

# ZEN NOTES



SESSHIN On December 8th, 1959, nineteen persons were admitted to the Sangha of Buddha on the occasion of the celebration of the Buddha's Enlightenment Day, following participation in our first Rohatsu O Sesshin with Miura Roshi, December 1st through 7th.

As you may already have noted, when Zen people reminisce, sesshins tend to be a common subject. In the December issue of ZEN NOTES, we brought you the impressions of some students who took part in our first summer sesshin. Gary Snyder, a Kyoto branch student, has written a detailed account of how a spring sesshin in Japan looked to him. It appeared in the very interesting summer 1958 issue of the CHICAGO REVIEW. For Ruth Sasaki's account of her part in a Rohatsu O Sesshin, see ZEN NOTES, Vol. I, No. 3. Vanessa Coward's record of her impressions of a Rohatsu O Sesshin appeared in ZEN NOTES, Vol. V, No. 12. A vivid picture of a comparable Chinese Seven-Days may be drawn from the Discourses of the recently deceased Master Hsu Yun in Chen-chi Chang's book *THE PRACTICE OF ZEN* (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1959).

Miura Roshi described his own first sesshins in an autobiographical sketch in ZEN NOTES, Vol. II, No. 7. In this issue another side of the picture is presented: how the newcomer looks to the timekeeper. In this particular case the newcomer was Mrs. Sasaki, the timekeeper Miura Roshi, and the time twenty-six years ago.

THE FOUR VOWS are reprinted in Miura Roshi's characters, this time with their roman-letter readings between the lines and English key words added to help you identify the characters with the meanings used in the translation. The character-compounds are not indicated, but can be readily identified by reference to the italicized roman-letter text. Of the 19 different characters used in writing The Vow you might like to note the following especially. If you pursue the study of Zen, you will encounter them many times, and they happen to be characters relatively easy to recognize, write, and remember.

佛 Buddha 門 Gate 無  
Butsu Mon Mu

Frequently a negating syllable which has been translated in ZEN NOTES variously as "without, not, -less, un-, no, im-, non-."

*The first remarks addressed to the members of The First Zen Institute of America by Isshu Miura Roshi at a public meeting, April 20, 1955.*

INNEN       As it was through the workings of Buddha's great karmic relations that I was invited to The First Zen Institute of America, and that I have come here from a far-away land and could meet you in person, I should like on this occasion to tell you about my special relationship with one of your members which brought this about.

Though it was in the spring of 1932 that Mrs. Sasaki first came to the zendo of Nanzen-ji in Kyoto, it was the autumn of 1933 that we first practiced together. That year I was acting as *jikijitsu*, that is, the head monk who measures the periods of zazen in the zendo and oversees the practice of the other monks, during the winter term, the severest period of all the seasons. Whenever I saw Mrs. Sasaki sitting in the zendo I could not but be very sceptical. Can this American woman, who is unaccustomed to the ways of Japanese life and completely inexperienced in sitting, really sit, I thought. Or will she run away after a month or two, having had enough of it? Probably this lady, having read a few books on Zen, has the whimsical notion that, if she practices a little zazen, she can attain satori in no time. At any rate, if she really has come to the zendo with such a frivolous idea, the minds of the monks will be distracted and their practice greatly interfered with. Therefore I, as the *jikijitsu*, who was responsible for the morale of the monks, tried hard not to miss a single movement she made in the zendo.

A month went on like this and two months, without her showing the least inattentiveness. On the contrary, it seemed to me that her earnestness in practicing sitting increased day by day.

And then at last, on December first, came Rohatsu O Sesshin. I think all of you already know what this Rohatsu O Sesshin is. But for those of you who do not, I shall say that this is the week of zazen practice we hold in commemora-

4

佛

*Butsudō*  
Buddha Wisdom

3

法

*Hōmon*  
Dharma gates

2

煩

*Bonnō*  
Worldly desires

1

衆

*Shujō*  
Sentient beings

道

門

惱

生

無

無

無

無

上

量

盡

邊

*mujō*  
no higher

*muryō*  
countless

*mujin*  
endless

*mūhen*  
numberless

誓

誓

誓

誓

願

*seigan*  
vow

願

*seigan*  
vow

願

*seigan*  
vow

願

*seigan*  
vow

成

*jō*  
attain

學

*gaku*  
practice

斷

*dan*  
end

度

*do*  
enlighten

tion of Sakyamuni's having attained his Great Enlightenment on December the eighth, so it is said, when, sitting under the Bodhi Tree, he gazed upon the morning star. For us, students of Zen, this is the most important period of practice in the entire year. No one who has not sat through Rohatsu O Sesshin can understand the reverence in which we hold it. Even now I become tense whenever I hear the word Rohatsu.

As Nanshinken Roshi of Nanzen-ji Sodo at that time had the reputation of being the most severe of all the Sodo Roshis in Japan, I was certain that Mrs. Sasaki, however serious she might have been at first, eventually would be "finished" in Rohatsu and flee. Although I am now ashamed to confess that I had such an impertinent idea about her, the question of how many days she would last was my main interest at that time.

About thirty-five monks were then practicing zazen in the zendo. Since her seat in the zendo was in the far corner diagonally opposite mine, I used to watch her slightest movement. I am sure she must have thought what an unpleasant man I was. It is my experience that the severest part of Rohatsu O Sesshin is the first two or three days. Usually those kojis (lay-students) who come into the Sodo from outside and who are not extremely earnest persons slip away after about three days without our noticing it. Therefore I thought Mrs. Sasaki, also, would probably disappear from the zendo about the same time. But fortunately I was mistaken. She sat through the entire O Sesshin without any difficulty, and with the same sincere enthusiasm as that of the monks. In fact, perhaps more. There is nothing quite like the exultant feeling we have on the dawn of December eighth. I suppose Mrs. Sasaki's rejoicing at having sat through this Rohatsu successfully must have been as great as that of the rest of us.

It was only after this time that I first came to realize the depth of the eagerness to practice zazen which had brought her all the long distance to Japan. And it was only after this Rohatsu that our friendly conversations began. From that time until today I have enjoyed an es-

pecially happy friendship with her. And it is this very friendship that has brought about my coming here to meet you tonight. All this is, I am sure, because of the karmic relationship which binds me to Mrs. Sasaki.

Now I should like to ask a favor of you. It is this: Will you please memorize the *Shiku no seigan*, the "Four Vows."

It is these Four Vows that all Buddhists not only recite every morning and evening but wish to remember and realize throughout their entire lifetime. I am sure the older members of this Institute must know them by heart. Such members I want to ask to recite them once more with a fresh feeling. And the younger members I want to ask to memorize them above everything else.

This is *the* Vow. It is true that my being here is largely because of various karmic relations. But fundamentally it is due to this Vow that I am here. Therefore, if you will be good enough to establish this particular Vow firmly in your hearts, my purpose in coming will be more than fulfilled.

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V  
O  
W

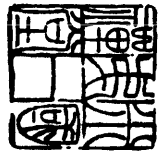
<i>Shujō muhen seigando</i>	Sentient beings are numberless I take a vow to enlighten them all
<i>Bonnō mujin seigandan</i>	Worldly desires are endless I take a vow to uproot them all
<i>Hōmon muryō seingangaku</i>	The gates of Dharma are manifold I take a vow to enter them all
<i>Butsudō mujō seiganjō</i>	The goal of Wisdom is ever beyond I take a vow to attain it

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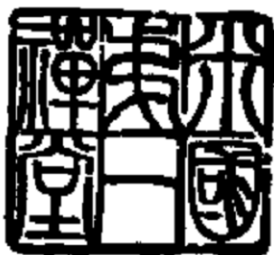
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