Founder's Hall where the monks and some few lay students practice their zazen. The Roshi lives in a little house at the top of an azalea-covered hill at the back of the temple, and the students must climb the hundred odd steps of the covered passageway to their morning and evening sanzen. From the verandah of the hojo⁷ there is a lovely view of Mount Fuji, in the spring framed with flowering plums. The temple is now spotless, the gardens tended and swept daily, the Roshi's particular preoccupation. And in their spare time the monks cultivate the three-foot long carrots for which the district is famous.

1 - Roshi: the title given to a disciple who has completed his Zen practice, inherited his teacher's Dharma, and is entitled to teach koans.

2 - There are nine major sects or divisions in Japanese Rinzai Zen, each with its own "mother" temple or Honzan, and each Honzan having from several hundred to several thousand sub-temples in various parts of Japan as well as one or more sub-sodos. The teaching in the sodos of each Honzan is practically identical, and the monks and Roshi attached to each move freely from one to the other. The "mother" temples were established in the early days of Zen in Japan by outstanding Japanese priests or priests invited from China. The most important sects or divisions are those of Kencho-ji (The Temple of Established Perpetuity) and Engaku-ji (The Temple of Perfect Awakening) in Kamakura; Kenin-ji (The Temple of Everlasting Benevolence), Nanzen-ji (The Temple of Southern Zen), Tofuku-ji (The Temple of Eastern Blessings), Shokoku-ji (The Temple of the Prime Minister), Daitoku-ji (The Temple of Great Virtue), Myoshin-ji,

(The Temple of the Marvelous Mind) and Tenryu-ji (The Temple of the Heavenly Dragon) in Kyoto.

3 - A "personal disciple" is a disciple who stands in the relation of a son to his teacher. The teacher oversees his studies, his activities, and gives him the Buddhist commandments in many cases; the disciple, in his turn, waits upon and attends his teacher as he would his own father. Seldom, if ever, does a disciple take his Zen practice under his personal teacher, though the teacher may be a priest of any rank.

4 - Sodo: the monks' training hall.

5 - Zenji: another title for a Zen priest of high rank, also for a roshi.

6 - Osho: an informal title for a priest

7 - Hojo: usually the name for the Roshi's quarters. The main building of the Honzan is also sometimes called the hojo

For a picture of a Myoshin-ji Master see LIFE, March 7, 1955. For more details of Engaku-ji, Myoshin-ji (misspelled by LIFE by the way) and Daitoku-ji, see CY. For Engaku-ji's present Roshi, see also ZN I, 7, 8, 9.

DEATH OF A SENIOR SANGHA MEMBER - On March 4, 1955, Asta Dorpowska, Zen-named Yokhan, after a long illness. Mme. Dorpowska's last visit to us was on the occasion of Abbot Asahina's coming in June, 1954. She may be seen, in the photographs taken at that time, at the extreme right, sitting straight as the Master's stick (which she alone of our sangha had, surprisingly, tasted when she determinedly offered herself as subject during a tea-hour demonstration of its use by Sokei-an). The uprightness of the Baroness was a characteristic no one could help remarking, coupled as it was with her almost weightless body which depended only slightly on a walking-stick in later years when the after-effects of a multiple fracture of hip and leg made locomotion difficult. The title "Baroness", by which Mme. Dorpowska was always referred to in our group, was one to which we were informed on good authority she was entitled by her Polish birth; her elegant carriage was attributed to training received at the Imperial Court of the Hapsburgs. But these earlier glories were intimated to us only by the gallant and indomitable spirit always in evidence, never more so than in a final conversation which took place in early February. The talk began (mostly the Baroness spoke in French, the preferred of her seven languages: she always sought out those available for converse in its graceful precisions) with the remark that if we thought she was dead she wished to call to our attention that she had survived the pneumonia of December which had driven her to a hospital for proper care and that we should send her ZEN NOTES and anything else we might have in mind (such as a jar of Martinson's powdered coffee, perhaps, which she found "superbe") to her present reclining-place in a nursing home on the East Side. We were glad to learn of the Baroness' whereabouts (touch had been lost when communication by mail ceased) and quickly dispatched the missing issues, the coffee, and a few oddments so that the Baroness might take absent part in our celebration February 16. When our conversation concluded, the Baroness added, almost as an afterthought, and with a distinct relish: "By the way, last night the entire hospital was disturbed by a formidable commotion... like a wild animal..." The barbaric yawp which for a moment pierced the sterile atmosphere, it later turned out, had come from the throat of an oldster of 112, who, though tied down in his bed, could not be hindered from roaring out. A delicate little snort, or perhaps it was a chuckle, was the Baroness' only comment on this incident. Adieu, Madame. Sokei-an told us you were a good sanzen student. It can easily be credited.

April 12, 1955, at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, WALTER NOWICK will perform before the Emperor and Empress as accompanist for the Ohtani Gakuen Chorus of seventy voices. See ZN I, 2, 5, and 6 for other of Walter's activities.

老師

Chinese: Lao-shih The first character of this
 Japanese: Roshi title is the same as that of
 English: Master Lao-tzu. Its commonest meaning

is "old"; the second character means, among other things, "teacher."

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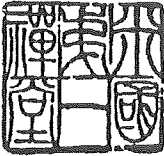


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