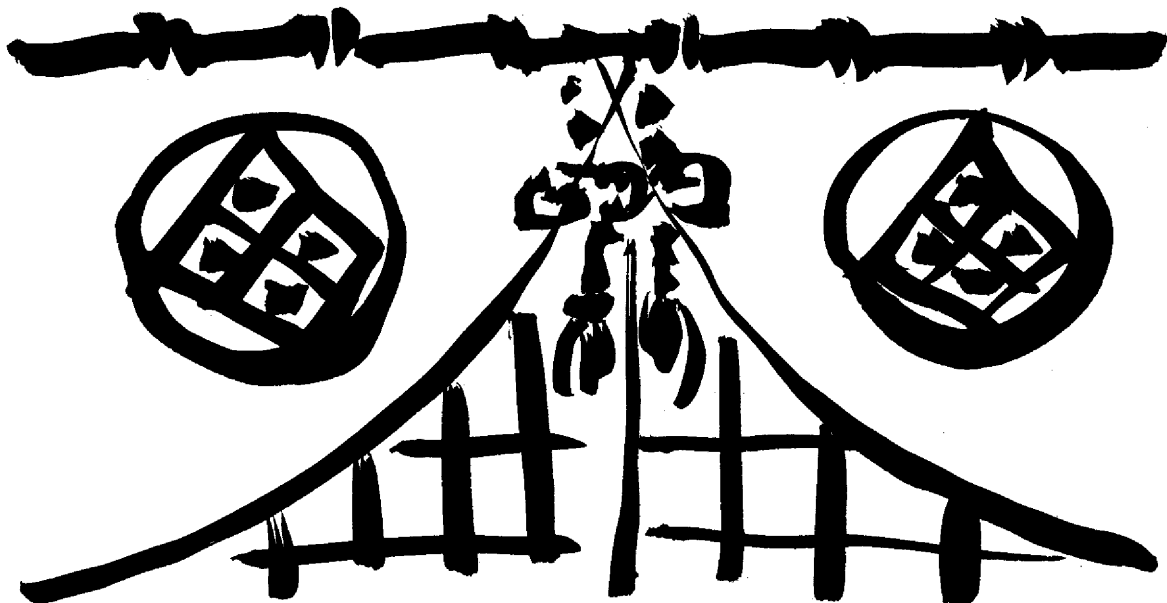


ZEN NOTES





Dear Everyone:

All of you know, through an earlier issue of ZEN NOTES, of the important events that took place at Ryōsen-an on May 17. Since I must make a somewhat detailed record of the happenings of that day, I shall write it in the form of a letter to you, though of necessity this will reach you long after the ceremonies took place.

Certainly the appointment of myself, an American, as the priest of a Rinzai Zen temple is unique in the history of that sect. The fact that I am a woman is not of such importance, for there have always been, at least in Japan, some Zen temples presided over by nuns, to which category, of course, I now belong. The formal dedication of the Zendō at Ryōsen-an, a building to be devoted to the purpose of the work of our Institute, that is, of making traditional Zen study available to western students, brought in another unusual element. Moreover, our Kyoto branch, now formally called The First Zen Institute of America in Japan, is the first organization ever to be formed for that purpose in China or Japan, as our American Institute was the first in the West.

To Sōkei-an Sasaki Rōshi, founder of our American Institute, must be attributed the initial impetus

to these events. Sōkei-an was a priest of Daitoku-ji and, strangely enough and unknown to us all until just recently, a member of the Ryōsen-an Line of priests within Daitoku-ji. The mother temple of this line had been the old Ryōsen-an, of the founding and demolishing of which I have already written you, and on the former land of which was situated the house I came to live in in Daitoku-ji. Such relationship or *innen*, as it is called in Japanese Buddhism, is much respected and cherished here. It has contributed greatly to the closeness of the bond that Daitoku-ji feels with all of us in the Institute, and to their wish to aid us in the future in whatever way they can in furthering the spread of traditional Zen teaching to the West.

The first step in all these proceedings was the invitation from Daitoku-ji Honzan (Administrative Headquarters) to our Kyoto Branch to make the building we have erected on a part of the old Ryōsen-an land into a sub-temple to be known as "The Restored Ryōsen-an." The rather tedious process followed of registering the new temple with the prefectural government. The laws of Japan regarding the establishment of religious organizations are much more complicated than those of New

York State, for instance, and several months were needed for the preparation of the many, many documents with their countless official seals.

The second step was that of my taking *tokudo*. The word literally means "to pass over" from the family life into the religious life. At this time the postulant takes the monks' vows from his teacher and usually his head is shaved. No, do not fear. My hair has not been cut off, nor will it be. There are rules for exceptional cases, and mine was considered to be one. Oda Sessō, the Kanchō of Daitoku-ji, gave me the vows. To enter the Daitoku-ji priesthood one must have an active member of the Daitoku-ji priesthood as one's teacher. My Zen Master, Gotō Rōshi, though a past Kanchō of Daitoku-ji, is now living in retirement, so the position of my "commandment teacher" was taken by the present Kanchō, who is Gotō Rōshi's Dharma-heir.

In the course of the very simple ceremony I was taken to the *hondō*--"main hall"--of the monastery, where the Kanchō lives since he is Rōshi as well, and allowed to bow and burn incense before the figure of Daiō Kokushi, founder of the line of Daitoku-ji teaching, which you may remember the Kokushi brought directly from China when he returned to Japan in 1269 as the Dharma-heir of Kido Oshō of Kinzan. This life-sized figure carved of wood has been placed deep within the main shrine of the *hondō*. The Kokushi sits, as he must often have sat in life, full of power, his eyes--of glass--glaring in the light of the candles, his real stick uplifted ready to strike. It is quite an experience to walk into that shadowy place and stand face to face with the old man.

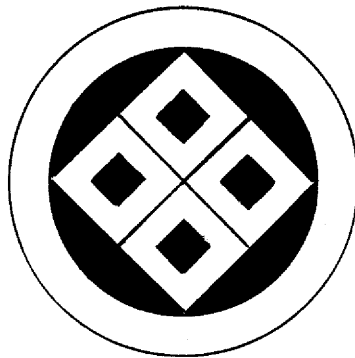
The next step was to confer with the Chief Secretary of the Honzan about the ceremonies themselves. Tokuzen San was a marvel of efficiency and of kindness as well. The guest list, the gifts to be given, the food, what I was to wear, each detail of the ceremonies themselves-- who came first, who came second, where each one walked

where they stood, what sutras were to be chanted, when and how and who was to bow--all this was written down in the Secretary's handsome calligraphy, making a veritable book for my guidance. My constant personal mentor through the maze was Kobori Sōhaku, a younger Daitoku-ji priest, though not yet with his own temple, as he is still engaged in koan study. Kobori San speaks excellent English, and often through those weeks I thought with gratitude of the late Beatrice Lane Suzuki, Dr. Suzuki's wife, who had taught Kobori San English so thoroughly.

Weeks were consumed in making the preparations. We decided to give all the guests large purple silk *furoshiki*--square scarfs for wrapping packages--with the seal of The First Zen Institute of America in Japan in white at one corner. This was to be the gift in honor of the dedication of the *Zendō*. For the memorial service for Sōkei-an, we decided upon *rakusus*--the smallish bib with the ivory ring always worn by Zen priests, except during religious ceremonies, when it is replaced by a *kesa*, the very large outermost or shoulder robe, of which the *rakusu* is actually an abbreviated version. The silk for the *rakusus* to be given to the Kanchōs and Rōshis was also specially dyed. Those given to the priests, attendants, and monks were simpler.

The invitation list, somewhat limited by the number of persons who could be accommodated in the *Zendō* for the ceremony, included the Kanchōs and Rōshis of all the Rinzai headquarter temples in Kyoto, all the priests within Daitoku-ji, the leading priests of the Ryōsen-an Line from out of town, the members of the Kyoto Branch of the Institute, and those persons who were closely associated with us in our library and other work. In the end our guests numbered ninety.

Before the invitations were sent out I had to make a visit to each of the Kanchōs and Rōshis in order personally to invite them to the ceremony. When it came to the invitations, each had to be carefully addressed in accordance with the



rank or relationship of the person invited. Later, the wrappings of the gifts had to be inscribed in a like manner. Kobori San, whose calligraphy is very fine, spent many days on this writing alone.

The ceremonies were to be divided into two parts. The first part would take place at Ryōsen-an, beginning at 9 o'clock in the morning. At this time the figure of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Intrinsic Wisdom, an altar to whom is installed in every Zendō, would be enshrined, the buildings at Ryōsen-an dedicated, a short memorial service held for Yōhō Zenji, the original founder of Ryōsen-an, and a black koromo--priest's kimono-like robe--the gift of Daitoku-ji, presented to me. The second part of the ceremonies was to be held in the Main Hall of the Daitoku-ji Honzan. Here the tablet to Sōkei-an, inscribed with the title "Founder of the Restored Ryōsen-an," would be formally installed on the main altar, side by side with the tablets of its most important priests of past generations, a sutra-chanting service held in his memory, and I would be formally presented with a kesa by my Commandment Teacher, the Kanchō. An elaborate dinner was to conclude the festivities, a dinner of "pure food," that is, vegetable food, prepared by the present members of a family which has been preparing temple feasts for Daitoku-ji for several hundred years.

The altars at the Honzan were the care of the Honzan priests; those in the Zendō at Ryōsen-an were that of Kobori San and myself. He arranged them beautifully, bringing brocades from his family's temple and supplying from the storehouse of the Honzan all the many utensils necessary for such a ceremony and which Ryōsen-an, as a new temple did not itself own. Above the temporary altar to the Original Founder was hung a portrait of him painted about 1500, and inscribed in his own hand, as fresh in color as if done yesterday. This is one of the few treasures of the old Ryōsen-an that survived the destruction.

Our own next concern was the tokonomas in the house proper, for the entire house had to be thrown open for the guests and we had to be prepared for its being thoroughly inspected by everyone. Since

ranks are very carefully observed at such a party, the reception room was reserved for the Kanchōs and Rōshis. There they would rest for a few moments on fat red and gold brocade cushions. In the tokonoma for this room we hung the last writing of the 7th priest of Ryōsen-an, Myōsō Sōfū, dated the 15th day of the 4th month of the year 1590. Sōfū was a famous man in his day and founder of several Ryōsen-an sub-temples in what is now the Tokyo area. He had been advisor to the last of the Hōjō Regents and, when this latter did not take his advice regarding negotiations with the rising military powers, Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, Sōfū wrote this death-verse, then retired into his temple room and starved himself to death in protest. In the room where the priests of lower rank would sit, we hung the single character "dreams" written by Gotō Rōshi in my study, where the foreign and other guests were to wait, the writing of Chūhō Sōu, 13th priest of Hōshun-in, a famous Daitoku-ji tea-master and calligrapher of the early 19th century, the gift to me of the Chief Secretary. The flower arrangements in all the tokonomas were very simple and composed only of roses from Kobori San's garden, cut early the morning of the ceremony, rain drops still clinging to them. My Washino San did these arrangements and the elaborate temple-style ones on the Zendō altars as well. In the library, typewriters and desks had to be stored away and the big room prepared for the newspaper people, of whom a swarm appeared.

We could prepare for everything but the weather; that we could only hope and pray for. Three days before the ceremonies, when the four gardeners arrived to put the gardens in order--to trim the bushes and grass, pick off dead blossoms and yellow leaves, rake the white sand gardens into design--the rain began, continuing with little letup for three days. The men worked regardless, in the most amazing get-ups, two of them tying themselves up from head to knees in white vinylon tablecloths, much used here in even good restaurants. Just before midnight on the sixteenth the heavens opened again for an hour or more, but when I woke the next morning at four, the air was as cool and



clear as crystal and a perfect day about to dawn.

At five o'clock all the helpers arrived. The gardeners raked the gravel paths for the last time and watered the stone walks for the arriving guests. Long stripes of matting were laid on the black tiled floors of the *Zendō* and covered passageways connecting the buildings. We had really not worried too much about the possibility of rain for we can go from one building to another, always under cover. Then the big purple silk *waku* or curtain-like hanging, bearing the crest of the Sasaki family in white--the crest of the old *Ryōsen-an* has been forgotten, so we have made the family crest of the "Restorations Founder" that of the temple--was hung over the front entrance and tied up with heavy scarlet cords and tassels. The red felt carpets always used on festive occasions were laid inside the front entrance, under the brocade cushions in the reception room, and on the tops of the raised platforms, or *tan*, that run the length of the *Zendō* on both sides. When the shelves to hold the *geta* and shoes of the guests had been set up near the entrance and, in the little house near the front gate where the boys store their scooters and bicycles, tables placed for the two priests who were to receive and record the gifts brought by the guests, we were at last ready.

The lay and foreign guests began arriving at eight o'clock. A little before nine they were in their places on the north *tan* of the *Zendō*, having entered through the rear door. At exactly ten minutes before nine, the clerical guests, who had first assembled at the *Honzan*, came in a procession according to their rank. They walked through the house and the library to the *Zendō*, entering this through the front door. The visiting *Kanchōs* and *Rōshis* with their attendants were seated on the south *tan*, which eventually had to take care of the overflow of ordinary guests also. For *Gotō Rōshi* a special seat of honor had been prepared on the north *tan*, close to the *Manjusri* altar. The *Kanchō* of *Daitoku-ji* took his place before this altar, the Chief Secretary stood by his side, and the *Daitoku-ji* priests stood in two lines along the *tans* facing

the center of the room. I stood directly in front of *Gotō Rōshi*, wearing the long plum colored dress you who came to the Institute in earlier days have so often seen me wear, and also a *rakusu* presented to me by *Gotō Rōshi*. In spite of the ten years that have passed the dress still fitted, I am happy to say.

The service opened with the Chief Secretary reading a formal proclamation known as a *Gashi*, in which he announced the opening of *Ryōsen-an*, stated the appreciation of *Daitoku-ji* for my work, and welcomed me into the *Daitoku-ji* priesthood. Then he presented me with the *koromo*. I immediately left the *Zendō*, put the *koromo* over my dress, and returned to stand at the bottom of the line of *Daitoku-ji* priests. In the meanwhile the *Kanchō* had burned incense before *Manjusri* and bowed formally three times, kneeling and putting his forehead to the floor. *Sutras* were then chanted. At the conclusion the *Kanchō* read an *Ekō* to *Manjusri*, in which the names of the *sutras* chanted were stated, the virtues of Intrinsic Wisdom extolled, and a petition offered that the *Buddhadharma* might spread throughout the world, intrinsic wisdom be awakened in the adherents of the new temple, and all beings attain salvation.

Then the *Kanchō* walked to the altar above which hung the portrait of the original founder of *Ryōsen-an*. Early that morning a tray of specially prepared food had been placed upon it and bowls containing whipped green tea and hot water, in addition to fruit, cakes, and flowers, with which *Manjusri's* altar was also decorated. The *Kanchō* burned incense and bowed as before; then he lifted the tray of food and purified it in the smoke of the incense. *Sutras* were again chanted by the assembled priests, then an *Ekō* for the Founder read, in which his virtues were praised and respects offered to him. The first part of the ceremony was now at an end. Everyone filed out of the *Zendō* in their respective order, again the priests through the front entrance, the lay guests through the rear. After walking about the gardens, resting in the house, or chatting, they gradually drifted over to the *Honzan*.

At exactly 10 o'clock everyone

had assembled in the great Main Hall of the Honzan. The high ranking clerical guests were seated to the east of the main altar, the Daitoku-ji priests in the large area in front of it, the non-clerical guests to the west of it. Beyond the high ranking guests and in front of the altar to Daitō Kokushi, founder of Daitoku-ji, a small table covered with brocade had been placed. Behind it stood the Kanchō and, to the left of it, Gotō Rōshi and his attendant. The ceremony opened with my going forward to the table where the Kanchō, after a few words of greeting, presented me with the kesa. After bowing to him and to Gotō Rōshi, I walked out; in another room I put on the kesa, and returned to sit in the lowest place in the ranks of the Daitoku-ji priests. There I remained while they walked in an intricate pattern before the main altar reciting sutras in memory of Sōkei-an, whose tablet stood in the center of the altar just under the image of Shakamuni Buddha. Women, that is nuns, do not participate in the walking sutra-chanting. This ceremony also concluded with the reading by the Kanchō of an Ekō in homage to Sōkei-an. Since the Kanchō had already burned incense and bowed before the sutra-chanting began, Gotō Rōshi now came forward and paid his respects to Sōkei-an's tablet. I followed, then the clerical guests in turn, and Daitoku-ji priests, and finally the lay guests.

In the meanwhile I had gone alone to the altar of the Founder of Daitoku-ji. There I bowed three times, forehead on the ground, then entered into the deep recess of the altar, where only disciples in Daitō Kokushi's line may enter, and, as previously at the monastery, bowed again and burned incense before the life-sized figure seated in its depths.

Now everyone took their places for the dinner. The high ranking guests seated themselves in an open square in the east part of the room, the Daitoku-ji priests in the center, and the lay guests in the west. Monks and novices began bringing in the high red lacquer trays with red lacquer dishes always used in temple dinners. One must see such a scene with one's own eyes to realize its full beauty. Against old gold

painted screens and black and white painted sliding panels, all National Treasures, the priests sit in their purple robes and gold brocaded rakus. In front of them stand the red lacquer trays; high on the walls behind hang famous paintings from Sung and Ming China. To the side stretch the age-darkened timbers of the deep verandah, and beyond, the white sand, rocks, and trees of one of Kyoto's most famous gardens, and beyond that still farther, the misty blue outlines of the distant mountains.

Together with the leading priest of the Ryōsen-an Line and the priest of Hōshun-in, and still wearing the black koromo, heavy brown silk kesa, and carrying a rosary of coral and amber and a fan with red lacquer sticks, I went to each of the three groups in turn. While the ranking priest expressed to the guests my profound thanks for their attendance, I knelt, my closed fan before me and my head on the tatami. Even had I been able to speak Japanese well, I would have done the same, for the host, as I was that day, always bows thus before his guests and has someone else speak for him.

When the whipped tea and pink and white cakes that always conclude such a dinner had been served, the gifts were distributed; the rakus in boxes tied with red and white cords because, as gifts in honor of the opening of Ryōsen-an, the occasion was joyous; the furoshikis in boxes tied with white and yellow cords, since for any gift connected with death these are always used; boxes of fat white and pink iced cakes, always presented on a happy occasion; and a copy of "Zen, A Religion," which I had had printed in memory of this event. The clerical guests were all given, in addition, folded envelopes tied with red and white cord containing gifts of money, the amount depending upon their rank.

Now little white wood boxes, wrapping paper, string, and white cotton furoshikis were handed around. As usual, much more food had been served than could possibly be consumed at one sitting. When everything had been neatly wrapped in the white furoshikis, the guests gradually took their leave. By one o'clock, divested of

my formal attire, I was sitting in a back room drinking plain tea and "hashing over" the party with some of my fellow priests.

When I finally returned to Ryōsen-an I found the tokonoma in the reception room piled high with boxes and a carefully written list of the gifts and their donors made by the two priests who had received them for me. The gifts included paintings, calligraphy, and brocade for Ryōsen-an, cakes, incense, fans, and rosaries for myself personally, and money, perhaps the most popular of all gifts in Japan, to the amount of over 100,000 yen or \$300. This, of course, has been deposited in a permanent fund for Ryōsen-an.

But my day was not yet over. About four in the afternoon Kobori San came over and we began wrapping and inscribing the gifts that must be presented within the following two days: to my two teachers, Gotō Rōshi and the Kanchō; to the Chief Secretary; to the priests in the Secretariat who had helped with the preparations; to the priests of the Ryōsen-an Line who had come down from Tokyo; to several other Daitoku-ji priests who had done some special service to me; to the Kanchōs and Rōshis of the other Rinzai temples in Kyoto. Most of these gifts were of money, but those to the last group were of a rare kind of incense used only by eminent priests. It was late in the evening when we finished our work.

The next morning at seven, dressed for making afternoon calls, I was standing with Washino San at the gate of the Chief Secretary's temple. He was out sweeping his garden. I heard later that day that, on the previous morning at six, he and the Kanchō had themselves swept the main walk between the Honzan and Ryōsen-an. I considered that the greatest indication of their respect that either could have offered me.

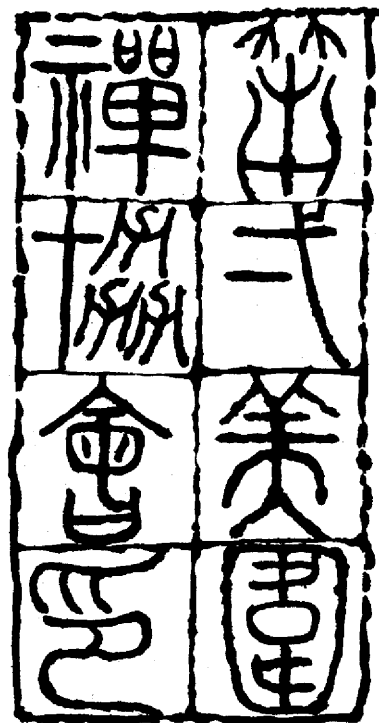
The last of the Tokyo priests, who had been staying at Ryōsen-an, said good-bye after breakfast on the morning of the 19th. By that evening the formal calls had all been made and the final gifts all presented. The ceremonies were at an end. Now all that seemed to remain was to take out of the kura and the closets the things that had been temporarily put away and get back to usual everyday living.

But I had forgotten the callers that must be received in the days that were to follow and the endless stream of letters that must be answered. That is being quite an undertaking, too.

Paul F. Sasaki

Ryōsen-an, Daitoku-ji, June 3, 1958
Issued with ZEN NOTES, Vol. V, No. 7

For our special combined issue of ZEN NOTES and LETTER FROM KYOTO we called on two artists unfamiliar to our readers. Hide Oshiro made the sketches of the maku and Sasaki crest on pages 2 and 3. Irving Group, an American artist specializing in carving Han seals shows his Chinese training by his selection of seal characters to write the name of our new Kyoto branch on this page. Chinese writers use the character for a word which means "beautiful" to denote America, whereas Japanese use one which means "rice" and suggests prosperity. The photo of Mrs. Sasaki at Ryosen-an is by Kyoto Press.



伴 扶
歸 過
無 斷
月 橋
村 水

*Tasukete wa dankyō no mizu o sugi
Tomonatte wa mugetsu no mura ni kaeru*

Supported by it,
I pass over the water by the broken bridge:
With it as my companion,
I return to the moonless village.

BASHŌ Oshō, addressing the assembly, said: "If you had a staff, I would give you a staff. If you had no staff, I would take a staff away from you."

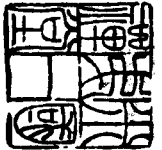
MUMON says: Supported by it, I pass over the water by the broken bridge. With it as my companion, I return to the moonless village. If you were to call it a staff, you would go straight to hell with the speed of an arrow.

The depth and the shallowness of the world
Both are within the palm of my hand.
It supports heaven, it sustains the earth;
Everywhere it spreads the tidings of our sect.

Mumonkan 44

Published monthly by
THE FIRST ZEN INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, INC.
156 Waverly Place, New York 14, New York

zen notes
Copyright 1958 by The First
Zen Institute of America, Inc.



Vol. V, No. 7, July 1958
1 year \$1.00
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright of Zen Notes is the property of the First Zen Institute of America, Inc., and its content may not be copied or e-mailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download or e-mail articles for individual use.

Founded in 1930 by Sokei-an Sasaki	First Zen Institute of America 113 E30 Street New York, New York 10016 (212)-686-2520 www.firstzen.org
	
會 協 禪 一 第 國 美	