

ZEN NOTES

The petals of the peony flowers last arranged by Miura Roshi's hand for the altar, though they stubbornly refused to fall, are withered now. Another person sits on the first zabuton to strike the gong marking the zazen periods. No voice leads the recitation of the Three Refuges, the Four Vows, and the Hannya Shinnyo. No white-tabled feet walk between the rows of the sitters guarding their meditation.

What change takes place when human beings enter the Sangha of Buddha? Twelve persons took this step during Miura Roshi's stay.

What change takes place when human beings are dedicated to the Zen life? Six students had rakusas placed on their shoulders after seven weeks of sansen.

All is as before Miura Roshi came, yet nothing is the same.

What has happened is that a group of sincere students have met a Master. The future being obscure, perhaps no more than this has taken place. Yet to a true student, to see only for a moment the look of kindness on the face of a true teacher is more than may be expected in any ordinary lifetime. The laws of permutation and combination being what they are, how many kalpas of karmic relations must have combined to bring about such a moment!

We live in the atomic age. Every child knows that inner changes can be effected in a second's split which may permanently alter the structure of matter yet leave no outward trace until their fruits are seen. American Zen? A dream, perhaps. But who would be so foolish as to deny that dreams well-dreamed can come true?

It had been our thought to give in this issue some impressions of our students' first experiences in Zen study. These experiences, however, have struck too deep to be spoken of now. Instead we bring you Miura Roshi's recollections in the tranquillity of his maturity of his own initiation into koan practice some thirty years ago and the advice he received at that time from the great Nanshinken.



Coriander

A Novice at Nanzen-ji
By MIURA ISSHU ROSHI
Translated by TAKEMURA HISAO

I came as a monk to the Sodo of Nanzen-ji, Higashiyama, Kyoto, in October of the year 1923. To become a monk at a Rinzaï Zen Sodo one must first go through a number of severe tests. Only after this ordeal has been suc-

cessfully passed may one enter the zendo. At that time there were about thirty-five monks in the Nanzen-ji Sodo, the eldest in his fifties, and to see them all sitting in meditation with stern expressions on their faces made a complete novice like myself shudder with terror.

My teacher, Nanshinken Roshi, was at that time fifty-eight and considered the strictest and most astute Roshi in the Zen Forest of Japan. When I was called for my first interview with him I entered the room in as dignified a manner as I could assume, bowing deeply before him, not only to conform to formal etiquette, but also to express my real respect for him. The old teacher took his time replying to me, but when he did open his mouth, the gist of his instruction was this:

"We have a saying in Zen that your first resolution is in itself your accomplishment. So you must realize how important your attitude of mind in the beginning is. You'll get nowhere in your practice with lukewarm resolution, by saying to yourself: "Of course I'll try my best, but I don't know whether I'll be any good or not." If you can make up your mind that you WILL accomplish this difficult task, you have already half, I might say even completely, accomplished it. Therefore, never forget your present state of mind and work hard."

After this little sermon he gave me my koan, Joshu's "Mu." Now an additional sermon came to my ears: "From today on you must stick to MU. You must literally live with this MU. When you are awake you are with MU. When you go to bed, you go to bed with MU. Everything you see and hear is MU. Therefore, until MU is really your own you must remain with this first koan, though it takes you two or three years, or two or three incarnations even. It is useless to sit on a zabuton thinking the word MU in your mind and mumbling it with your mouth every once in a while. You won't get anywhere in a hundred years that way." I had been making my whole body ears. Then the interview ended.

The third of October was the first day of my first O-sesshin. During the week of this O-sesshin we sat in the zendo from three in the morning until nine in the evening, and from nine in the evening until three in the morning on the *engawa* or "verandah" of the *hondo*.¹ During the *yaza* or "night-sitting" we were permitted to take a recess after one or two hours sitting if we wished, but there were some hardy monks who sat throughout the entire night. Four sanzens were given each day of this O-sesshin, but such novices as myself were not permitted to take them. Nanshinken's theory was that it was preposterous for one who could not

sit properly even to want to take sanzen. His view was, of course, somewhat different from that of other Roshis. As for myself, I was at first unhappy about this, but later I realized that his attitude came from the old man's deep compassion and felt very grateful to him. Only once during O-sesshin was I permitted to enter the sanzen room and that was when Nanshinken gave *soken*, "general interview," and every monk was compelled to attend. Thus my first O-sesshin came to an end without any serious difficulties.

On ordinary days between the O-sesshin weeks we were busy with routine practices such as *samu*, "work," *takuhatsu*, "begging," and farming. Nanshinken gave *teisho*² twice a week and sanzen every morning and evening. I did my best to live with MU. I spent my days and nights working on it, but could not get the slightest light.

Then *Rohatsu O-sesshin* came, the most important period in *sodo* life. It began the first day of December, and the severity of this practice can only be understood by those who have actually taken part in it. We just went on sitting "like hell" with no sleep or rest. Even *Roshi* did not go to bed until it ended. The old man gave six sanzens every day during *Rohatsu*, but I was permitted to take only the three general sanzens.

When my first *Rohatsu* ended I was still in a fog about my MU. That term³ I went through two more O-sesshins at which I took no sanzen at all. Throughout the three O-sesshins of the summer term, I still could find no place to take hold of this MU. Sometimes I would summon up all my courage and go into the sanzen room, only to have the old man hit me on the face, temporarily numbing it, and sending me running back to my seat. I was very unhappy, but I knew there was nothing to be done about it. No one would tell me the secret of the koan, and no book existed which could solve my problem. As my teacher had said, there was nothing to do but practice more and more. Perhaps after really hard work and suffering, I thought, I might find the way to bow before the patriarchs.

Then my second *Rohatsu* came. Sometimes in a quiet moment of the late afternoon *Roshi* would come into the *zendo* to give some encouraging words to the sitters. "I see a great improvement in your sitting," he would say, "so I expect good sanzen from you tonight. Come on boys, you've only a little further to go now. Come to sanzen tonight. I feel I shall have some good answers." The moment the bell from his sanzen room rang, I would jump up and run. But still what I received was only a couple of good blows on the face. At such miserable moments I could not even cry.

All my days, and nights too, were thus spent fighting with this MU koan. I had made up my mind by that time not to become impatient, and whenever delusive ideas came into my mind I would try hard to remember the difficult time our patriarchs also had had. Even though I was stupid, surely sometime I would see the light, if only I worked continually and patiently, keeping my mind as hard as an iron wall.

By the time my third *Rohatsu o-sesshin* came I found myself sitting a little better.



"Mu." Without; not; not exist.

* * *

A monk asked Joshu: "Has a dog Buddha-nature or not?"
Joshu said: "Mu."

- 1 The main building of the sodo in which is the *Butsudan* (altar) and where the lectures and services are held.
- 2 The lecture given by the Roshi in which he comments in Zen style upon one of the several records of old masters, such as *Mumonkan*, *Rinzai-roku*, *Hekigan-roku*, etc.
- 3 There are two terms each year in Rinzai Zen sodos during which the monks concentrate on zazen and koan study. One begins in November and ends the first part of February; the other May first and continues into July. The exact dates of these terms vary at different sodos.

BOOKS As our budget for Zen Notes (and may we remind you once more, any-sized contributions help) does not yet allow for expansion, we are often obliged to omit some of the items a well-balanced Zen diet should include. A new publication, reviewed by the NY Times July 3 reminds us to express our appreciation to Pantheon Books, a neighbor, for its consistently high-minded efforts in the publishing field. Their latest is *The Art of Indian Asia*, No. 39 in the Bollingen Series. This handsome two-volume work, in addition to an interesting survey of the subject by the late Heinrich Zimmer, completed and edited by Joseph Campbell, contains an exceptionally fine collection of photographs (614 plates), beautifully reproduced and painstakingly indexed, of the greatest Buddhist art and architecture, not only of India, but also of Ceylon, Burma, Java, Thailand, and Cambodia. Many of these glamorous pictures were taken by Eliot Elisofon, of LIFE fame, and are large enough and clear enough to show details elsewhere unavailable. \$17.50 until August 15, after that \$19.50. Another title of this house, *Gift From the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh's perceptive essay on woman's place in the universe, justifies our growing belief in the general public's tendency toward better things by maintaining its position at the top of the non-fiction bestseller list. *Zen in the Art of Archery*, nearly a classic though still unremarked by the press, continues to win friends. Other releases this year include Hubert Benoit's *The Many Faces of Love* and *The Supreme Doctrine* (fall) which present distinctively European views of the ideas of Zen as expounded in psychological circles.

Zen Notes

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Vol. 11, No. 7 July
1 Year \$1.00
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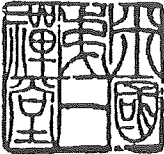
Published monthly by

THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.

156 Waverly Place, New York. 14, N.Y.

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