

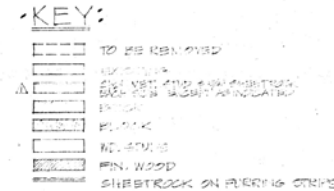


紐約禪堂
New York zen Do

NEW YORK
ZEN DO
SHOBO-JI

THE FIRST
50
YEARS

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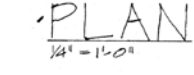
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CONTENTS

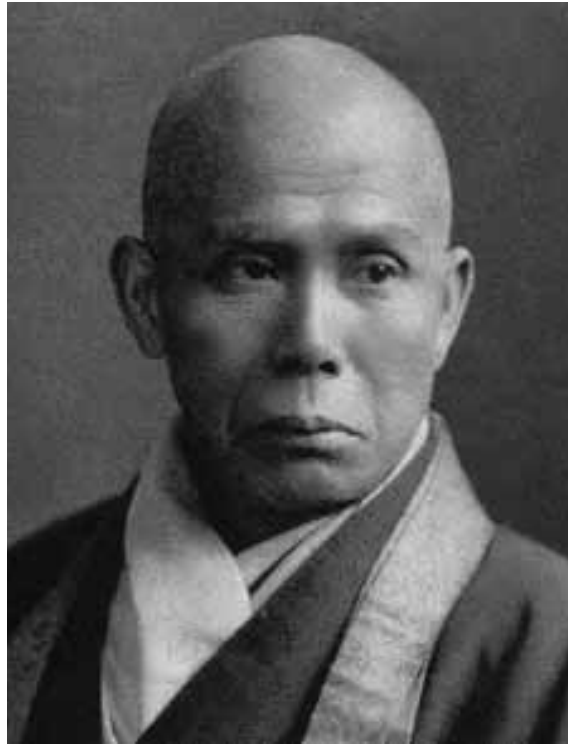
CHAPTER 1	
The Road to New York Zendo Shobo-ji	4
 CHAPTER 2	
Eido Tai Shimano Roshi Memorial	18
 CHAPTER 3	
An Interview with Shinge Sherry Chayat Roshi	20
 CHAPTER 4	
New York Zendo Shobo-ji Reflections	36



The Road to New York Zendo Shobo-ji

This chapter uses passages from old letters, newsletters, and other historical documents to sketch the story of the birth of the Zen Studies Society and the transformation, occurring from the end of 1967 through the beginning of 1969, of an old carriage house on East 67th Street into New York Zendo Shobo-ji. All language from the historical documents is reproduced verbatim; writers are identified at the start of the passages if known (many articles in the newsletters are unsigned).

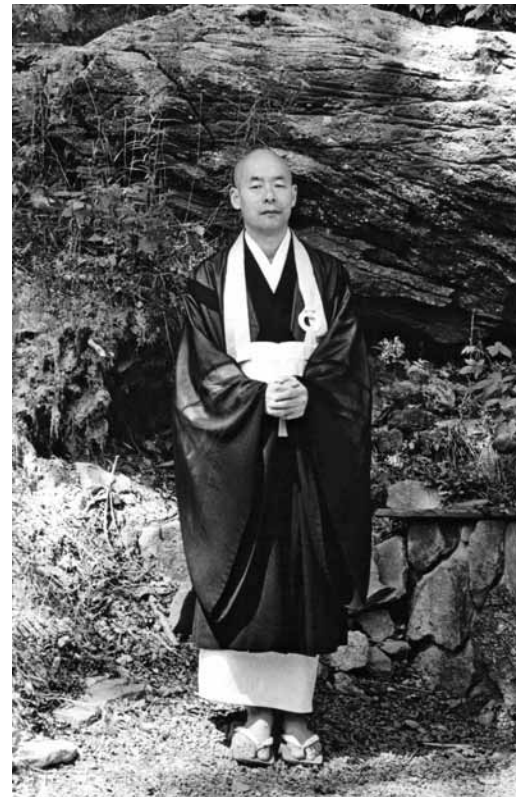
In one sense Shobo-ji (Temple of True Dharma) is the flower of Dharma activity on two continents over the course of a century. Through the concern of Soyen Shaku Roshi, who came to America in 1893 to attend the World Parliament of Religions, attention began to focus on the possibility of transmitting Zen Buddhism to the West. Two of his students, D.T. Suzuki and Nyogen Senzaki, seemed best suited to take up this challenge in the early years. Using his superior intellectual gifts and understanding of Western culture to their fullest, Dr. D.T. Suzuki published the most comprehensive collection of books and essays on Zen to date, thus establishing Zen Buddhism as a legitimate field of inquiry among



Western intellectuals. Nyogen Senzaki also wrote books, but his focus was from the first on practice, and to this end he accepted a small number of students.

In 1956 The Zen Studies Society was incorporated to aid D.T. Suzuki in his efforts to introduce Zen Buddhism to the West. Some twenty years before, the poems of an obscure Japanese monk had attracted the attention of Nyogen Senzaki who had then been living for many years in Los Angeles. The close relationship which grew between Nyogen Senzaki and the poet Soen Nakagawa was

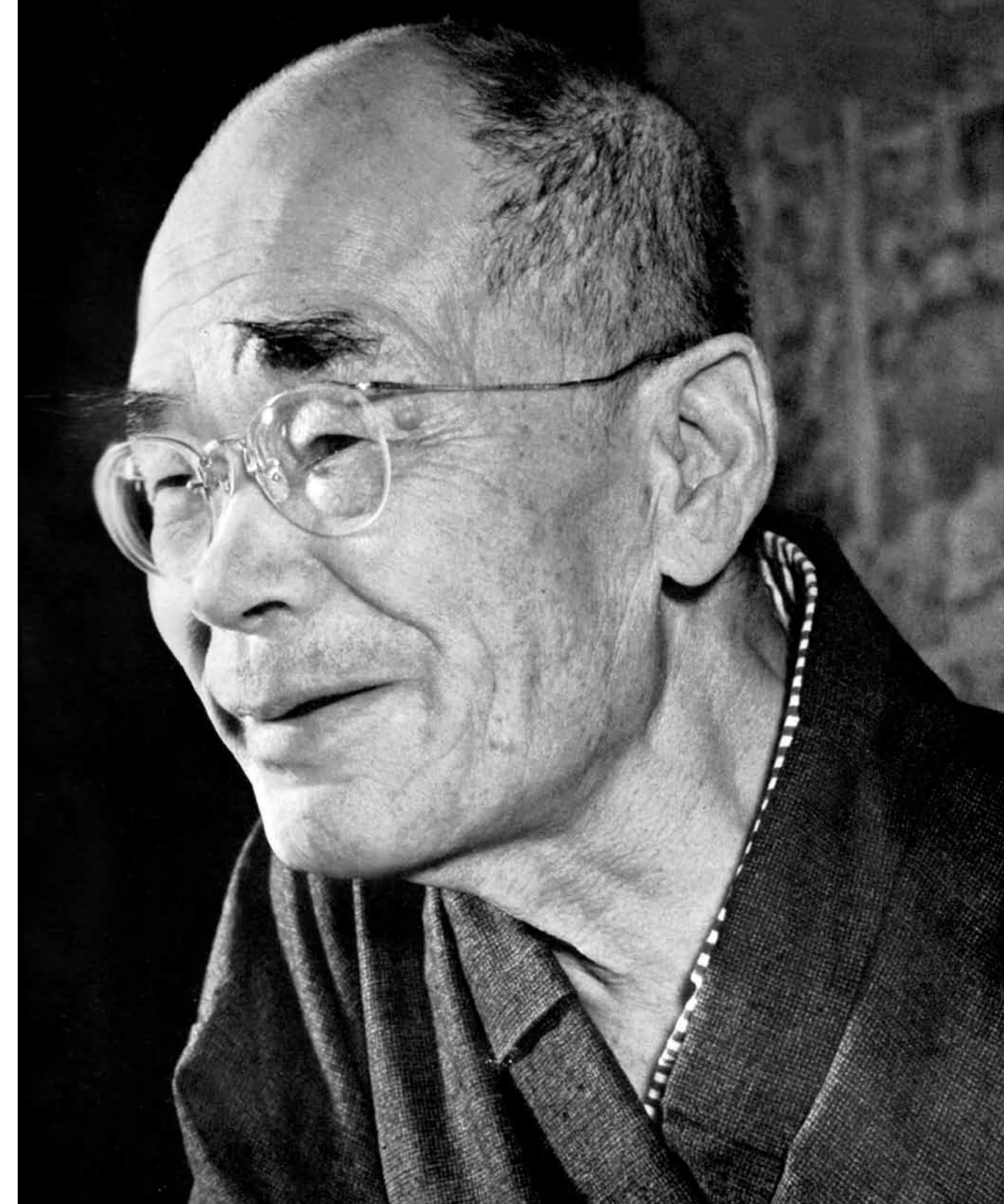
later to result in Soen Roshi's frequent trips to America with his friend and fellow teacher Yasutani Roshi. In 1964, after accompanying his teachers Soen and Yasutani on several "sesshin tours" of the U.S., Eido Roshi (then Tai-san) came to live permanently in New York. In 1965 he became president of The Zen Studies Society and its goal became to establish a living tradition of Zen Buddhist practice in America. **From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 1989**



Eido Roshi I had been told that it was important for an organization of a religious and educational nature to have tax-exempt status. However, when I consulted a lawyer, his estimate of the costs sounded enormous. Even so, despite my discouragement, I was very eager for such an organization to be established. Quite by chance I recalled the existence of The Zen Studies Society, which had been incorporated to help Dr. Suzuki's work while he was teaching at Columbia University. My friend Dr. Bernard Phillips was one of its board members, and so I got in touch with him.

In March, at the suggestion of Dr. Phillips, I went to see George Yamaoka, a lawyer representing Cornelius Crane, the president and founder of The Zen Studies Society, Inc. Bernard was the vice-president and Mr. Yamaoka was secretary of the Society, which had been incorporated in 1956 by Mr. Crane. The purpose of the Society, as described in its bylaws, was to introduce the cultural, educational and spiritual aspects of Zen Buddhism to the West. After Dr. Suzuki's return to Japan, and Mr. Crane's death in 1962, The Zen Studies Society became

Photo this page: D.T. Suzuki. Opposite page: left, Soen Shaku; right, Eido Shimano Roshi.



inactive, although it remained a legal entity. The Zen Studies Society at that time had no Zendo, no property and no real activity to speak of. It was an organization without any tangible entity: a Sunyata organization. In fact, there is no organization which is not Sunyata, but this one was particularly Void. There was no president, there were no funds, no power drive, no anything—true Sunyata! Mr. Yamaoka seemed very happy to have me as a board member. As soon as I signed, he resigned. There was nothing for him to turn over to me and there was nothing to take over. This dramatic transaction was one of the most unforgettable lessons for me.

Dr. Phillips and myself, Sylvan Busch and several others from among the original New York group were The Zen Studies Society—a penniless organization, but now filled with great aspiration. ***From Namu Dai Bosa, “Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu,” by Eido Shimano Roshi***

Until January 1, 1969 (the date of the first “sitting” at New York Zendo Shobo-ji), the New York Sangha had been sitting at the apartment leased to the young Zen priest Tai-san on West End Avenue. Space was woefully limited. Sometimes people were



turned away for lack of room, and no money was available to move to larger quarters. At this juncture, help—help in abundance—came from a Bodhisattva friend of the Dharma. He promised the Zen Studies Society an extraordinarily generous sum of money with which to purchase a building of its own. ***From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 1989***

Eido Roshi Suddenly the pattern of our life had changed. Now a “firm, permanent Zendo in the city” seemed possible. We began to look for a place. First we thought of a brownstone house, but brownstones are usually located in residential areas. Zoning regulations prohibit an institution such as The Zen Studies Society, Inc.,

from operating in those areas. Also, a brownstone, being constructed primarily for living quarters, would not provide the space we needed for a Zendo.

We gave up that idea and began searching for a loft. Here the problem was not space, but location. Most lofts are in noisy business and industrial areas. We gave up on that idea too.

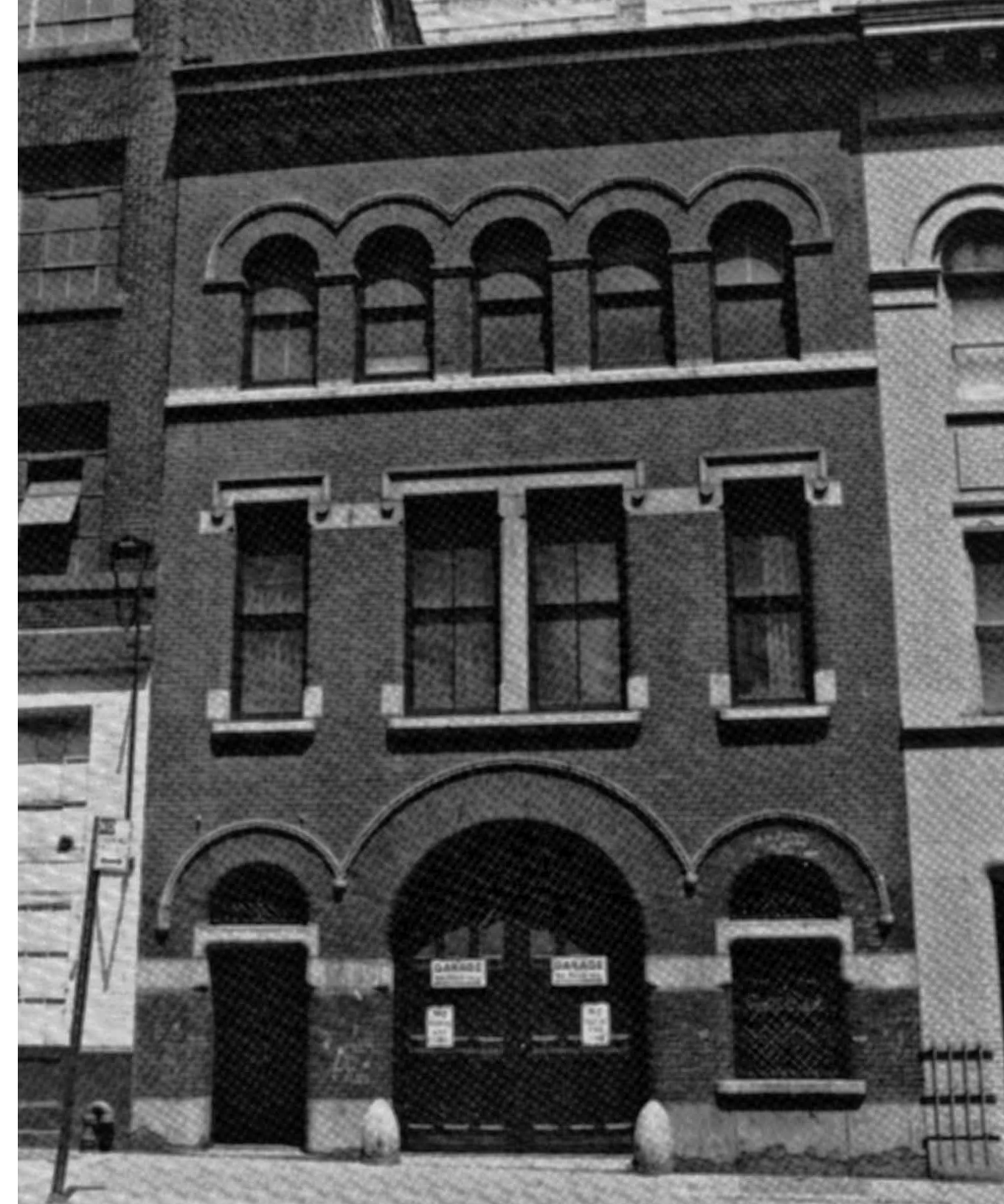
After seeing many buildings, we came to the conclusion that the only solution would be to find a carriage house. The plan was to buy and renovate such a building, but even though my friend’s contribution had been very generous, we knew that it might not be enough. Nevertheless, we went to look at about five carriage houses in Manhattan. None was the right size or in the right location. Then, on December 24, 1967, we had an appointment at 3 pm with a real estate broker to see a carriage house on East 67 Street, between Second and Third Avenues. As soon as we saw it, we felt, “This is it!” ***From Namu Dai Bosa, “Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu,” by Eido Shimano Roshi***

When in the final month of 1967 the Reverend Eido Tai Shimano and fellow members of the building search committee came upon the 3-story building,

they knew at once it would become NY Zendo Shobo-ji—Temple of True Dharma. It bore two signs on its shabby exterior. Both said “Garage.” Once a place for horses and carriages, it would become home to the greater vehicle of Mahayana Zen Buddhism. The building was well suited to its new purpose, for the long space where horses had stamped and cars had fumed lent itself to a zendo: two lines of sitting cushions running down low platforms of tatami. There was a messy yard in back that could become a Japanese rock garden. Upstairs was space for meeting rooms, a Dharma hall, kitchen and bedrooms—just enough, not more.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 1989

Eido Roshi To design an appropriate zendo for Americans was a challenging, but useful experience. The first question was whether we should follow Rinzai style Zen or Soto tradition. We decided to follow neither, but to construct one which would be appropriate to both. However, the architect did not know anything about either Rinzai or Soto. In fact he had never even seen a zendo, which is of course quite normal in America. It would therefore be a very challenging job for him too. After many,

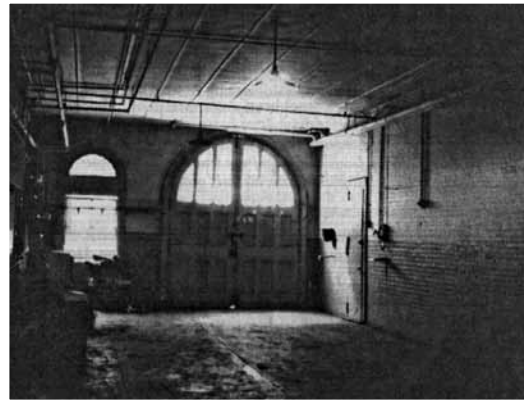


many meetings and consultations, we were able to come to an agreement, and in May we submitted our architectural plan to The Building Department of New York City.

It took more than a month to get an alteration permit. One of the interesting things that happened was that the Building Department at first refused to approve our plan because they felt that a “Tea Room” on the second floor was inappropriate since we were not applying for a restaurant permit. Actually, “Tea Room” means to me, Chashitsu, Japanese Ceremonial Tea Room. This was a good experience since all of the misunderstanding between man and man or man and action are from the different interpretations of one word. When I translate something from an Oriental language into English quite often I discover that what I mean is not exactly what English-speaking people mean. The matter of the “Tea Room” is a good example.

From a letter to donors and Sangha members dated January 1, 1969

Architect Yar Kunycia When, in 1967, Vito Tricarico introduces me to Sylvan Busch and Tai-san in the drafting area of Tricarico Associates on Fifty-second Street, Tai-san breaks out into laughter,



“Ah, konichiwa!” My last name sounds like “hello, good day” in Japanese. I see it as an auspicious beginning. The project is a zendo in a carriage house on Manhattan’s East Side. And I get to be known as Mr. Konichiwa.

Tai-san (as Eido Roshi was then known) lets it be known that the place will be a combination of east and west. We visit the West Side Zendo and learn what a tatami is, what a sesshin involves. We survey the carriage house; an empty garage with a high ceiling on the ground floor, a backyard, a second floor, and upstairs rooms that make up the third story. Piles of *Vanity Fair* and *Life* magazines with dates ending before the second world war and

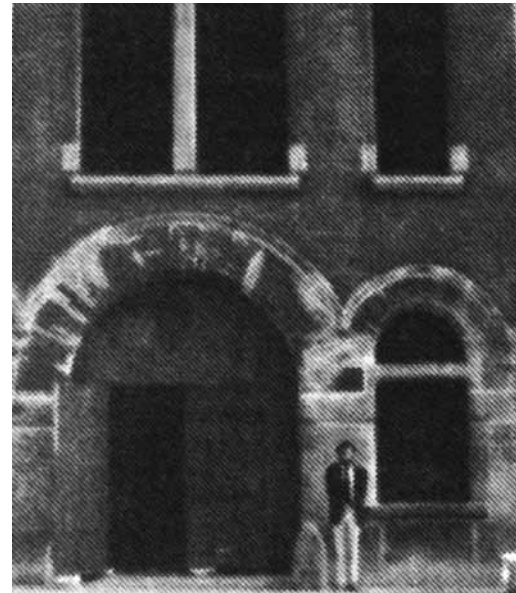
This page: above, the carriage house; right, Yar Kunycia outside carriage house. Opposite page: The Chashitsu “tea room,” actually the dokusan room on the second floor.

picture frames, now removed, leave ghost shadows on the walls. The place is dry, dusty, and waiting for new use.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall/Winter 1998

Eido Roshi The transformation of a carriage house to a zendo needed much more than a physical renovation. We could still feel the spirit of an exhausted horse and its old carriage. There were many negative vibrations. But because these too have Buddha-nature, the spiritual transformation was possible.

From Namu Dai Bosa, “Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu,” by Eido Shimano Roshi



Aiho Yasuko Shimano On the third day of the third month [of 1968] at three o'clock in the afternoon, we held a purification ceremony, offering incense and chanting "Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo" thirty-three times with intense nen. "Let True Dharma Continue." The building had been vacant for many years and needed lots of work. In the rundown backyard were two trees. They reminded us of the twin sala trees under which Shakyamuni Buddha entered Parinirvana. It seemed a wonderful place for deep zazen practice and Roshi thought it would be fitting to create a Zen stone garden there. He and Bill started to search for an appropriate stone. One day when they went to Pennsylvania, where Bill was a vice president with Bethlehem Steel Corporation, they found the large rock which is in the garden now. It weighs four tons and a truck had to drive through the empty



building to bring it from the street to the garden. The smaller stones on the right were from Bill's house.
From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter 1992

On June 25, the renovation work to transform the old garage into a Zen temple began. We were so excited and went every day to see what was going on. One day a worker who was knocking down walls with a hammer said to me proudly, "Do you know? We are renovating this building into a beautiful Zen Buddhist Temple," as if I were just a passerby. I wasn't sure he knew what a Zen temple was, but nonetheless, I was so pleased that the workmen felt such pride and joy about the project.
From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter 1992

Eido Roshi On July 16th, our standing, wooden, 700 year old Buddha (Endless Dimension Universal Life Buddha), presented by Soen Nakagawa Roshi to the New York Zendo, arrived at JFK

airport via Japan Air Lines. This Buddha brought us good fortune and I believe it will support the new zendo.
From a letter to donors and Sangha members dated January 1, 1969

Soen Roshi, the abbot of Ryutaki-ji, where Tai-san had done much of his training, went to what he called "the hidden part" of the enormous altar in the Dharma Hall of his hilltop temple. He remembered seeing there among various stored objects a gently smiling Buddha, standing about four feet high. No one knew how it had come to Ryutaki-ji, or whether it was Chinese or Korean.
From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 1989

This smiling wooden Buddha is neither Shakyamuni Buddha, Amitaba Buddha, Kwanyin Bodhisattva nor any other particular Buddha or Bodhisattva. Soen Nakagawa Roshi gave it the name of Endless Dimension Universal Life Buddha, and its hidden spiritual power inspires us deeply. It is a gift from Ryutaku-ji Monastery of Japan to the New York Zendo for its opening.
From a card distributed by Zen Studies Society (circa 1968)

This page: Bill Johnstone at door of NYZ with Tai-san at the opening ceremony. Opposite: Endless Dimension Universal Life Buddha.



The characters on this sign board [below] were written by Soen Nakagawa Roshi for the New York Zendo and were carved by his friend, Mr. Shin Segawa of Mishima City, Japan. Although they are unclear on the photograph, it has three seals: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, the three treasures of Buddhism. The wood is neither oak, camphor nor pine. It is a nameless wood which has been waiting for fifty years at the home of Mr. Sato in Tokyo to be used in some meaningful way. It will be hung over the main entrance (to the zendo).

From a card distributed by the Zen Studies Society (circa 1968)

Eido Roshi On September 15, 1968, over two hundred people gathered for the dedication and official opening of the New York Zendo Shobo-ji (Temple of True Dharma). Our joy and the beauty of the autumn day made the incompleteness of the renovations seem almost

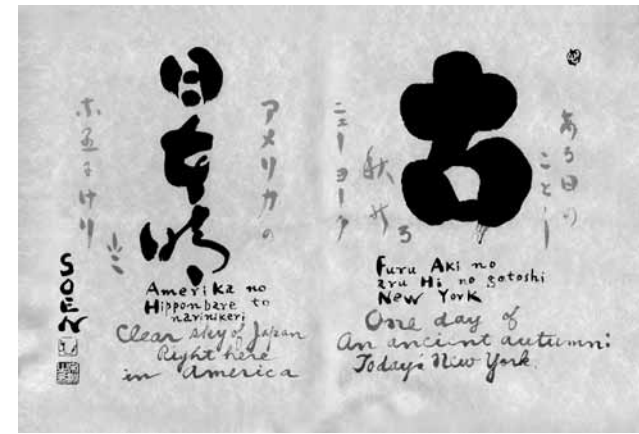
insignificant. At 10 am the ceremony began with a bamboo flute melody. After the chanting was over, Soen Roshi offered two haiku.

From Namu Dai Bosa, “Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu,” by Eido Shimano Roshi

Aiho Yasuko Shimano At last we had the opening ceremony. Buddha, Dharma and Sangha were gathered together. Shunryu Suzuki Roshi sent a beautiful stone from Tassajara by airmail. Among the many gifts for the opening were calligraphies by Soen Roshi and Yasutani Roshi and a yellow incense box from my sister in Japan. I wore a “tomesode” kimono, a traditional celebration dress. Eido Roshi was 36 years old and I was 33.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter 1992

ER: I sent an invitation to him [Shunryu Suzuki Roshi] to attend the opening



ceremony and he was almost—not so sure—it was possible that he would come. I was hoping that he would show up, but instead a huge rock came from Tassajara. We went to Kennedy Airport and picked it up.

DC: Yeah, it was a big box. It weighed 650 pounds or so. I remember Suzuki Roshi finding it in the creek and Paul Disco building a box for it and we put it on the truck at Tassajara.

ER: It came by air mail so I interpreted it to be Suzuki Roshi’s manifestation, and I treated it as though it was Suzuki Roshi. This was when my first zendo

This page: left, sign board with Soen Roshi’s calligraphy; above, Soen Roshi’s haiku for the official opening. Opposite page: above, Tassajara rock on tatami; right, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. Photo courtesy of San Francisco Zen Center.

was opened. Soen Roshi, Yasutani Roshi, Sasaki Roshi, Maezumi Roshi came.

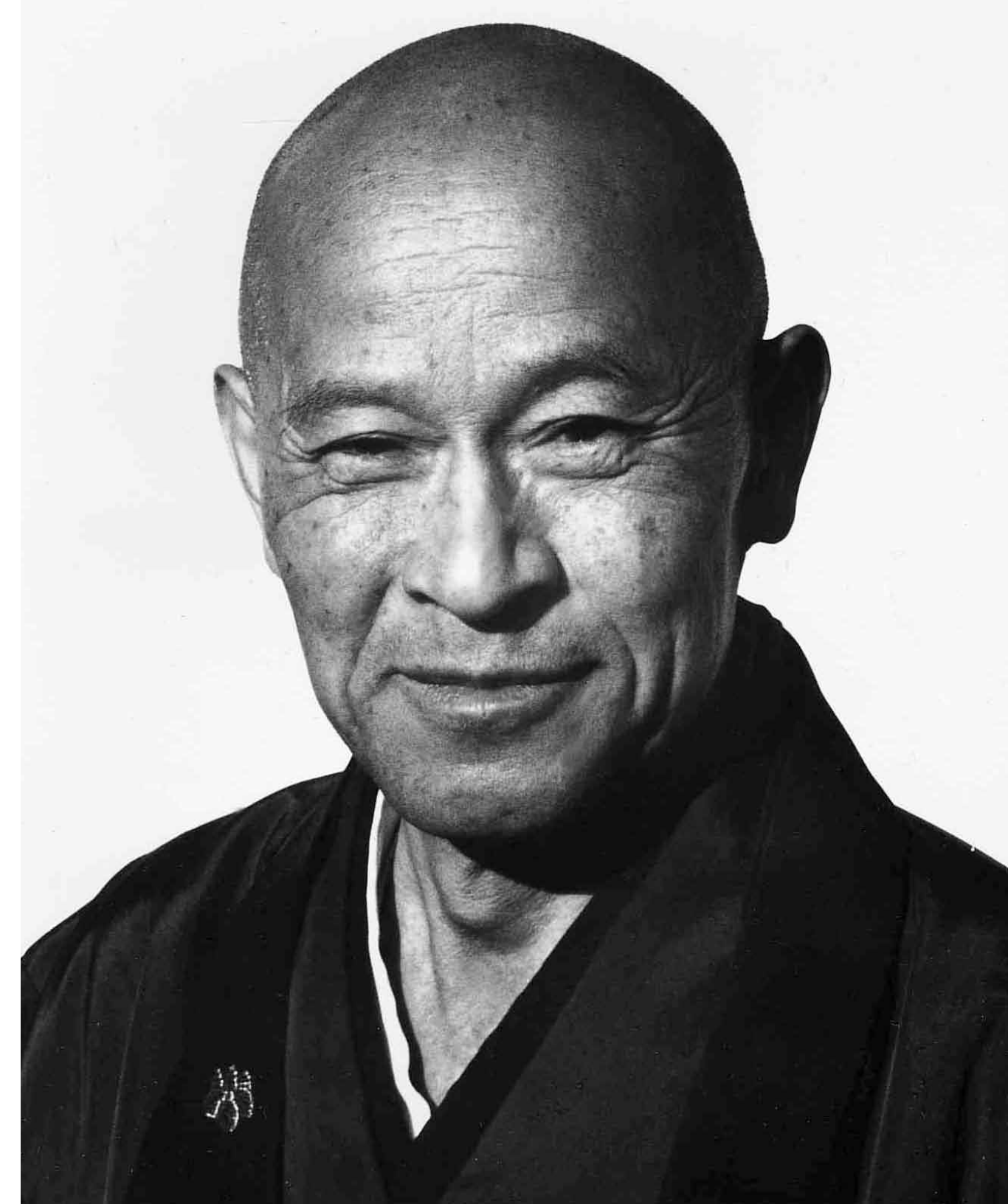
From an interview with Eido Roshi by David Chadwick. From Crooked Cucumber: The Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki.



Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Catholic Benedictine Monk

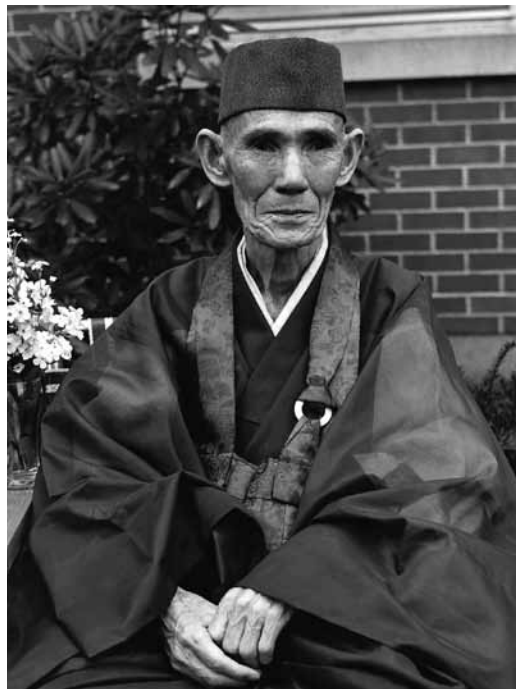
September 15 was a silent, sunny Sunday morning in New York. The remodeling of the zendo building was not complete, but far advanced, and the dirty backyard of a few weeks ago had been transformed into a beautiful little garden. Chairs were set up in the zendo for about 130 people. One knew more or less everybody, and there was a certain feeling of belonging together.

While we were silently waiting, one could catch glimpses of the garden whenever the shoji-screen behind



the altar opened a little. When the preparation bell rang—it was a recent gift and this was its first official use—another bell answered it and was in turn answered by a bell that seemed a great distance away. This dialogue of bells opened up whole eons and enormous depths of space.

To the sound of a bamboo flute the four guest priests entered: Joshu Sasaki Roshi of Los Angeles, Rev. Hakuyu Maezumi of Los Angeles, Rev. Kan of the Buddhist Academy in New York, and Rev. Boris Erwitt of the Buddhist Fellowship in New



York. Suzuki Roshi and the West Coast Sangha were represented by a beautiful rock they had sent. It arrived the day before the opening and at first we wanted to place it on a cushion amidst the visiting priests. It ended up near the altar and looked wonderfully alive and fresh from the water that had been poured over it. The moss was as green as if it had come right out of Tassajara Creek.

Soen Roshi, who had been fasting in preparation for this event since the beginning of the month, came in radiating something which is hard to describe—that “after the bath” feeling which we all know, comes closest to it. He offered ceremonial tea to the Buddha in perfect co-ordination with the sound of the bamboo flute and with marvelously powerful gestures.

Then Tai-san went out (like an arrow in slow motion) to bring in Yasutani Roshi. The Roshi approached the altar, offered incense and recited the following poem:

*Three-story brick building
changed into a Zendo.*

Let us now continue the true Dharma.

*Who knows the real meaning
of today's dedication?*

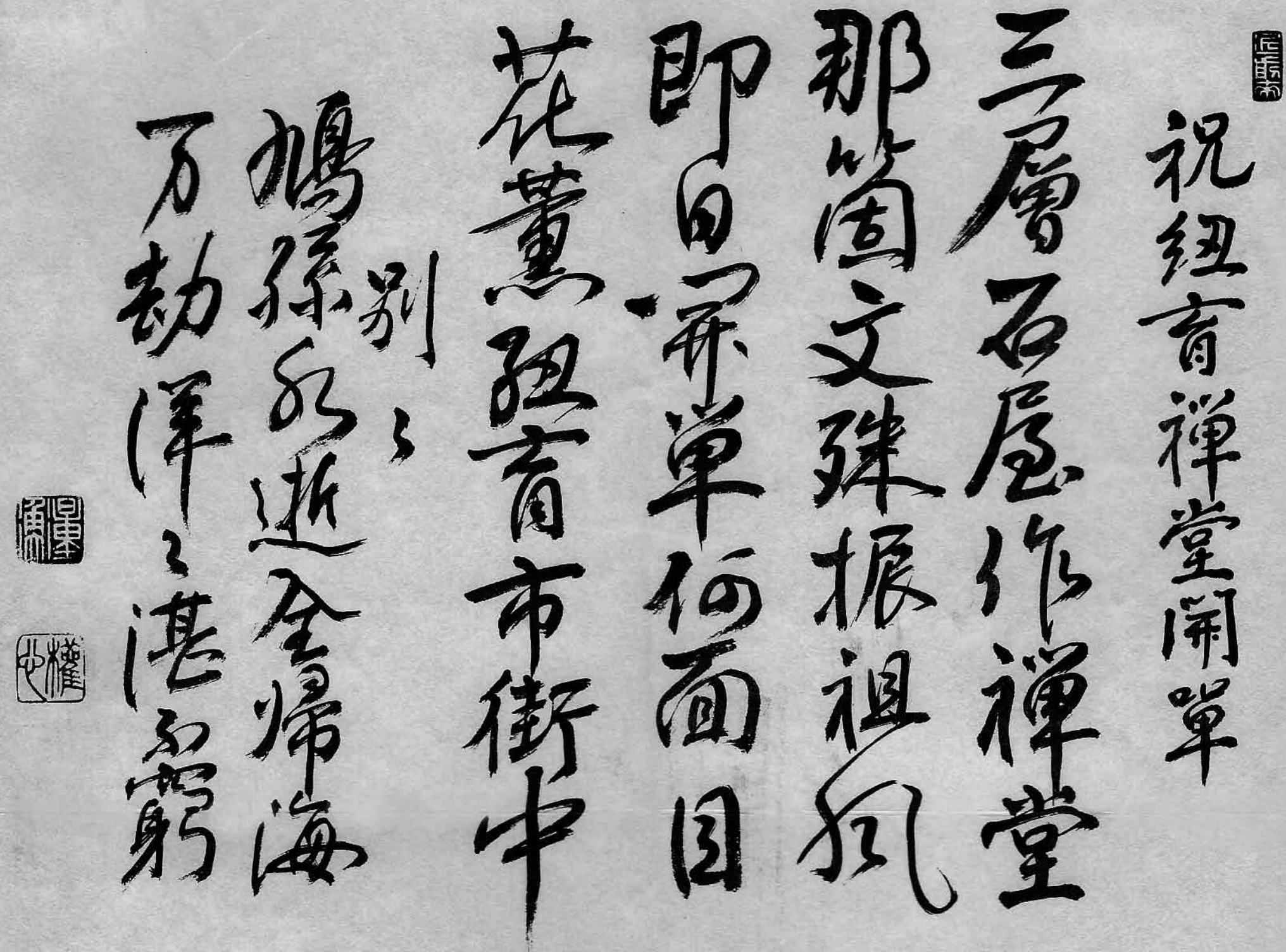
*A new flower opened in the midst
of New York.*

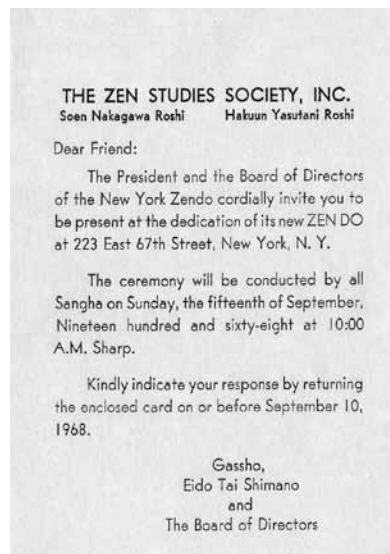
His voice sounded ancient but powerful, and the last word *naka* (in the midst of) came out with the thrust of a bud in early spring or with the impact of a meteorite.

Then everyone began chanting the Heart Sutra and all the priests offered incense, Yasutani Roshi bowed three times to the ground, and Soen Roshi pronounced the dedication, starting with The Buddha of Endless Dimension Universal Life. Next the ashes of Nyogen Senzaki Sensei were enshrined permanently on the altar. During the dedication the playful and singing voices of children came in from the street. There was no sound of cars in Midtown Manhattan on this Sunday morning; only these joyful shouts in the distance, a background of spring-like promise.

After the dedication Henri Leighton introduced Tai-san as the “man who dreams for others and whose dreams come true” and Tai-san in a muted lion’s voice gave a sermon. He thanked all who had made this day possible; he outlined the history leading up to this event, from the time fifteen years ago that he became Soen Roshi’s pupil, and later was sent to Hawaii, then came

This page: Yasutani Roshi. Opposite page: Yasutani Roshi’s calligraphy of his poem recited at the ceremony.





to New York in 1962, became an American citizen, and started the first and second zendos. This is the third. He said: This zendo belongs to no one in particular, to no sect, neither Soto nor Rinzai. It is dedicated to Buddhism and just that. It is not a hall of tranquility, but a furnace-room in which we work with all our might on the combustion of our egoistic delusions. We vow to save all things—all things. Save means, negatively, not to waste (for instance water, energy, time). Positively it means to affirm the value of that which one saves, the absolute value of all things—of dust, of suffering even. Our life is a chain of millions of moments and the meaning of each moment is that we offer ourselves and so fulfill our vows.

This zendo is to be a place dedicated to the practice of this attitude, to earnest and intense practice.

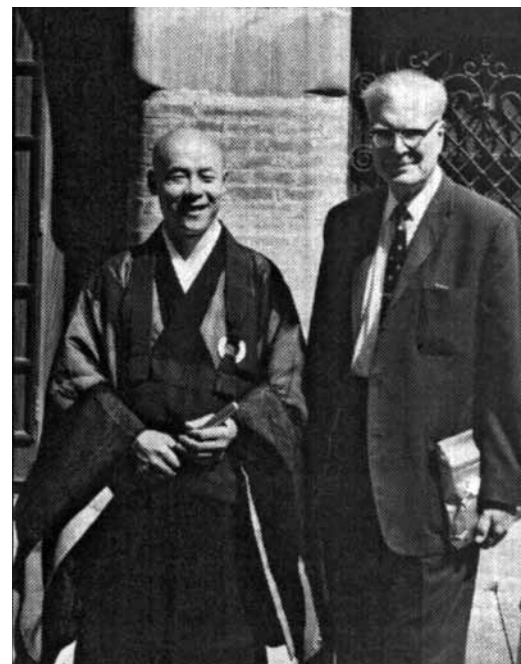
Next Mr. W. H. Johnstone spoke as friend, advisor and helper of the Zen Studies Society. On the background of the fleetingness of time he brought out the significance of today's event as cutting across time.

He referred to the history of this building, this Buddha statue, and this five hundred year old gong which still says everything it has to say in one word. Then Henri Leighton spoke a few concluding words of thanks as a member of the Board of Directors and a representative of the Sangha. All guests received gift packages containing incense, printed cloth, a little book of daily sutras, and a calligraphy by Soen Roshi; also a copy of Yasutani Roshi's poem.

Chester Carlson, to whom the New York Zendo owes so much, had come in for the ceremony. A few days later he suffered a fatal [heart attack]. The day before he died he went across the street to buy a balloon in the park.

Right away he let it fly and followed it for a long time with his eyes—smiling. If this gesture was a beautiful anticipation of his death, it is also a non-verbal expression of what Yasutani Roshi may have meant when he said: "Who knows the real meaning of today's dedication?"

From "Dedication of Zen Studies Society Zendo" from a description of the ceremony sent by Brother David: Wind Bell 68-3-4: cuke.com.



This page: left, the invitation to the opening; right, Tai-san with Chester Carlson at the opening.



49-Day Memorial
Guiding Words and Verse for
Kongo Soken Muishitsu
Eido Tai Zenzu Dai Osho

Dai Bosatsu Zendo, April 8, 2018
by Shingeshitsu Roko Sherry Chayat, Abbot

Eido Roshi! Your karma was drastically transformed on February 19, 2018, but your indefatigable spirit pervades beyond space and time. The light of your brilliant Nen will continue, radiating lifetime after lifetime.

For 85 years you traveled, conveying This Dharma from East to West. You realized your teacher's vision of a Great Bodhisattva training monastery at this very place, moving mountains.

Last O-Bon at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, you offered incense at the stupa of Soen Nakagawa Roshi and Nyogen Senzaki in Sangha Meadow; this winter, in Japan, your heart gave forth its final yet ever-resounding beat.

Now your formless Dharma body has joined Soen Roshi's and Nyogen Senzaki's. Thus three spiritual pioneers in the transmission of Zen Buddhism to America are in eternal communion with each other, with us, and with all beings in this Great Mandala.

At the end of your Introduction to *Endless Vow: The Zen Path of Soen Nakagawa*, you wrote, "My karmic bond with him is such that regardless of human emotions, it cannot be separated. It is an everlasting, intermingled bond." Then you quoted Daito Kokushi:

*"Parted from each other for millions of eons
Yet not even for a second separated."*

How these words resonate for us all.
Let True Dharma Continue!

VERSE:

*Dreaming the impossible dream
You rooted Zen in American soil
Now freed of the founder's yoke
Nothing left but your endless vow!*

Kwatz!



An Interview with Shinge Sherry Chayat Roshi, Abbot of the Zen Studies Society

You were sitting with the Zen Studies Society almost from the very beginning. How did you first become involved with the organization?

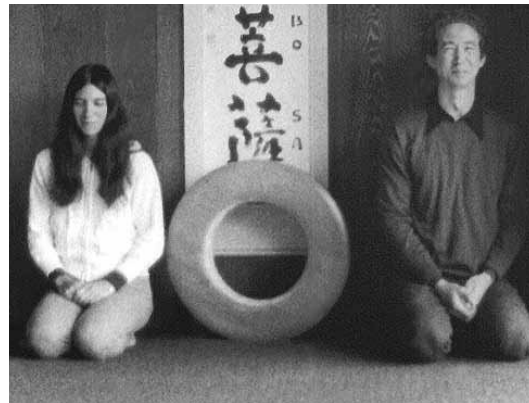
I started sitting on my own when I was quite young. I had no idea that there was a name for it. Then, when I was in eighth grade, I came across a passage in a world culture textbook about Zen Buddhism. It described the practice of zazen, and I thought, “I do that!” Then, of course, I wanted to learn everything I could. I read Alan Watts’ *The Way of Zen*, which came out in 1957, around that same time. I found *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* when I was a freshman at Vassar, and that was a seminal moment. In the library at



Vassar I discovered D.T. Suzuki’s three-volume *Essays on Zen Buddhism*. I really wanted to go to Japan, because I thought that’s what I’d have to do to continue.

Then I met Lou [Nordstrom], my first husband, in New York—he was getting his PhD at Columbia. We decided to get married, and I asked, “Could we have a Zen ceremony?”—I’d never been in a zendo in my life—and he said, “Of course,” not knowing what he was agreeing to, either. We were living on Riverside Drive at 87th and knew about the Buddhist Academy on Riverside Drive. We walked up there, but they were having a judo competition that day, and somehow it just wasn’t what we were looking for. So we went home and looked under “Z” in the phone book, and sure enough, the Zen Studies Society was a few blocks away, on 81st Street and West End Avenue. We walked over there to see if someone might be willing to perform our wedding. This was in August of 1967.

We knocked on the door, and you have to imagine what we looked like: I was wearing a miniskirt, with long black hair nearly down to my knees, and Lou was this long, tall, skinny guy with a blond afro, kind of like Bob Dylan. So there we were, and a young monk came to the door, Tai-san, who later became Eido Roshi, and we asked him, “Would it be



possible to have a Zen wedding ceremony?” And he just looked at us. Then he said, “Hmm, come in and have tea.” So he made us tea, and we talked, and I guess he must have felt that we had some sincerity that went beyond just wanting to get married, that we were interested in practice. He said that the date we suggested, September 2, was very auspicious, because Haku’un Yasutani Roshi would be there. Yasutani Roshi had been coming from Japan to the United States from 1962 on. In fact, on his first trip, it was Tai-san who was his attendant monk, and who was jikijitsu and translator for teisho and dokusan at sesshins for various sitting groups in Honolulu, Los Angeles, Pennsylvania, and New York City. Yasutani Roshi also taught for a time at the New School for Social Research. Sure enough, when Lou and I arrived at the zendo that September day, it was Yasutani Roshi who performed the ceremony. About twelve



friends came and we stood in a circle. We had had a serious talk with them beforehand: “We are going to a Zen temple. Please, no drugs!” This was 1967, at the height of it all. The ceremony was beautiful. There was some chanting; Yasutani Roshi said something in Japanese, and Tai-san translated, and we were married.

We started sitting there from that point on. The zendo consisted of two adjoining rooms in an apartment Tai-san had rented that had an extra room where Yasutani Roshi would stay whenever he came over from Japan. Then Lou got a Fulbright fellowship. He was working on Jean-Paul Sartre’s book *Saint Genet* for his PhD, and was happy to comply with my request to go to France so that I could do plein-air painting in the South of France. We sailed in the late summer of ‘68.

What were your first impressions of Yasutani Roshi and Eido Roshi?

Yasutani Roshi was a very frail old priest with translucent ears that stuck out.

He was quiet, introspective, gentle, yet his eyes were as piercing as those of a hawk. One could tell that he was extraordinarily brilliant. When we started going to the zendo regularly, his teishos were being translated by Tai-san. We didn’t understand anything; they were long, and the translation made them even longer—so those sittings were kind of unendurable. But they were important to us, because we wanted to learn about Zen, and we were learning: not *about* Zen, but by doing zazen.

Tai-san was a very charming young monk, and he had a friendly, earnest, and accommodating way with Westerners, yet never deviating from what we could feel was the real deal. He presented the practice directly; people who had never encountered it before could find something of significance for their lives.

How did you make your way back to New York Zendo after you returned from France?

When we came back to New York in 1969 we were living in a converted barn



in Poughquag, a small village near Poughkeepsie. A very rural area. And one Sunday we were sitting out on the deck, and I was looking at the Real Estate section of *The New York Times*, and there was a front-page story about a renovated carriage house that had opened as a zendo. Maybe it was published for the one-year anniversary of the opening, I don’t know. But it was a very long, impressive article. I said, “Lou, this is the same group that was in the West Side zendo we went to! Look, read this article. We have to go!”

So we started going down to practice at the newly opened New York Zendo Shobo-ji. Lou was teaching at Columbia, I was writing for *Art News*, and we would go to the zendo in the evenings and then

drive back home, and that was our life for the next few years. We went three evenings a week. And every seat in the zendo would be taken.

Then Soen Roshi started coming from Japan. His first trip to the States had been in 1949, to spend several months with Nyogen Senzaki on the West Coast. The following year he became abbot of Ryutaku-ji; he returned to America a few times to lead sesshin. Once Tai-san established Shobo-ji, Soen Roshi came more frequently.

I remember the first night he came to the zendo. We were all sitting there, waiting for them to arrive from the airport. Everybody was very excited—Soen Roshi was coming! And they didn’t come...they didn’t come...the zazen went on longer and longer. Except for chanting, we sat facing the wall in those days. You know, you’re sitting there facing the wall thinking, “I’m going to die here!” Nothing was happening. And then finally the double doors were opened, and in came the Roshi with Tai-san. Soen Roshi walked to the altar and offered incense and bows, and that was the first time we heard his amazing voice, that deep voice from the center of a mountain, saying a few

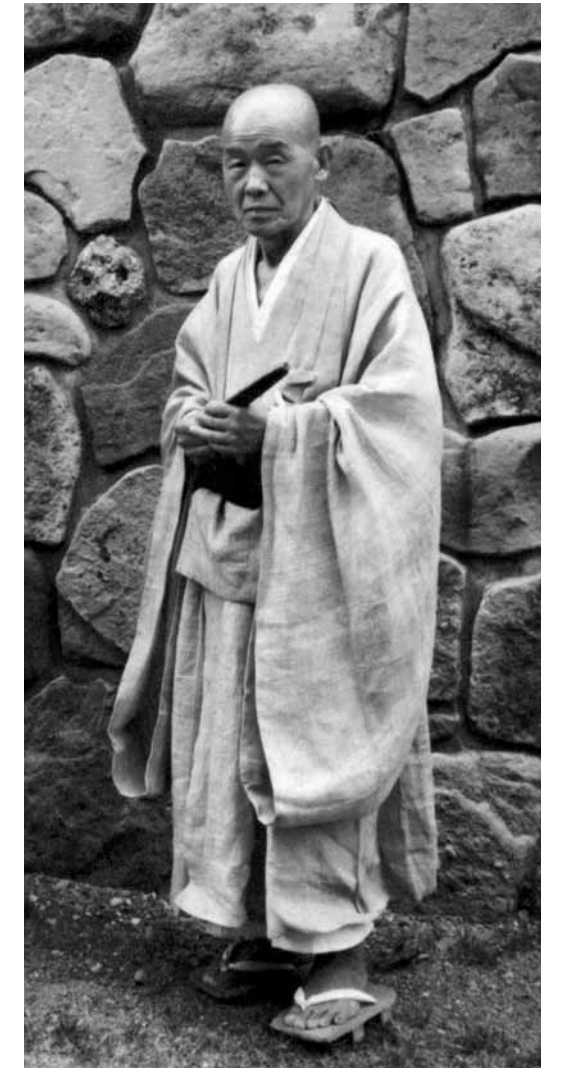
Opposite page: Hakuun Yasutani Roshi at first zendo on West 81st Street, left; Tai-san, right. This page: Soen Nakagawa Roshi.

words to us and encouraging us. He was there often from that point on, and would stay at New York Zendo.

That was a wonderful time. There was a very powerful sense of being Zen pioneers. People who had, like myself, practiced on our own and had done a lot of reading, and had certainly gotten familiar with “beat Zen,” were now discovering that there was a disciplined practice that we could immerse ourselves in. Sesshins were packed. At night we just used the whole library—what’s now called the Dharma Hall was the library then; it was wonderful, the whole wall was books—and we all brought sleeping bags, and we’d sleep practically elbow to elbow, 40 or more of us. There was no issue about men and women being separated; wherever you could find a spot, you’d lie down. The whole floor would be occupied. This was a time when people were first starting to engage in various body movement practices, like yoga and Charlotte Selver’s sensory awareness techniques. And so participants would be doing all these different things before zazen, or during the breaks. Somebody would be trying to take a nap, and someone else would be doing downward dog over that person! For longer sesshins we’d go to Litchfield, Connecticut—the

Daughters of Wisdom had a retreat center there used by many groups.

We met such impressive people Lenore Tawney, for example, the fiber artist.



Rebekah Harkness. Peter and Deborah Matthiessen. World-renowned figures in the arts and music and writing were sitting with us. Some of them are buried up in Sangha Meadow at Dai Bosatsu now. Well-known Buddhist practitioners and teachers would visit, like Paul Reps and Trungpa Rinpoche.

The Sangha was very close. We'd have little routines. There was a luncheonette nearby, and many of us would go and get a little bite or some tea before sitting. After sitting there was a Greek restaurant we'd sometimes go to. And we put on art shows, oh, terrific Zen art shows with calligraphy by Soen Roshi and Eido Roshi and Gempo Roshi for sale and many wonderful ceramics, fiber works, photographs, and paintings by Sangha members. One member owned the Greer Gallery; we had exhibitions of Zen arts there and also at the zendo for a number of years.

The community aspect was rich and mutually encouraging, and the teachers themselves were so inspiring. And there



were important books coming out: Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* became a classic; everyone read it. We all read *The Three Pillars of Zen*, and Durkheim's *Hara*, and Herrigel's *Zen and the Art of Archery*. It was almost as though we were in an underground of sorts. You know, these were not books that many people outside the zendo were reading. We would go down to the Eighth Street Bookshop or the Strand and find the latest thing that had come out on Buddhism. There weren't many. So again, it was a

feeling of being involved with something almost secret, almost like a political movement, only it was a spiritual movement that no one really knew about. Very different from today.

We were very innocent in a way, you know, even though it was the era of sex, drugs, and rock and roll. We were innocent about the practice, and just so taken with it, really. Everybody was in love with zazen, with Soen Roshi, with Tai-san. Of course things have a way of changing, and becoming not so innocent. But it was really a wonderful time.

Were people thinking of Zen as being a Japanese tradition they were inheriting, specifically? I'm wondering how it was conceptualized by Americans. World War II was more of an immediate memory at that time.

Well, there were people like Robert Aitken who'd been in Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. When Americans started coming back in the '50s after the occupation, there was a love-hate relationship with Japan. The love part had to do with the culture, and the hate part had to do with the militarism, the nationalism, the brutality.

For some people, being drawn to the practice and to the cultural and aesthetic dimensions was all of a piece...not for everyone, but certainly for me. I grew up with a love of Asia, particularly Japan. My stepfather, who had served in the War in the Pacific, was an artist, and was deeply affected by Japanese culture. He cut off the legs of our furniture—all of our furniture was on the ground! I used to

This page: "Dream" by Eido Roshi. Opposite page: After a Litchfield sesshin, around 1972. Middle row: center, Tai-san, Soen Roshi, shakuhachi master Watazumi Doso. In front of them: Ray Crivello, Daiko Chuck Carpenter, Chigetsu Ruth Lilienthal. Front row: fourth from right, Aiho-san, Roko Sherry Chayat (now Shinge Roshi), Shoro Lou Nordstrom (now Mitsunen Roshi), and behind him, Maurine Freedgood (later Maurine Stuart Roshi). In front of pine at left, Jonen Sheila Curtis, Ishin Peter Matthiessen (later Muryo Roshi).



listen to one radio station that had international music—there was a Chinese program and a Japanese program—on a little Hi-Fi that he'd built for me. I was just riveted. It was as though I was coming back to a long forgotten home when I listened to that music. But I think for most of us it was the sitting itself, more than the cultural tradition.

Were the forms—the rituals, the services—at Shobo-ji the same as they are now?

No, they were much less formal then. You have to remember that none of us had any training. Tai-san had been trained at Ryutaku-ji, of course. Soen Roshi definitely felt that Americans should not be burdened with too much formality. He himself was so happy here, because he didn't have to be hindered and constrained the way he felt in Japan. The Japanese Buddhist establishment was kind of suffocating for him, I gather.

The services did become more formalized over time. Tai-san taught us how to chant, how to ring the gong and strike the mokugyo and the han, and every now and then a monk would come over from Ryutaku-ji to help. Soen Roshi taught us the beautiful Pali Atta Dipa verse that we chant at the beginning of our morning service after his trip to India. We studied

the forms in D.T. Suzuki's books *On the Training of a Zen Buddhist Monk* and *An Introduction to Zen*. The English translations of the sutras that we chanted (and still do) also were by D.T. Suzuki.

In addition to Eido Roshi and Soen Roshi, you also studied for years with Maurine Stuart. What was her role in your life and training?

Oh, she was such an important person to me! When I met her she was Maureen Freedgood, and she was still married to Ozzie Freedgood. They were living in New York at the time. She was a pianist who had studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris; she was a beautiful, stately, tall woman with auburn hair. Our first encounter was at a sesshin at Shobo-ji. I was sitting in the women's dressing room under all the robes, eating—furtively—a piece of apricot. You know how it is—I was feeling as though I was going to faint if I didn't get something to eat before morning service. And she came and peeked under the robes,



and there I was like a little mouse. So I offered her an apricot, and that was the start of a really wonderful friendship.

Then, after her husband's creative work in the toy industry took them to Boston, she didn't really come down to New York much any more. She was asked to teach at the Cambridge Buddhist Association in a beautiful building on Sparks Street. By then Lou and I had moved to Syracuse, where he was teaching Huston Smith's classes in the Syracuse University Religion Department while Huston was on a one-year sabbatical. Later, we were

divorced, and I married my second husband, Andy Hassinger, and our son, Jesse, was born in 1981.

I would visit Maurine frequently. After Soen Roshi's death, she came and did sesshins with us from '85 on at the Zen Center of Syracuse, and she and Jesse fell in love. I have many pictures of them

This page: Maurine Stuart.



sitting together on the porch swing after sesshin ended. Several of us would also go to sesshins at the Cambridge Buddhist Association (CBA). So our friendship turned into more of a teacher-student relationship, and I was ordained by her in '85. For her, ordination meant that your heart was fully pervaded by the Dharma; there was very little emphasis on form. After her passing in 1990, I was invited to return to Dai Bosatsu Zendo. I was ordained by Eido Roshi in '91. At that point, I felt the need for real training in the Rinzai lineage, and I was struck anew by his brilliance as a Zen master.

I met Dokuro Osho [Roland Jaeckel] through the Cambridge Buddhist Association at Sparks Street. This was in the winter of 2010. Our son was doing graduate work in film in Boston, and we wanted to visit him. I told Andy, "Maybe we can check out who's in charge at CBA, and perhaps we can stay there overnight, and I'll give a talk"—you sing for your supper,



you know? So it turned out it was Dokuro, a senior disciple of Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who was then running the practice there. And I did indeed give a talk, and from that point on Dokuro and I continued our friendship. It turned out that his wife, Shuko Rubin, had also studied with Maurine. Then, after I was installed as abbot of the Zen Studies Society and Joshu Sasaki Roshi retired from teaching, Dokuro and I agreed he would continue his training at Dai Bosatsu. As he kept coming for sesshin and dokusan with me and giving Dharma talks, I began to see that he would be an ideal successor.

And indeed, at a ceremony on November 25, 2017, at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, he became my first Dharma heir.

Did you have much involvement with Shobo-ji between those early years and when you became Abbot of Zen Studies Society in 2011?

I think we continued going three times a week all during the period from '69 through '74, when we became residents at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, living in Joraku-an, the Beecher House. From '74 on we'd go down to New York City maybe two or three times a summer and a couple of times during the winter, and we'd stay at Shobo-ji or stay with a friend and sit there. But Dai Bosatsu Zendo was the focus of our practice until we moved to Syracuse in 1976.

How would you describe the ways that Shobo-ji has changed from when it first started?

Well, the beginning was a wonderful time, as I've said. We just had such an enthusiastic attraction to the Dharma and to the practice itself, without all the weight of centuries. It was pure. There was this pure wish to learn meditation, because we'd already experienced something...don't forget, many of us had already been through the whole LSD psychopharma-whatever. It was a period of experimentation. We had read *The Doors of Perception*, by Aldous Huxley. We already had experienced the mind that abides nowhere; we just didn't have the Diamond Sutra to give us the context for it. We were doing it on our own.

Left: Dokuro Osho.



And some people were really getting a little messed up because of their individualistic experimentation. We needed to find a trustworthy container for that wide-open, spacious mind, something that would allow us to focus in a way that could lead to true realization, not a passing drug-induced experience. We already had tasted the Oneness that was at the heart of everything. But how could we come to it in a way that wasn't going to result in a bad trip, or some-

thing that would wear off in the next two days, or something that would become an unhealthy way of life over time?

Things had really gotten dark in America after we returned from France in 1969. There was so much tumult. There were revolutions on campuses—at Columbia, where Lou was teaching, he held “liberated classes” in our apartment. There was a clear change occurring, and not always in the idealistic sense every-

one hoped for. Vietnam vets were coming back addicted to heroin. I remember very vividly sitting at the West End Bar, right outside Columbia University's gates. Lou was writing and brainstorming with friends about the book he was working on there, and I was reading the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. As we sat there, somebody was knifed to death right in front of us over a “nickel bag,” a \$5 bag of heroin.

Roko Sherry Chayat second row, third from left;
Shoro Lou Nordstrom, back row, far right.

So there was a real need to find a discipline, to find a structure that didn't depend on substances or doctrines that others might put in place politically, that didn't depend on the reactivity that was so prevalent during that time. We wanted to experience for ourselves, as the Zen saying goes, “whether the water is cool or warm.” And there were many people who had been involved in risky behaviors, so they were willing to go out on a limb...go to sesshin, do things that required courage. There were so many people hungry for spiritual experience, having come to it in all kinds of weird ways, and they really wanted to go deeper.

Fortunately, we had incredible guides, all of those pioneering Zen masters and Tibetan rinpoches. No matter what people have written about their faults, they themselves were the purveyors of True Dharma. There's plenty of dirt to be scooped up on almost all of them...but they had something that was so real, and we could feel it. Their own authentic, realized nature was clear, and we wanted that. That was why we became their students. We believed in it. We believed in the possibility that we, too, could awaken. It was not rhetoric, it was not theory, it was not conceptual. It was something that we knew we had to be a part of in an experiential way.

Unfortunately, our Sangha, like many others, went through a period of disappointment and disillusionment. Eido Roshi was so charismatic; his bright light made for some deep shadows. In the fall of 1975 women began speaking of seriously inappropriate behavior they had experienced, and many Sangha members left. It was a very sad time for all of us. Soen Roshi was absolutely crushed by what he was hearing, and he went into a long solitary retreat. I vividly remember sitting in the car outside Shobo-ji early in '76. Lou and I had decided to leave. Soen Roshi came running out and gave us a shikishi (a square panel with calligraphy) upon which he had drawn the figure of Bodhidharma and big letters in English, “Wait!” But we couldn't. We just felt we had to leave at that point.

We ended up in Syracuse later that year, with Lou teaching Huston Smith's classes, and leading a small Zen group that had started at the university. From what I gathered, membership at Shobo-ji fluctuated during the next decade; old-timers left, newcomers arrived. Then again, during the traumatic period after a new revelation in 2010, more people left both New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo. It was heartbreaking. There were a number of students who continued their practice



elsewhere with Eido Roshi after his formal retirement at the end of 2010.

What was that transition period like for Shobo-ji?

It was a very difficult time. Eido Roshi's wife, Aiho-san Yasuko Shimano, had been the director for nearly thirty years; she retired, too, at the end of 2010. Shoteki Chris Phelan became interim director.

Splitting my time between Dai Bosatsu Zendo and the Zen Center of Syracuse, with occasional trips to New York Zendo to lead sesshin, I couldn't spend as much time as I would have wished at Shobo-ji. I appointed Hokuto Dan Diffin a Dharma Teacher and spiritual director, and he came down from Rhode Island to lead all-day sits and events. I invited visiting Zen teachers, including Junryu Vardi Roshi, to help guide the practice. We've had excellent head monastics in residence who were trained at Dai Bosatsu, Tenrai Fred Forsythe, Zuiho Matthew Perez, and now Koge Louise Bayer. These days, Dokuro



Osho and I alternate leading sesshins. There's more of the old interconnection between DBZ and NYZ, with interns who have spent time at the monastery becoming practitioners at Shobo-ji, and people from New York attending sesshins at DBZ.

Excellent new practitioners

have come to both zendos since 2010, but I really miss all those wonderful Sangha members who left. You know, when you walk into the zendo and you see half the row empty on either side, there's a sense of diminishment. However, what is heartening is the wonderful group of mature Zen practitioners who have continued through thick and thin. Their faith and loyalty to Shobo-ji are truly inspiring.

I've done my best to revive and regenerate the Sangha. My emphasis has been to encourage a strong, consistent practice and to create a trustworthy space

in which students can completely give themselves over to the Dharma and discover real truth. I do think things are going in the right direction now, and I see this fiftieth anniversary as a real turning point, bringing renewed vigor and enthusiasm.

But I'm aware that it's a different era from when we started. We're surrounded by all sorts of meditation groups. There are many places to sit nowadays: yoga centers, martial arts dojos, "Zen" spas. Do they have the veracity, do they have the authenticity of what is offered at Shobo-ji? Maybe not. But do people care? No. And there's the commodity factor these days. There's an app on your phone. You can say, okay, I'm going to set it for 20 minutes, and I'll be enlightened—or at least I'll feel some inner peace for a while.

What you would perceive to be the most enduring quality of New York Zendo Shobo-ji through time?

The nen from the wise and compassionate teachings of enlightened masters and the students who have realized their true nature fills the building. It has always been a hothouse for spiritual maturation. People have gained insight here into what it means to be human, what it means to dedicate oneself to a



purpose that goes beyond one's own small self; to live by the Four Great Vows. This is what endures, no matter what the vicissitudes of the era may bring.

What are your hopes and dreams for the next 50 years of New York Zendo Shobo-ji?

We must continue to provide this kind of demanding practice to people who are yearning for something real, and make it clear that what we offer is not “Zen lite.” That people can really sink their teeth into this practice, and engage in a present-day discipline with a rich history. The forms one learns are there so that one can do the often-risky work of inner transformation. There may be creative innovations, but they are rooted in a tradition that has been proven to work, again and again.

Honoring the intertwining of creativity and tradition is important as we go forward. The energy that we had in the beginning was wide open, powerful, never stagnant. We have to continue in ways that will mean something not



only to us old-timers, but to young people who are hungry for spiritual experience, for profound truth, just as we were. How to support that, how to cultivate it, how to encourage people with that hunger in appropriate ways, with skillful means—that's our responsibility.

After all, that was what our teachers did during the 1960s and '70s. They thought deeply, “What's appropriate for these young Americans? What do they need in order to become fully engaged in the practice? How can we best offer it?” We need the same openness, insight,

and energy. We have to be keen and attentive, offering the Rinzai Zen tradition in ways that are appropriate now, in this very difficult moment for all of life on this planet. After all, the difficult moments of the past—all the great challenges—are what gave us the fortitude and determination to continue; as Soen Roshi often put it, to “march on bravely.” Honoring the legacy of our pioneering teachers, listening deeply to the questions posed by our own time, let us offer ourselves with all our hearts to This True Dharma.

However innumerable all beings are,
I vow to save them all.

However inexhaustible delusions are,
I vow to extinguish them all.

However immeasurable Dharma
teachings are, I vow to master them all.

However endless the Buddha's Way is,
I vow to follow it.

Martin Luther King Sesshin, 2018.



New York Zendo Shobo-ji Reflections

This chapter features essays that have been submitted by both early and contemporary members of the Zen Studies Society Sangha, some of whom were students of Soen Roshi and Yasutani Roshi before New York Zendo Shobo-ji was established. These essays are interspersed with passages that have been taken from books and historical documents such as newsletters, interviews, and letters.

Mu **Seijun Karen Rizvi**

*Did you hear it? The first Mu that
shook the sky over 67th Street?*

*Can you see it? The walls trembling
with fifty years of Mu?*

*One shout cuts like a polished diamond.
The universe calls and answers itself.*

*I breathe in and the bow of my body
draws all intention into a single arrow. Mu!*

Zen Studies Society Recollections **Hugh Curran**

I joined the Zen Studies Society in 1965 with the encouragement of Dr. Bernard

Phillips, who was Chairman of the Religion Department and my academic mentor at Temple University as well as the co-founder of the Zen Studies Society. I attended my first seven-day retreat with Yasutani Roshi, who had been recommended by Bernard's friend Philip Kapleau, author of *The Three Pillars of Zen*. The retreat was held at Pendle Hill in the Philadelphia area.

Sitting cross-legged for the first time in my life was, to say the least, very



difficult. Despite the intense pain from an athletic back injury, the retreat was life changing. Having survived my first retreat, I soon attended another seven-day retreat held on an estate near New York City.

In the fall of that same year I attended a series of talks on Zen given by Yasutani Roshi at Temple University, and my sister and I helped edit a book based on them. With the encouragement of Yasutani Roshi, I attended several more seven-day retreats over the course of the next two years, as well as a number of zazenkai (one-day retreats)—all this while attending Temple University and working part-time.

I was very drawn to Yasutani Roshi and became his student and formally took the precepts with him. He inspired me with his energy in dokusan meetings and his gentle encouragement to keep my focus on my koan. The intense discipline of maintaining my posture hour after hour convinced me that this practice was of great importance despite the excruciating demands on my body. The pain forced me to

concentrate my entire efforts on the practice. During my fourth retreat I experienced a touch of kensho that was verified by Yasutani Roshi. This experience became a touchstone for me for years to come.

After returning to Canada in 1967 to work at a homeless shelter I subsequently joined Philip Kapleau in Rochester and became his head monastic for the next five years. Yasutani Roshi came to Rochester for two seven-day retreats

during this period. However, a serious rift between Kapleau and Yasutani took place during the second retreat that resulted in Yasutani severing his relationship with Kapleau. When Kapleau showed me a letter from Yasutani that



Above: "Mu!" by Eido Roshi; Opposite page: Pendle Hill, 1963 (Bernard Phillips, middle row, third from left; Hugh Curran, back row, fourth from left, behind Yasutani Roshi).

made the break formal I faced a dilemma: stay on as his head monastic or leave? After much soul-searching I decided to stay, although it was with many misgivings.

While at Rochester I took on the responsibility of supervising twenty young monastics and many volunteers as we rebuilt the Center after a disastrous fire. Periodically I would visit New York City and Philadelphia, and in this way maintained contact with Zen friends from the Zen Studies Society, including Bernard Phillips, Shirley Tassen-court, Lenore Straus, Deborah Moscovitz, and Stuart Lachs. Several of us—including Lenore, Deborah, Stuart, and myself, all former students of Yasutani—met up again by fortuitous circumstances in the mid-70s at Moon Spring Hermitage (now Morgan Bay Zendo) on coastal Maine and became students of Walter Nowick.

About ten years earlier (in 1965), I had made an impetuous decision to hitchhike to San Francisco with another friend from the Zen Studies Society's early days, Dick Cohn (Dick later took his family

name of Kagan), to visit friends and see Suzuki Roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center. Our funds were limited, so we had to sleep on the side of the road during our eight-week pilgrimage. Suzuki Roshi's talks at San Francisco Zen Center were difficult to comprehend because of the language barrier, but I came to know him much better over time, coming to admire him for his fortitude and his gentle requests that Rochester Zen Center and San Francisco Zen Center develop a closer relationship. He visited us at the Rochester Zen Center with Dick Baker in 1968, and in 1971 I went to see

him as a representative of the Rochester Zen Center just prior to his death. I had a personal interview with him and, only a few days later, attended his funeral. Toward the end of 1972, I resigned from Rochester Zen Center because I'd recently gotten married and had the responsibility of raising a son and earning a living.

In 1970 Philip Kapleau had invited me to go with him for a three-month pilgrimage to India and Japan, a journey that proved to be of considerable significance for me. We stayed in Kamakura and visited

with Yasutani Roshi's Sanbo Kyodan (now Sanbo Zen) group, which included Yamada Koun Roshi, with whom we spent some time. Kapleau's attempts at a rapprochement with Yasutani Roshi were not successful. There was another side of Yasutani that I gradually became aware of—a fierce militarism which seemed to be a nationalistic form of Zen that I found personally repugnant. Such views did not represent the essential nature of the Buddhism that inspired me. We also travelled to Hosshin-ji monastery, where Kapleau had trained for several years with Harada Sogaku Roshi, and stayed several days in a nearby temple with Tangen-San (later Harada-Tangen Roshi).

I considered rejoining the Zen Studies Society in 1974 and contacted Eido Roshi, who invited me to Dai Bosatsu Zendo and showed us a building on its grounds where we could live. However, upon reflection I realized that I needed some time away after my nine years' immersion in Zen. I wrote to Eido Roshi accordingly and received an understanding letter from him acknowledging my decision.

The Great Vows, especially the first: to “resolve to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings”, have helped shape the direction of my life and provided an ethical foundation that

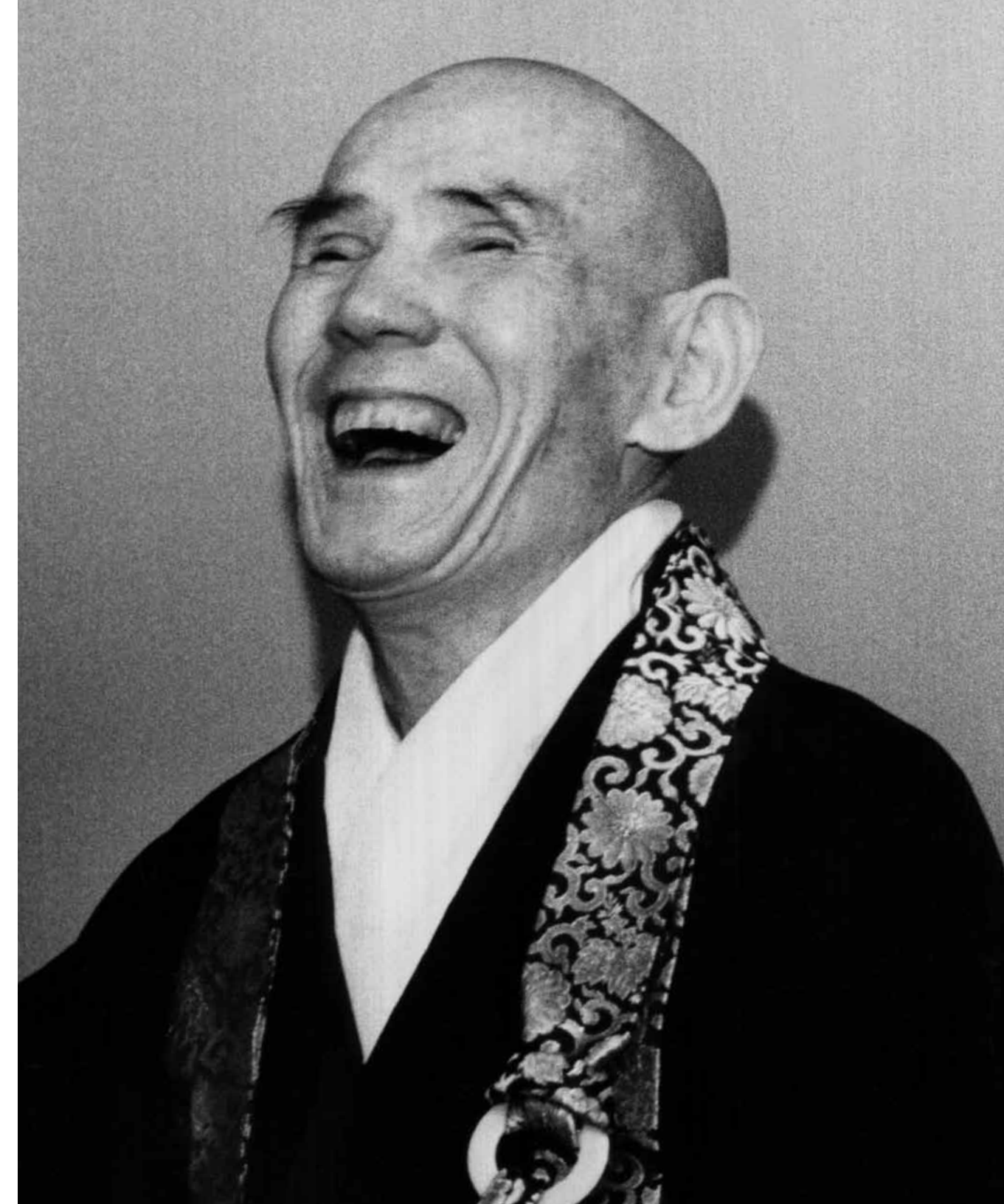
served as the basis of academic courses I teach. My later encounter with a Chinese Ch'an teacher greatly expanded my interest in the devotional and ethical aspects of Zen and Ch'an.

The Buddhist ethics that I embraced included the fundamental principle that all living beings are to be saved, not just humans. Having repeated the precepts and vows many times, a gradual absorption has taken place and penetrated to a deeper level of consciousness, making this understanding consistent with my ecological studies. I consider myself fortunate to have had my initial experiences of these basic principles instilled in me at Zen Studies Society retreats and zazenkai.

Yasutani Roshi's True Nature *Korin Sylvan Busch*

Our first sesshin was extremely disciplined in the Rinzai style. The students were not young but they were committed and deeply serious. They were people like myself who were very enthusiastic about Zen Buddhism. This sesshin was a strong experience for me and coming out of it took several days. You asked once if I could recall some revealing stories about the Zen

This page: Yasutani Roshi. Opposite: Tai-san.





masters I have encountered. One thing that I vividly remember was at Pendle Hill.

It was during a rest period. I was sitting outside, and out of the corner of my eye I saw something fluttering. It was Yasutani Roshi's robe, and he was moving with great haste with his arms outstretched and open wide. When he got across the lawn, he lovingly embraced a big tree and stayed there for a while as I sat entranced....

From an interview in The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Issue No. 4, 1986.

Memories of the Zendo at 81st and West End Avenue

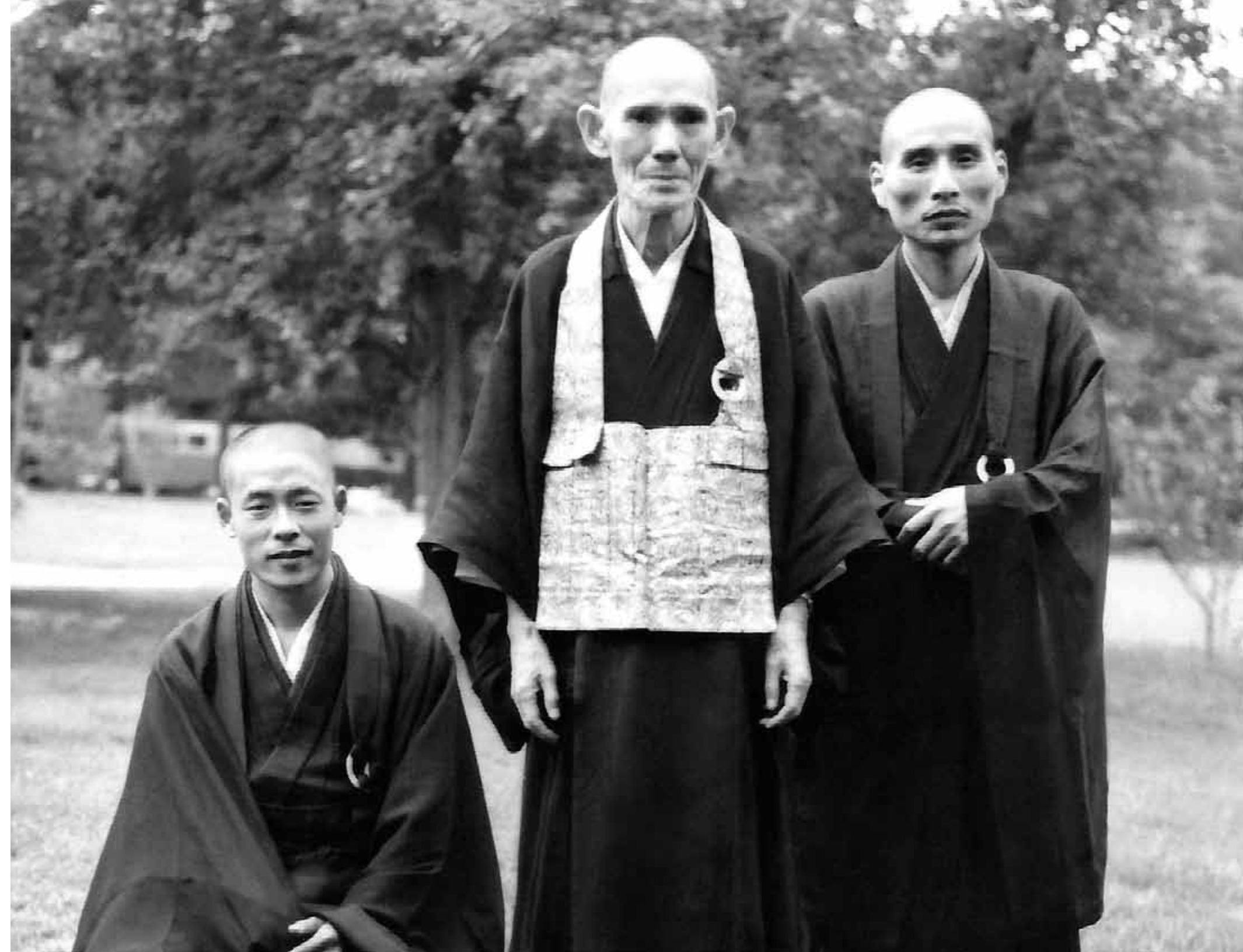
Richard Kagan

Before Shobo-ji, the zendo was at the corner of 81st Street and West End Avenue. I started coming in the fall of 1965 (some months after it opened) while a student at Temple University in Philadelphia. Bernard Phillips, one of the founders of the Zen Studies Society, was the head of the Philosophy and Religion Department at Temple and had arranged for Yasutani Roshi to come

down to give talks at Temple once a week. He was accompanied by a deeply earnest 33-year-old monk, Tai-san, who translated and was later to become Eido Roshi.

Yasutani Roshi was a physically frail-looking 80-year-old with an anything but frail spirit. What he said made more and more sense to me, and wanting to experience zazen first hand, I began taking the bus up to New York every Thursday after class for two sittings, and then catching a late bus back to Philadelphia to attend class the next day. After a couple of months of this, and two weeks before finals, I was deeply honored when Yasutani Roshi asked if I wanted to deepen my commitment by taking the precepts. So I spent the night on a friend's couch and went out to buy a new maroon shirt the next morning before the ceremony. I ended up staying in New York and never went back to finish the semester. Six days a week I was at the zendo. What an extraordinary experience that was—an experience that would affect the rest of my life.

This page: Sesshin at Pumpkin Hollow, 1966. Richard Kagan, fifth from right; Sylvan Busch, ninth from right. Opposite page: Tai-san, Yasutani Roshi and an unidentified monk, 1965.



Tai-san had started the zendo and led it as Yasutani Roshi came and went. He was the most inspiring individual I'd ever met—a model of single-mindedness and commitment. He spoke with full attention, carefully enunciating every word. Every movement was clear and fluid and flowed out of a spring of awareness. Nothing was accidental.

The zendo at that time was a lovely first-floor arrangement of fair-sized rooms. As I remember, you came in from 81st Street through a black door and went down a narrow hall where the shoe rack was. Then, walking through another door past two auxiliary rooms, you'd come to an austere meditation room where the thick smell of incense carried away the tensions of the city and allowed our minds to settle. Students sat facing the wall, Soto style. Bowing to the Buddha, I would approach my cushion and try to fold my legs into some semblance of a lotus posture. After two sittings, Yasutani Roshi would give a Dharma talk and say the most extraordinary things. "I don't give you anything. I only take away." Or, replying to the question "Does God exist?" (and, I assume, not wanting to fall into a dualistic trap), he simply waved his fan and said "not important!" How simple! How profound!

Three years later the zendo moved to its current location on the East Side. I was there at the opening ceremony, yet a part of me, a very dear part of my spirit, will always linger in the memory of the old zendo on West End Avenue. I can still smell the incense.

The New Zendo
Brother David
Steindl-Rast,
Catholic Bene-
dictine Monk

I met Eido Roshi (then Tai-san) in the fall of 1965, demonstrated with him against the Vietnam War at the University of Michigan, and practiced at the Zen Studies Society from 1966 to 1970. It was a huge step up when Bill and Milly Johnstone made it possible, in 1968, for Tai-san (as he was called at that time) and the Sangha to move from West 81st Street to the New York Zendo on East 67th Street.

Until then, we had been sitting in a basement with windows opening onto the sidewalk next to a bus stop. On



hot and humid summer evenings we had to keep the windows open, in spite of the street noises. Every few minutes, the same sound sequence repeated itself: first the deafening noise of the air-brakes that NYC buses used in the 1960s; next came

ridiculous snatches of conversation, as passengers getting off the bus were passing by our windows: "...my husband likes them fried...when was the last time ...I'd have kicked him out..." And, finally, the noise of the doors closing and the bus starting again. Yasutani Roshi's comment was, "Learn to practice here and you'll be able to practice anywhere."

Above: Monks walking through Rockefeller Center.
Opposite page: Soen Roshi.



Good Happening *Gyoun Manuel Greer*

I was introduced to the spiritual in 1953. After many lectures and readings, in the early 60s I decided to work directly on myself. I joined the Zen Studies Society. Meditations were held on the Upper West Side by Eido Roshi. The Society later moved to 67th Street.

On a Tuesday, at my second retreat at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, the Roshi during dokusan was Soen Nakagawa Roshi. I told him about a wonderful experience I'd had during meditation. All he said was "Good happening."



From time to time, as I walk along the street, take the subway, or wait at a doctor's office, I remember the "good happening" moment and I immediately become one-pointed. The experience is certainly not as deep, but I go immediately into meditation. Also very important, I have a picture of Soen Nakagawa Roshi on my dining table. Every time I look at the picture, I remember "good happening."

Light as a Cobweb *Milly Johnstone*

Dear Student,

One Saturday in June. The hottest on record. We had finished several hours of an "All Day Sitting"

.... I was wearing a flimsy robe made of linen thread. As light as a cobweb. It seems that for some time Tai-san has been watching what we wear. Evidently he's been wishing we'd all look alike with our differences. Realizing that some unity of design would help harmonize with the neutral tones of the new zendo, filling its solid structure with airy ease.

This linen, hand-loomed in Ireland, is in the spirit of Zen. Yielding and luminous. Anonymous and natural. The style of



the robe is simple. It flows and it goes. Breathes with the body into nothing. ...I have located 300 yards of the exact material. This is being contributed by friends. 42 Zen robes can be ready by September 12th, delivered as each is prepared. The sleeves and skirt length will be left unfinished for each of us to hem. We will need to provide our own slips, long and full, the color about the same as the robe. Ecru. The price of each robe is \$17.50.

Above: Milly Johnstone in 1979.

...Wearing the same robe at the same time—yes, I hope you enjoy yours as much as I enjoy mine.

From a letter to Sangha members dated July 1st, 1968

A Self-Perpetuating Organization

Tai-san and Sylvan Busch summarized the changes decided upon at the Board of Directors meeting of The

Zen Studies Society, Inc. held Sunday, January 4th, 1970.

Up until now, the Society consisted of three Zen groups located in New York, Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. However, due to fragmentation, and to simplify legal matters, the Board of Directors decided to dissolve its institutional relationship with the groups in Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia. This does not mean

that these groups have disbanded; they are still meeting regularly for zazen practice. Members of the Washington and Philadelphia groups may individually become students of The New York Zendo of The Zen Studies Society, Inc... According to the Society's by-laws, it is a self-perpetuating organization. ***From a letter titled Zendo Planning Meeting, January 5th, 1970***



Resonant Gong *Eido Roshi*

To conduct a sesshin or zazen meeting, certain instruments are essential: a bell, clappers, and a mokugyo and gong for chanting. The New York Zendo had only a tiny inkin, and two pieces of wood for makeshift clappers. I was looking for a gong with a good sound. In the summer of 1966, in order to meet Yasutani Roshi, I flew to the West Coast. While there I went to a large antique shop in San Francisco. At the very entrance was a huge gong. It was so enormous that an American shopper standing there asked, “Is this a Japanese bathtub?” The size was gigantic, but the shape and color were equally impressive. I asked the manager to bring the striker. Calming my excitement, I struck the gong. The sound was overwhelming! The inscription around the outer edge was even more impressive: It stated that the gong had been made in 1555 for Daitoku-ji, Kyoto—one of the most important Rinzai Zen temples in Japan.



I couldn’t believe my eyes and ears. Daitoku-ji! How could it be possible that this venerable gong had left there, crossed the Pacific Ocean and had now come to this store in San Francisco! Looking at the subdued golden color and dignified yet serene shape, and listening to the deep sound that seemed to issue from the center of the earth, I felt as though my feet were nailed to the spot. I asked the manager, “How much is it?” “One thousand dollars,” he answered. It was an incredible sum of money—not expensive for this gong, but I could not afford it. Yet I could not give it up.

I was sure it would not be sold to someone that day or the next; nevertheless, I asked the manager to please hold it until the following day, and he agreed. I had \$250. It was just enough for one month’s rent for the New York Zendo. In fact, that was all the money in The Zen Studies Society account.

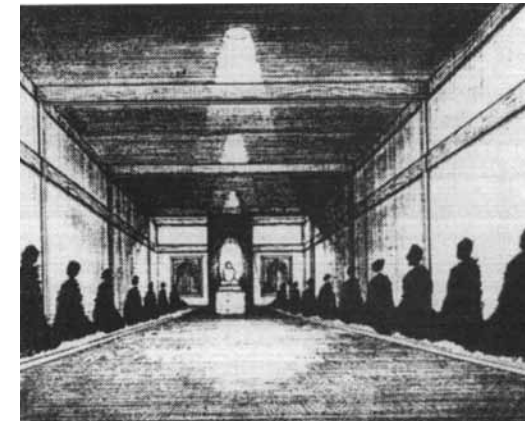
I sat throughout that night, thinking about the gong. To buy or not to buy? I knew we couldn’t afford it. Yet I also

knew that this was an opportunity not to be missed. I thought, “If I don’t take some action, this great treasure of Daitoku-ji may not be used in the best way.” Next morning, I went back to the store and met with the manager and told him where I lived, what I did, the significance of this particular gong, and the effectiveness of its sound for zazen. I also told him about our financial situation. Looking at my face, he suggested that I pay \$250 as a deposit. Then he would send the gong on to New York City. I promised I would send the rest of the money within three months.

I was so joyful and grateful; I knew that for the manager I was merely a stranger. But perhaps the gong itself wanted to be in a zendo instead of an antique store. My excitement erased all thought of the New York Zendo’s August rent. When the gong arrived at the New York Zendo, the students were immensely moved by its deep sound. It must have been the first time in their lives that they had heard such a sound. When I explained the financial problem, they all responded so quickly that within a month, I recall, we were able to raise fifteen hundred dollars. I immediately paid what we owed. The discovery of the gong was important;

ever since, its sound has brought to innumerable people the feeling of profundity and tranquility. But equally important was my discovery that if one becomes desperate, and if one sincerely, honestly and bravely confronts an obstacle, there is a way to overcome it.

From Namu Dai Bosa, “Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu”



Transformation *Architect Yar Kunyucia*

On Sunday, October 5 [1969], *The New York Times* publishes a headline article in the Real Estate section: “Garage Here Converted to Zen Studies Center” giving the cost of the carriage house as

Above: Architect’s drawing of the zendo.



\$100,000, and the construction costs as another \$100,000.

That same year, the New York State Association of Architects awards the project an honorable mention for “transforming the Japanese idiom and feeling, within the context of American materials and methods and reconciling the heavy elements of the carriage house with the delicacy of Japanese tradition.”

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall/Winter 1998

Chester Carlson and American Zen ***Soun Joe Dowling***

Among so many significant events, 2018 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the inventor/businessman/philanthropist Chester Carlson, whose generosity to the Zen Studies Society made possible the founding of both New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo. He died on September 19th, 1968, at the age of 62. Carlson’s improbable rags-to-riches story should be known. Not only did he rise from very modest circumstances to become one of the most wealthy and successful businessmen of his day, but as he reached the pinnacle of his ambitions,

he also went through a radical spiritual transformation and began to give away much of his fortune, a process which the Chester Carlson Foundation continued after his early demise. At his funeral he was quoted as saying, “I want to die a poor man.”

In 1906 Chester Carlson was born into a family struggling economically. His father was disabled, and his mother was the sole supporter. Chester began to help her at an early age, and after her death he was the primary

breadwinner from high school on. For years he worked at all sorts of odd jobs at odd hours to pay the rent and put himself through school. Carlson started at a local junior college and later attended California Technical College. Along the way he adopted a motivational belief that proved incredibly prescient: “The idea of making an invention appealed to me as one of the few available means to accomplish a change in one’s economic status.”



Through the decades he tinkered with many inventions and applied for many patents; none, however, was more important than his invention of the photocopier, which the Xerox Company made famous and which made Chester Carlson wealthy beyond all his dreams.

Of his most important discovery he said, “With the problem so sharply defined, the solution came almost as an ‘intuitive flash’”.

His discovery of photoconductivity (using a flash of light to allow an image to emerge) and its brilliant application with the “Xerox”

(Greek for ‘dry printing’) machine is a monumental achievement in modern business history. Chester Carlson’s influence ripples far and deep.

However, having all that money made him uncomfortable, and in the years before his death he set out to give it away to a wide variety of progressive causes, mostly through anonymous

Chester and Dorris Carlson, summer 1967.



donations. They included the United Negro College Fund, various Civil Rights and integrated housing causes, the New York City Civil Liberties Union, the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, the University of Rochester, and the Rochester Institute of Technology as well as many other educational and non-profit institutions. Over the decades the Chester Carlson Foundation has made an astounding \$150 million dollars in donations to worthy causes.

One of these causes for Chester and his wife, Dorris, was Zen Buddhism. The fortune generated by the phenomenal success of Xerox and the photocopier (“the biggest thing in imaging since the coming of photography itself,” as Dr. Clark Batelle noted) provided important resources to allow the early seeds of Zen in America to be planted. He and his family had relationships with many significant meditation teachers such as Thomas Merton, Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, Philip Kapleau and others. In addition to the Zen Studies Society, San Francisco Zen Center and the Rochester Zen Center benefitted from the Carlsons’ generosity.

In a letter of September 15, 1968, to ZSS Board member Sylvan Busch at the Society’s earlier West End Avenue

location, Carlson wrote that he was enclosing “a further contribution from Shanti Foundation to the Zen Studies Society, Inc., in the amount of \$50,000.” His support was foundational. Without it the carriage house on East 67th Street could not have been purchased, and our zendo—one of the most beautiful in the city—would not exist.

As a longtime member of New York Zendo Shobo-ji, I give deep bows of gratitude for the generosity of Chester Carlson. By allowing the seeds of Zen to take deep roots in America, his donations have changed many lives. His life story also makes me marvel at his inherent Zen virtues of commitment and endurance, persistence and ingenuity. Carlson’s is a very American story; his arc is pure Horatio Alger, and his accomplishments are truly the fulfillment of an impossible dream!

On September 15, 1968, two days before Chester Carlson’s letter to Sylvan Busch enclosing “a further contribution” of \$50,000, New York Zendo Shobo-ji officially opened its doors, with the Carlsons in attendance. On September 19, Chester Carlson died of a heart attack. So attending the event, writing the letter and signing the check were among his last official actions.

It’s uncanny but true; it was meant to happen, as some might profess. How could it be otherwise?

Unprecedented Incredible Way

During Sunday zazen meeting, March 1st, Mr. Soshin Hayasaki, a Japanese Tea Master from the Urasenke School (accompanied by Mr. W.H. Johnstone and three teachers for the New York Tea Society), offered a ceremonial tea to the Endless Dimension Universal Life Buddha using a special tea bowl. This tea bowl was first used when Mr. Soshitsu Sen, 15th-Generation Grand Tea Master,



performed an unprecedented dedication tea ceremony for our new zendo on October 13, 1968. Hence, it was named “Hatenko” by Soen Roshi, which may be translated as “Unprecedented” or “Incredible.” Many unprecedented and incredible events have been occurring since this bowl was given to New York Zendo, such as the establishment of a permanent zendo in New York City, the exchange program and this recent five-day sesshin. The tea ceremony was not only skillfully performed and deeply moving, it was a most unprecedented and incredible Way.

From Report of the New York Zendo, No. 3—March 1970

Zazen is the Most Dynamic Thing You Can Do *Issho Randy Place*

“Zen is new,” Eido Roshi remarked during our first conversation following an early morning sitting at New York Zendo Shobo-ji. “Not many people know about it,” he said. That was forty-seven years ago. And I count myself among the very fortunate who learned and benefitted greatly from the wonderful teachings and zazen practice methods received from both Eido Tai Shimano Roshi and his teacher, Soen Nakagawa Roshi.

GRATITUDE
TO CHESTER AND DORRIS CARLSON
THROUGH WONDERFUL DHARMA RELATION
WE RECEIVED YOUR DONATION TO ESTABLISH
THE PERMANENT ZENDO IN NEW YORK CITY.
WE BELIEVE THIS WILL BECOME A SEED TO
OPEN DHARMA FLOWER AND BEAR FRUITS
FOR YOU AND FOR ALL SENTIENT BEINGS.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH

NEW YORK ZENDO OF THE ZEN STUDIES SOCIETY

Before knowing about the zendo, I was at the top of my game as a young broadcast sales executive. Nevertheless I experienced emotional unrest and dissatisfaction with my personal life. Something was missing. Christian worship failed to provide the spiritual answers I sought, and I recall praying one day for God to “cleanse my soul,” although I hadn’t a clue about what needed to be cleaned or why. Besides, I had also become dissatisfied and stressed in a then-successful career.

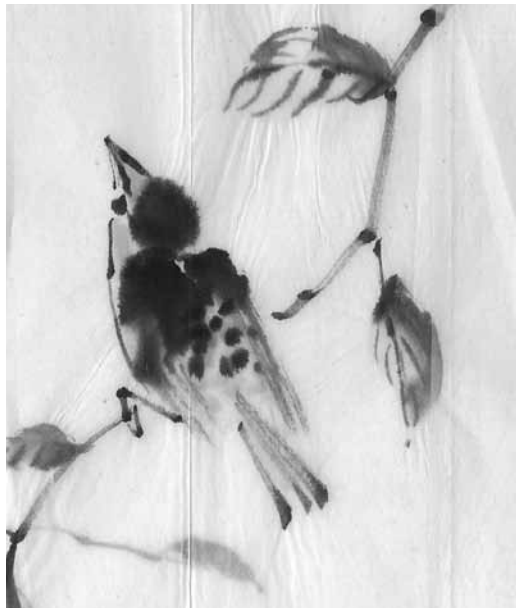
While my Higher Power didn’t dispatch an angel to attend the soul request, that state of unrest signaled that my spiritual ladder might have been placed against the wrong tree. All the while, I didn’t realize that the old saying—“When the student is ready, the master will appear”—was already in operation and slowly leading me to New York Zendo’s door.

What a marvelous trip! It began at lunch with a customer. All he talked about was “metaphysics,” a word I hadn’t heard. He recommended some books on the topic by his favorite spiritual writer, where I began to find answers that opened my mind to new ways of thinking. Then a friend told me about New York’s Quest Bookshop, founded by his parents.

That’s where I discovered a potpourri of spiritual works by Jiddu Krishnamurti, Christmas Humphries, a couple of Indian swamis, and, finally, my first Zen book: *The World of Zen* by Nancy Wilson Ross, a novelist and early Zen practitioner in America.

While reading her book at home on a beautiful spring morning, this short Zen poem caught my eye and enlightened me as to why I’d been reluctant to attend church:

*Inside, the sermon is dull and stale
But, oh, outside a nightingale.*



Back at the Quest Bookshop I inquired about how to enter this world of Zen and was directed to New York Zendo.

It was a Tuesday afternoon when I stood outside its door with a puzzled look on my face, hearing for the first time the unfamiliar sounds of chanting accompanied by bells and gongs coming from inside. Bruce Rickenbacker, the doorman for that sitting, answered my knock, listened to my inquiry, and told me to read *The Three Pillars of Zen*, the popular introductory book in those days. “Then come back any Thursday evening for a beginners’ meeting,” he said.

After reading *The Three Pillars of Zen* while practicing for brief periods of zazen at home, I returned to the zendo on a Thursday evening before Easter. Inside, I enjoyed the most wonderful spiritual experience I had known. This, too, has been etched in memory.

On the zendo’s second floor, Marcia Finehandler taught our beginning group how to sit, then led us downstairs for the first sitting. After the sound of the gong faded, we heard the deep, calm voice of Soen Roshi assuring us, “You are well protected here. Everyone has problems during the day, but zazen is the time to abandon them.”



Soen's words helped us to calm down and focus on "just counting." Towards the end of that twenty-minute sit a feeling of happiness welled up from inside me as I stifled the urge to giggle. Never had I felt such powerful joy. Soen's teisho talking about Jesus and Easter further enhanced this awesome experience and I felt overjoyed knowing that this new world of Zen was going to be the path I'd follow.

In September 1971 I was accepted as a preparatory student. I was grateful to be sitting at the feet of our teacher, Eido Roshi, who gave us instructions each Friday evening about sitting and chanting while encouraging us to also attend weekend sittings at New York Zendo plus week-long sessions in Litchfield Connecticut and, later, at Dai Bosatsu Zendo.

Taking Roshi's advice dramatically changed my life for the better right away. While sitting with the Sangha as much as possible I received many lovely revelations and experiences. To mention just one: while experiencing severe pain in the knees during a sitting at Litchfield, I realized that my physical pain was a heck of a lot better than the emotional pain suffered before becoming a zendo member; the pain itself disappeared shortly afterward.

Sitting zazen also helped to solve the career dilemma I mentioned earlier. It became clear that the next step was to return to my previous work as a performer on radio and TV. As Eido Roshi put it during a Wednesday evening sitting, "What we are and what we want to be will come closer as we do more zazen."

Because I hadn't performed in years, I asked Eido Roshi if he became nervous before a radio or TV appearance. "No," he replied. "I'm on TV and radio daily when I do zazen." The Roshi went on to explain that in many cases, "you



can transcend experience with zazen." Sitting enabled me to do just that.

And whenever I hosted TV shows or did an all-day commercial shoot, I stuffed a sitting cushion inside the garment bag that I carried and sat zazen in dressing rooms between takes and during lunch breaks. I felt refreshed and energized all day as a result and enjoyed more energy and spontaneity during performances. Sitting made my work considerably more effective and enjoyable.

Then I met Ellie, my soul mate, who became the love of my life and my wife. On October 10, 1973, we were married at New York Zendo. Sheila Curtis and Don Douglas were our maid of honor and best man as Eido Roshi conducted our beautiful wedding ceremony during a Wednesday evening sitting, "in front of the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma, Sangha."

I often think about how my life started to change so nicely when I began to sit at New York Zendo. The reason why it became enriched was explained by Eido Roshi when he told Sangha members, "If you're wondering what you're doing here inside the zendo when your friends

This page: Soen Roshi. Opposite page: Eido Roshi leading service.



are watching TV, understand that zazen is the most dynamic thing you can do to decide life's purpose."

I'm forever grateful to my teachers Soen Nakagawa and Eido Tai Shimano Roshi for establishing Zen in America and for leading their students of the Dharma into this wonderful world of Zen.

All-Night Zazen

After having spent several inspiring weeks with us, Soen Roshi left New York on September 21st... As everyone by now knows, Soen Roshi agreed to become Abbot of New York Zendo (Sho Bo Ji) and will visit us annually. Tai-san, of course, will remain director. The Roshi plans to visit here in March at which time he will hold Sesshin. There will be two Summer Sesshins, which will be conducted by him....In addition, from December 4th, Friday, until December 8th, Tuesday, we are planning to have Rohatsu Sesshin here in this zendo to commemorate Buddha's enlightenment. There will be the traditional all-night zazen on the last evening.

From The Sangha Report, October 1970

This page: "True Man Without Rank" by Soen Roshi. Opposite page: left, "Temple of True Dharma," by Tai-san; right, Eido Roshi and Soen Roshi at Eido Roshi's transmission and installation, 1972.



First Ordination

On September 15th, Soen Roshi and Tai-san led the ceremony to celebrate the 3rd anniversary of the New York Zendo in the 67th Street building. The occasion was especially marked by the ordination of the first New York Sangha American monk, Reizan Daiko (Chuck Carpenter). As a monk, Chuck is now to be called Daiko. Daiko means "Dharma Carpenter" and Reizan means "Spiritual Mountain." ***From The Sangha News, October 1971***

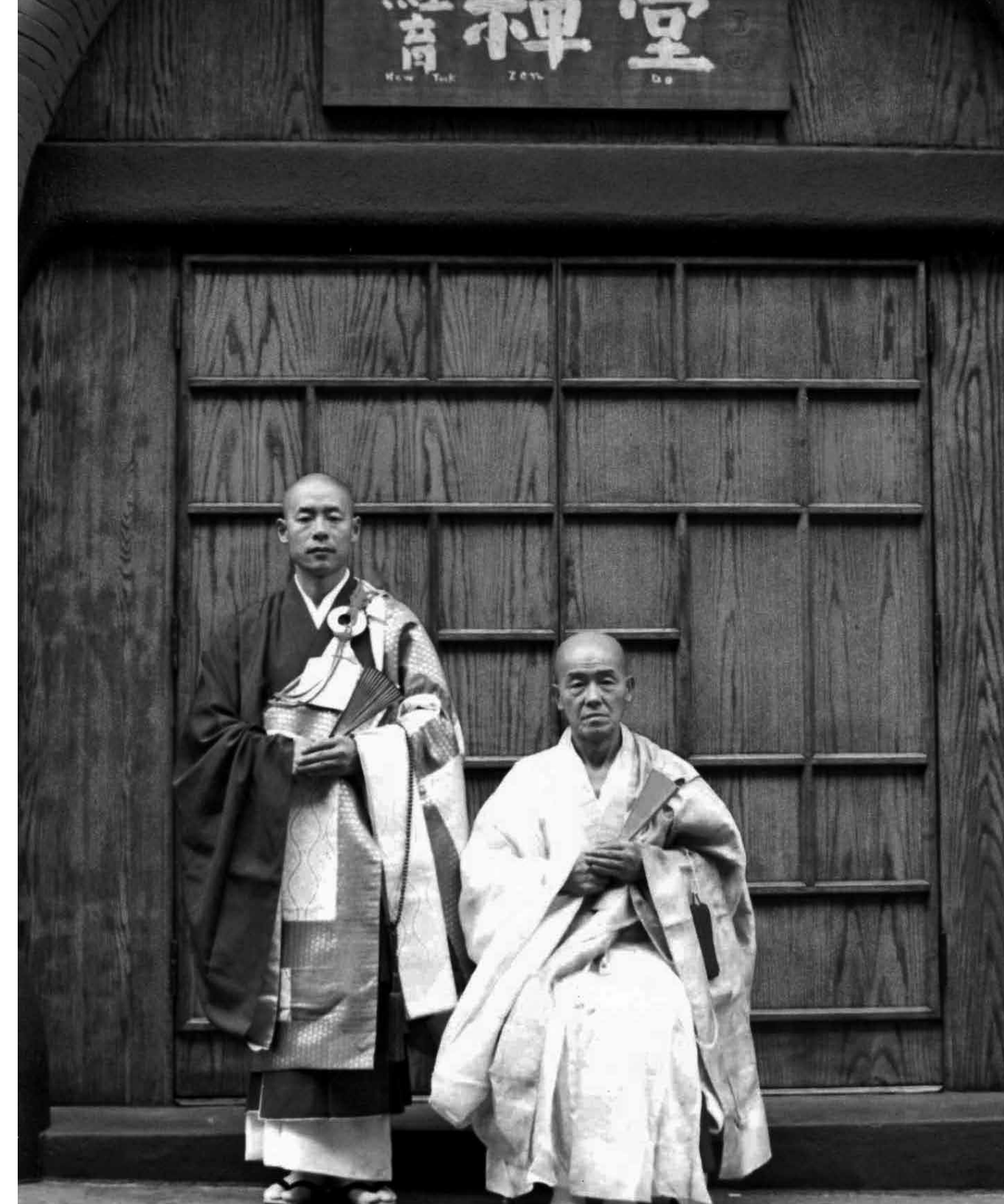
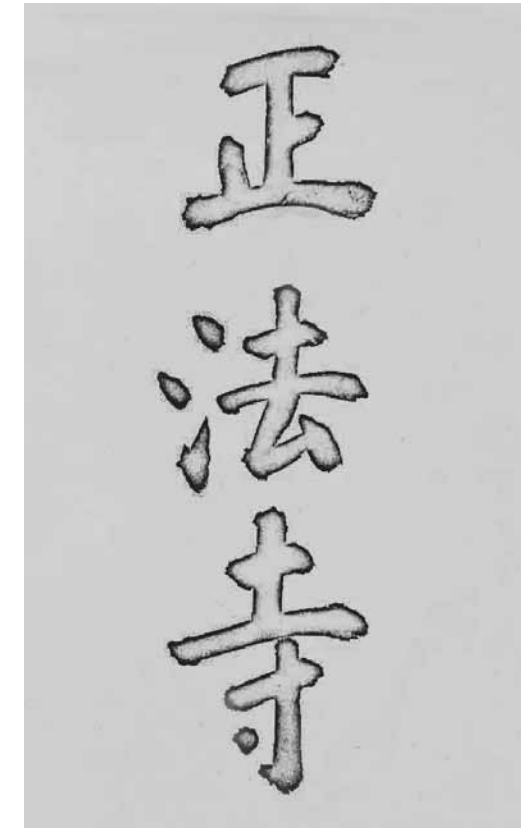
True Man Without Rank *Eido Roshi*

On the fourth anniversary of the New York Zendo Shobo-ji, Shinzan Shiki, the ceremony for the installation of a new abbot, was held at the New York Zendo. Despite my green condition, I was forced by the Dharma to accept the robe and bowl of Mitta Kutsu ("The Cave of the Paramitas") Soen Roshi as a symbol of the transmission of the Rinzai Zen lineage. According to tradition, the Roshi selected a name for his Dharma heir: Mui Shitsu ("True Man Without Rank").

From Namu Dai Bosa, "Part Three: The Way to Dai Bosatsu," by Eido Shimano Roshi

Temple of True Dharma

This calligraphy [below], written by Tai-san, is read Sho Bo Ji and literally means "Temple of True Dharma." This is the poetical name which Soen Roshi gave to us on the evening of our Second Anniversary celebration, September 15, 1970. ***From The Sangha Report, September 1970***



A Poem and Sequel
Ryushin Evelyn Talbot

I joined the New York Zendo in 1974 and Eido Roshi was my root teacher until 1980. I experienced many ups and downs during my studies with him. During dokusan we sometimes created poems together. During sesshins at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, many poems were experienced.

One written in 1979:

*Misty waters
a beam of light—
every which way.*

The sequel, composed in 2017:

*Still waters
illuminating
THIS!*

Haiku in the City

On Wednesday morning, March 6, a group of students participated in a traditional haiku “match”—the first such event ever to take place at the New York Zendo and perhaps at any American Zen center. Soen Roshi and Eido Roshi led the meeting. The participants had previously composed haiku on the theme “New

York.” After the haiku had been read aloud and voted upon, everyone identified...his or her own poem (which had been anonymous until that point). Two that received a large number of votes were Chigetsu Ruth Lilienthal’s:

*Six sparrows bathing
In dirty street water
Diamonds fly in ten directions!*

And Brian Rosenstein’s:

*Head in the Clouds
I forget to watch my step—
City of Dogs!*

**From Dharma Seasons: The Zen Studies
Society Quarterly, Spring 1974**



Forever, Forever, Forever
Yasutani Roshi

On Wednesday morning, March 27th, Eido Roshi led a one-year memorial service for Yasutani Roshi. In his dedication, he said,

*White Cloud comes and goes
Yet, white cloud does not move at all.*

At the end, he translated Soen Roshi’s haiku, which he had read at the funeral service the previous year:

*The sound of awakening gong
In early spring dawn
Forever, forever, forever.*

Afterward, everyone listened to a taped teisho by Yasutani Roshi, translated by Eido Roshi many years ago.
**From Dharma Seasons: The Zen Studies
Society Quarterly, Spring 1974**

A Nyogen Senzaki Evening

On Friday, March 20, we had an unprecedented Nyogen Senzaki Evening. Mrs. Shubin Tanahashi, who had taken care of him for many years in Los Angeles, sat with us and then told us many fascinating

This page: “Way” by Eido Roshi.



details about Senzaki's life in America. Her talk, translated by Aiho, was interspersed with stories and recollections by Soen Roshi and comments by Eido Roshi, and the evening was truly a memorable one, ending with an informal tea upstairs.

**From Dharma Seasons:
The Zen Studies Society Quarterly,
Spring 1974**

Finding The New York Zendo Eshin Brenda Shoshanna

On a cool, lovely Thursday evening in autumn, along with other new students, I lined up outside the zendo. With excited anticipation, we all waited for the doors to open. Who knew what would happen then?

At exactly 6:15, not a minute sooner or later, the doors opened and the line started to move. The doors stayed open for forty-five minutes and closed at precisely 7 o'clock. If you arrived at 7:01 the doors remained closed. No matter what you did then, you couldn't get in. Time mattered here.

If it was your first time, you were directed upstairs to the second floor. As you climbed the steep stairway, the exquisite smell of incense followed you. You were

then ushered into a large room and told to sit on the floor on round black cushions, and wait. Wait for what? No one knew. We crossed our legs awkwardly, straightened our backs, and waited. And, even though we were told to keep our eyes down, out of the corner of our eyes, we peeked at each other.

Vinny Piazza—
Daijo—was there, Harold, Sara Birnbaum, Kuju, two Catholic nuns, and a few others. Oddly enough, this particular group kept returning for years, became inseparable.

Finally, it was 7 o'clock. Bells rang, and the evening began. A slender Japanese monk stood up and told us he was here to give us instruction.

"This is an incredible night. It's your first time sitting in the zendo," he said so softly we could barely hear him. Then he carefully showed us how to do

zazen, and led us in our first sitting. The bells rang out and silence descended. No one moved. Time seemed to go on and on forever. Could this be it?, I wondered. Finally, the sitting ended and thankfully we got up from our cushions. Now it was time to join other, more experienced students, who were sitting downstairs in the main zendo.

The silence downstairs was electric. All were doing kinhin; some were in robes, some were not. Our brand new group of students joined the back of the line and followed along. Walking through the zendo I

was transported to ancient Japan. The intense silence, simplicity, fragrance, and beauty were overwhelming. After kinhin was over, wooden clappers were struck indicating time for the second sitting to begin.

A deep, resounding gong was struck. The sound entered every pore of my



body. In the silence that followed, new thoughts arose. Who are these people? Who am I? Why am I here? How did this happen? The thoughts arose ceaselessly. In spite of this, the second sitting was easier. It was different sitting downstairs in the main zendo, supported by others who sat powerfully beside you without wavering. At the end of that sitting, a few announcements were made about the upcoming week's schedule and we were all thanked for our attendance.

Then Tai-san, who had been sitting at the front of the line, took a few steps to the center. Dressed in black monk's robes, charismatic and bold, he looked as if he'd stepped out of another century. His voice, powerful and deep, seemed to come from the bottom of the earth.

"We will be serving informal tea upstairs now," he said. "If you have time, please join us. You are all welcome at the zendo whenever you care to return."

I started to tremble. At last my teacher was here.

When I returned home later, my husband couldn't wait to hear the news. "Did you like it? Was it all you hoped for?"

"It was strange, it was weird, it hurt terribly," I replied, utterly disconcerted.

My husband was startled. "Well, you tried it, anyway," he said. "Now forget it, let it go. You don't have to go back again."

But this was not something that could be let go. Not knowing what to think, I went to sleep, restless. At four o'clock the next morning, suddenly, as if electrocuted, I sat bolt upright in bed. My God, my God, what happened? I couldn't wait to get back to the zendo again.

Years passed, shocks happened, joy, sorrow, disappointments. But no matter what, for so many years I kept returning. I had to find out for myself.

*The sound of the gong
Forever,
In the spring dawn.*
—Soen Roshi

Transformation *John Jones*

Shobo-ji was a critical gateway for me at a point in time when I was transitioning from a broken way of living to a dawning that transformed my life forever-

more. I had come to Shobo-ji toward the end of a career in the advertising business. During my career I experienced a gradually emerging misunderstanding of who I was. My ego had slowly but surely developed to such a toxic point that I was on the verge of ending it all. The truth was I was unaware there was such a thing as an ego and was for sure ignorant of anything beyond.

Consequently, Shobo-ji was like an emotional emergency room for me which then evolved to an extended stay in the main hospital of Dai Bosatsu Zendo under the care of Eido Roshi. During that time I went through an initial hell of working through forty years of traumas that had brought me to a state of complete despair. To be wholly transparent, that phase was awful, but it was essential for ridding myself of the demons that stood in the way of coming to terms with my true, immaculate identity.

When at long last this new awareness suddenly came upon me, I was confused but felt as though the toxic part had died and was replaced with a sense of self that was wonderful, whole, and joyous. In spite of this new sense I was disoriented and mystified, not realizing that unlike that vacillating ego, this new sense of myself was stable and unwavering. It took me quite some time to understand that this

new me was not going anywhere. And that was followed by many years of maturation and subsequent study to comprehend what had taken place.

All of that happened more than forty years ago. The experienced saved and changed my life for the better, and Shobo-ji was where it all began under the care of Eido Roshi, whom I consider a savior of sorts. I owe him my life. Of course, I am aware of the difficulties that later occurred, but who am I to judge the very person who brought me out of the bowels of hell and introduced me to a self I never suspected existed?

Seven Splendid Chrysanthemums

One hundred people gathered at New York Zendo on the evening of September 15th to celebrate the 7th birthday of the East 67th Street zendo. Seven splendid chrysanthemums, sent by Daiko Chuck Carpenter, were placed at the altar, which was decorated with calligraphy and Buddha children of all sizes and forms carved from Dai Bosatsu wood by Soen Roshi's friend, the sculptor Nakano San.

The ceremony opened to the sound of the bamboo flute. After a period of zazen Eido Roshi recited a verse:



*True Dharma is ageless
Yet the Temple of True Dharma is seven
years old
Bodhisattvas are countless
Yet one hundred lucky Bodhisattvas are
here right now
Today is September 15
—Golden Wind blows and blows
May True Dharma
continue forever
May all Bodhisattvas be lucky ones*

**From Dharma Seasons: The Zen
Studies Society Quarterly, Fall 1975**

Gassho to Eido Roshi! Ohashi

On April 24, 2018, my son Kazuhiro and I left New York Shobo-ji on East 67th Street in New York in the early morning by school bus. We were on our way with some 40 other people to the funeral and memorial services for Kongo Soken Mui Shitsu Eido Tai Zenzu Dai Osho, also known as Eido Roshi.

As the bus was heading for Dai Bosatsu Zendo in the Catskill Mountains, all of my wonderful experiences and encounters, my endless blessed and happy memories with Eido Shimano Roshi came to me.

It was March 19, 1975, the day I met and was introduced to Eido Roshi. That day was the 68th birthday of Soen Nakagawa Roshi, who was a mentor to Eido Roshi. One of my shiatsu students, Harry McCormick, asked me to come and give an old Japanese man an Ohashiatsu treatment as a birthday gift. We went to New York Zendo Shobo-ji. A younger monk came out and welcomed me saying “I’m Eido Roshi. Welcome, Mr. Ohashi.” That was my first time to meet him. Then I gave a treatment to Soen Roshi, who didn’t utter any words, and I didn’t ask anything.

After this experience, I started visiting Eido Roshi many times and asking for his advice. One day I asked him, “How did you establish two temples on such a big scale?” He replied, “Ohashi—I just sit.” Then I asked, “Just sit?” He said, “In order to ‘sit’, I need a temple, but without sitting the temple doesn’t come—because I cannot do what I need to do. If you don’t do what you need to do, nothing comes to you.” He continued, “Do whatever you want to do now. Don’t ask how to do what you want or what you want to do in the future. Do what you want to do now, right now. I just started sitting, then the way I should make the temples came to me.”



Immediately, I followed Eido Roshi’s advice. That evening I started teaching without any students, without knowing anything I was teaching, without any plans, without any place to teach. Eventually, I achieved the founding of my school, with many branches in the

This page: Eido Roshi. Opposite page: Ohashi and Bonnie on their wedding day, 1977.

U.S. and Europe; I taught in more than 27 countries.

On January 2, 1977, Bonnie and I were married at Shobo-ji. Eido Roshi officiated and conducted a beautiful ceremony for us and our friends, who chanted with us to celebrate our union. Later, I asked Eido Roshi to allow me to start a summer program for our students at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, which had been built a couple of years before. He accepted our request. Our first Ohashi Institute Program at Dai Bosatsu Zendo started in July 1979, and continued every year for more than twenty years. From practically all over the world, from many different nationalities and from all corners of life, people came to attend. This ten-day program was a profound and meaningful experience for the all the people who participated. Former students still thank me for putting them in touch with Zen Buddhist philosophy, and specifically, New York Zendo Shobo-ji and Dai Bosatsu Zendo.

I believe more than 1,000 people came to Dai Bosatsu Zendo through our program over the years. Eido Roshi gave us speeches about Zen, and all the residents helped our program run smoothly. Without this summer program



at Dai Bosatsu, I don't think Ohashiatsu would have prospered as much as it did.

All the memories of Eido Roshi and our experience of Dai Bosatsu Zendo came back to me when the bus arrived. My deepest gratitude will continue to go to Eido Roshi forever.

Dharma Travels from East to West

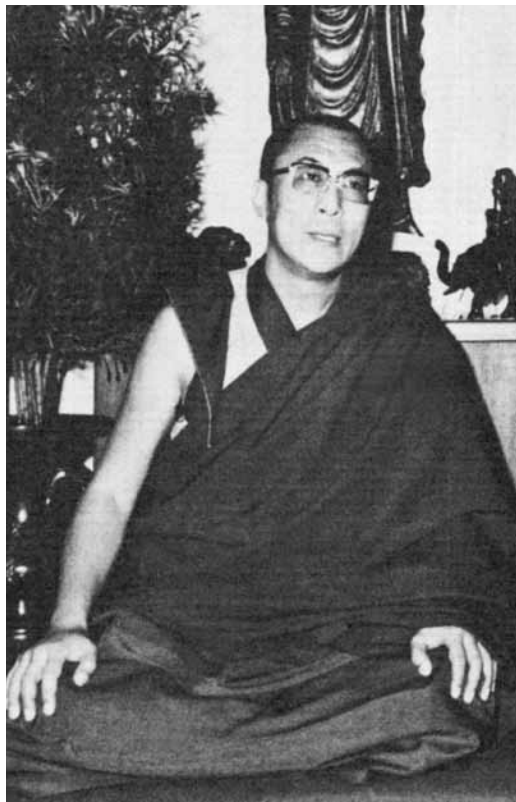
On September 8, 1979, His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, visited the Zen Studies Society. He talked with about one hundred invited guests, including the Japanese Consul General, Ambassador Takahashi. His Holiness and twelve attendants were served a classical Japanese luncheon. His Holiness had a private interview with Mrs. Dorris Carlson, and met with some two hundred and fifty Tibetans who were seeing and paying homage to their king and leader after twenty years of separation.

We were deeply honored to host this occasion. Eido Shimano Roshi, Abbot of the Zen Studies Society, introduced His Holiness:

"On behalf of the Buddhist leaders of the New York area and the representa-

tives of the Japanese community, as well as officers of our Sangha, I should like to express our great sense of honor and deepest gratitude to your Holiness for this visit.

Some time ago, I read inspiring words by the late British historian, Arnold Toynbee. He predicted that future historians, when looking back on the 20th century, will consider of major significance not events currently viewed



as being of lasting importance, but rather an event few people are even aware of: the transmission of Buddha Dharma from East to West. Today's visit of His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, is one concrete event of this transmission which will be long remembered."

From The Zen Studies Society Newsletter, Fall/Winter 1979

My First Encounter with Shobo-ji ***Daishin Paweł Wojtasik***

It happened back in May of 1982. At that time I was a student of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. I had also been studying Chinese calligraphy at China Institute in New York. At the calligraphy class, a woman told me about an amazing Zen temple on the Upper East Side. She convinced me to visit New York Zendo Shobo-ji one Thursday, on the public night, when beginners were welcome. Upon entering, I was immediately struck by the impeccable aesthetics of the place. It was the perfect environment in which to practice meditation, I thought. Being a painter and having studied

architecture, I was sensitive to my surroundings. At Shobo-ji I felt that I was inside a fully realized work of art. Moreover, it was as if here the ancient Japanese culture had been transplanted into New York City, without any compromises. The sparseness, the perfect proportions, the beauty of natural materials, the wild energy of calligraphies, the grace of flower arrangements, the subtle scent of incense—I was inhabiting a Kurosawa or Mizoguchi film.

I was told to put on a robe and sit in a circle of newcomers on the second floor, and a senior student with a deep voice told us how to meditate and how to behave in the zendo. He was somewhat rigid and dogmatic, I felt, compared to Trungpa's approach, which was gentler. But I was willing to try it. We went downstairs and meditated for a while facing the wall, or rather the backs of those who were facing the wall. There were two rows of people on each side. At some point a senior student gave a talk. I don't remember what he said, but I remember he took a 10-dollar bill and burnt it in front of us. Everyone was amazed! (It was equivalent to \$25 in 2018 dollars). The gesture embedded itself in my memory.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.



The atmosphere of the zendo was rigorous. There was a sense of striving towards something very desirable, very beautiful and exotic, yet very distant and hard to reach—one would need to do battle to attain it. Battle with oneself—it was somewhat terrifying. Still, I signed up for the weekend sesshin beginning the next day. During sesshin the meditation was extremely painful, but there was a lot of energy coursing through the room, and I was able to make it to the end. The beauty and elegance of the surroundings carried me through the ordeal. Doing dokusan with Eido Roshi was a revelation. It was a mix of intimacy and terror—to live in late 20th-century New York City, and suddenly to find oneself face-to-face with a Buddha/samurai—the experience was intensely real and surreal at the same time. He was totally with me and I had to respond to that. I found it incredible that a new student could see the Zen Master individually almost from the start. Two weeks later I was off to Dai Bosatsu Zendo to do my first seven-day sesshin. I was desperate to free myself from myself and was convinced



that my initial Shobo-ji experience pointed me in the right direction. Thirty-six years later, I still attend sesshin at Shobo-ji. The place (and the practice it embodies) is inexhaustible.

Memories of Shobo-ji ***Katherine Senshin Griffith***

I first heard the word “zazen” from Tim Miller, whose performance art piece I was in during the summer of 1984. It sounded like a practice that would be good for me. Two and a half years later, I looked up “Zen” in the White Pages of the phone book and found

the Zen Studies Society. As it turned out, this was the same place where Tim had sat. After taking my first class in February of 1987, I practiced there through 2000, when I moved to Los Angeles. I am now the Program Steward at the Zen Center of Los Angeles (ZCLA), was made a Dharma-Holder this Spring and am on the ZCLA Teacher’s Circle.

I have many fond memories of practicing at New York Zendo Shobo-ji: Amidst a very busy Manhattan life, I remember rushing from all parts of town to arrive

before the doors closed and enter the deep, dark, quiet oasis of Shobo-ji. I’d quickly go upstairs to put on the one robe that fit me. Other memories include Katsuro and Aiho greeting the arrivals, a quiet early morning snowfall in the back garden, and many wonderful Saturday mornings with service and zazen followed by tea and treats and temple cleaning. I loved that morning service. Each time we did it was an amazing journey of the spirit that I miss to this day.

I appreciated the Friday night classes, often led by Saman Sodo, as well as the ones taught by the renowned Buddhist scholar Dr. Joan Stambaugh. Both invaluable, but revealing the distinction between academic Buddhism and embodied Zen.

We sat extra sits during Rohatsu week in solidarity with the monastery. I loved the vegetable creatures Aiho made to place on the altars during the Segaki service. I appreciated the Thursday night Dharma talks and the chance to get to know my fellow practitioners. I gave my first public talk on practice at Shobo-ji on the topic of Zen and humor.

I did almost every weekend sesshin and all-day sit for many years. I remember



those consistently delicious meals, sleeping on the yellow carpet upstairs, and how the noise of the bus stopping outside could sound an awful lot like the dokusan bell. I also did several sesshins at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, but it is the ones at Shobo-ji that were the most formative.

My exposure to Zen and the Dharma at Shobo-ji infused my life and has stayed with me to this day. I do zazen before every performance. My writing is informed by the endless Dharma vista. And my day job is working for a Zen center!

Every year, when we at ZCLA visit Nyogen Senzaki's grave, I recall with gratitude my experience and formative years in Zen at Shobo-ji.

The Man at the Door ***Soun Joe Dowling***

The founder once said, "Katsuro is the guardian angel of Shobo-ji," and he was right. A member of New York Zendo for more than forty years, Katsuro's name is one of the most frequently recorded in the zendo's regular sign-in

books, and he has often been at the door of the zendo during that time. He (a.k.a. Anthony McKiernan) has regularly attended and been an officer during the Thursday and Friday night sits for decades, as well as assisting Aiho Shimano as jisha and tenzo over many years, generally arranging things, and seeing that things go smoothly for everyone while at the zendo. He usually is the first person people meet at our beautiful New York Zendo, now enjoying its fiftieth anniversary.

Years ago Katsuro gave the regularly scheduled Dharma talk one Thursday evening, during which he quoted a haiku by Issa that expresses a lot with very little. The title is "the snail."

*Climbing Mount Fuji
Slowly
Very slowly.*



Issa's poem sums up what seems to be a "que sera, sera" attitude, with a tolerance for whatever will be and a general acceptance of others along the way. There is no rush, it seems to say; we're in this together.

Katsuro is an expert observer on Shobo-ji's public night, which is on Thursdays. That is when an individual passes from being interested in meditation to actually going to get training at a zendo. Most people don't come back. In some way zazen practice is not what the majority expects. However, among those of us who did and do come back, you can be sure one of the reasons is the man at the door.

Shobo-ji Turns 20

On September 15, 1988 New York Zendo Shobo-ji celebrated its 20th Anniversary on East 67th Street. The weekend prior to that some fifty members and guests attended a 20th Anniversary Weekend Sesshin where the zazen was rich and deep, having become ripe over two decades of continuous practice in one place. Then as now our minds



were set to the challenges at hand, but of course we could not help but feel gratitude for the effort and enthusiasm of earlier years. It is with this spirit that Shobo-ji 20th Anniversary Issue is dedicated to the memory of Milly Johnstone; member, friend, and patron of New York Zendo and the Zen Studies Society.

From The Journal of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 1989

Zen in America

Essan Shoei Nakai, a visiting monk from Japan

Here I would like to introduce New York Zendo Shobo-ji. It occupies a three-story building in Manhattan. The zendo is on the first floor. There is a rock garden in the back, and when I look into it, I almost forget that I am in New York City. On the second floor there is the Dharma Hall where students can gather, and the living quarters are on the third floor. Two residents take care of the zendo. In contrast to the elaborate setting of Dai Bosatsu, this is a convenient metropolitan gathering place for many to learn and practice zazen in the mornings and evenings and to chant Buddhist sutras together. On Thursdays,

orientation sessions are offered for newcomers. On Fridays, a Buddhist studies course is offered. The Sunday morning service is a continuation of this country's custom of Sunday morning church services. People with a variety of backgrounds come to study here. Some began their studies with Soen Nakagawa Roshi over fifteen years ago, while others know nothing at all about Zen. Ten or so students carry out the operation of the temple. Eido Roshi provides guidance during workshops and weekend sesshins during the yearly two-month training periods. On some weekends, as many as fifty students gather here. When appropriate, the first floor zendo is used as a Dharma Hall or dining hall. It is astonishing to see with what efficiency the students conduct these transitions.

The students who gather here study Zen while holding down full-time jobs. I am profoundly touched by the dedication of these people who commute daily from their working places while also carrying out their responsibilities at home. One thing that has also surprised me is the absence of Japanese people. Very few attend zazen practice. Perhaps this is a reflection of Japan's lack of interest in religion. I have found at Shobo-ji the future direction for Japan's



Zen temples. And one can see the foundation for American Zen here as well.

In the temples in America, there is much more openness and an abundance of opportunity for people to sit in sesshin. There are in America and Europe students who begin their



days with zazen and work practice and continue their training into the night. It will be a while before Buddha's teachings will be fully understood and incorporated into the lives of Westerners, but one must realize that it has not even been a century since Buddhism arrived here. The teachings will grow. Here in America, at Dai Bosatsu Zendo and at Shobo-ji, the Dharma wheel revolves every day.

From The Journal of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 1988, Issue 8

Then and Now

Student: What is the main difference between the students who came thirty-five years ago and those who come today?

ER: I came to this country in the beginning of the Golden 60s. That's not only thirty-five years ago, but a really unique, specific period in the history of the U.S.—the 60s—really glorious 60s! There was confusion, as well as an interest for Eastern things. People who came to Zen in those days were perhaps over-excited about Eastern mysticism. And people who come to Zen nowadays, especially at Shobo-ji, are those who are really tired of working on Wall Street for example. They are not necessarily over-excited

about Eastern mysticism, but rather over-exhausted from Western Capitalism! That's the difference.

From an interview with Eido Roshi, The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Spring 1996

The Eternal Will Aiho Yasuko Shimano

On September 15, 1998, Roshi and I were extremely happy to attend the 30th anniversary celebration of New York Zendo Shobo-ji. As a living witness, I wrote the articles for the Zen Studies Society Newsletter from 1991–1994 entitled "The Way to Shobo-ji." It was my personal reminiscence. When I wrote these articles, Shobo-ji was about to celebrate its 25th anniversary. I felt as though I was looking at my own face in the mirror.

During the past three decades innumerable events occurred. Some of them were like climbing a steep mountain. Some of them were like crossing a river where the bridge was broken. Nevertheless, Shobo-ji became 30 years

old. As Confucius said, "At the age of 15 I began study. At the age of 30 I became independent..." So, Shobo-ji is an independent, mature zendo with youthful, vigorous power.

On March 3, 1968 at 3PM, available Sangha gathered in the old dirty garage located at 223 East 67th Street. We placed the gong at the center, burned incense and chanted Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo 33 times with intense nen to "Let True Dharma Continue."

On June 25th, 1968 the renovation began. A worker was knocking out a

This page: 30th Anniversary. Opposite page: "Inexhaustibility" by Soen Roshi.



wall with a hammer, while drinking a can of Budweiser beer and said, “This building will become a Buddhist temple...” When he said that I felt the voice from SOMETHING coming through the workman, which gave Roshi and me encouragement and conviction. At that moment nobody on this earth thought that this ugly garage would ever become a beautiful, elegant and breathtaking zendo.

I am proud of it, as a mother is proud of her own son. I’m grateful for my karma to be involved with this historic creation and its transformation and growth the past 30 years. As one of the Dharma students I sat and sat. I prayed and prayed.



My prayer was nothing but, “Let True Dharma Continue. Please encourage and guide us all. May Shobo-ji be protected ever, ever and forever.” I will continue to sit and sit during the remainder of my present incarnation.

This is my ETERNAL WILL, my lifelong devotion and doubtless commitment for my beloved Shobo-ji.

*Endless is my vow,
Boundless autumn sky,
Blue heaped upon blue*
—Soen Roshi

We are all on our pilgrimage, which has no end. Luckily we have no alternative

but to walk together with THIS. Thus we can cross rivers and mountains. With THIS we have no choice, but to return to our original HOME where THIS radiates shining alone under the name, “True Dharma—Shobo!”

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall/Winter 1998

The Tea Kettle Denshin Bruce Ackland

The tea kettle. It rattled back and forth. Furious—spouting steam and spitting into the evening air. I changed into my robe and went downstairs. Aiho-san sat in the vestibule facing the zendo as she directed members to their seats: “Facing wall.”

“I turned the tea kettle off, Aiho-San,” I whispered. She jerked her head towards me. Had I interrupted her zazen? As upset as the hot kettle upstairs, she hissed, “What?”

During my years attending evening sits at Shobo-ji, my relationship with Aiho was cordial always, but never warm. She often confused me with Daishin. Or Daiden. It didn’t bother me. It was just the way it was. At the 30th anniversary of Shobo-ji, a series of black-and-white

photos hung on the wall outside the dining room at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. The photographs illustrated the transformation of the carriage house on East 67th Street into the zendo and resident quarters of Shobo-ji. But there was one photograph of Eido Roshi and Aiho standing side-by-side in the street at the entrance of Shobo-ji that caused me to stop. Eido Roshi faces the camera, a younger and more robust Roshi than the later-years Roshi I knew. Alongside him, Aiho waits in a full kimono, her hair tucked up, an obi around her waist, sandals on her feet, as if she had been teleported from Japan and plunked onto East 67th Street; a foreigner in a strange land. There was something about the expression on her face, and the formal, traditional Japanese kimono that she wore, that caused me to wonder and imagine what she had given up to come to America, fifteen or so years after a world war devastated her country, and begin a different life in a city halfway around the world from her native land.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, when I was going to evening sits and weekend sesshin at Shobo-ji I was (and, I confess, still am) a reluctant Bodhisattva. Meaning that I attended sits on a regular basis and then did

not attend for months and sometimes years at a time. I would return to Shobo-ji for evening sits, always grateful and relieved to enter the calm aura of the zendo, to encounter the familiar smell of the incense, the stillness of this consecrated space, the sense of calm and the centered feeling of relief and contentment once I took my seat on the zafu.



Although she had helpers, various jishas—Katsuro was always in attendance in those years—this was Aiho’s domain, while Eido Roshi attended to the practice at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. It was she who presided over the daily running of the city zendo, through thick and thin, when neither rain nor snow nor gloom of night kept her from Shobo-ji. Not the easiest job.

Yet she persevered. I remember one time, when she had just returned from a trip to Japan, she remarked on how timid and hesitant other women,



her friends and family in Japan, had been about going out and about their business in the city. Whereas she, after living in New York for some years, was perfectly able to take off on her own. She wasn't Carrie Bradshaw, but New York had worked a bit of magic on her over the decades.

When I think of Shobo-ji the image of Aiho-san as jikijitsu at each evening sit rises in my mind's eye. She leads the Sangha for the Heart Sutra. Sitting on her special bench at the head of the row of cushions by the altar, she

announces, "MA KA HAN NYA HA RA MI TA SHIN GYO...", and the chant begins. What has stayed with me through the years: no matter where I am, or who is the jikijitsu or the ino, when MA KA HAN NYA HA RA MI TA SHIN GYO is chanted, it is Aiho-san's voice leading the sutra that I always hear.

**True Love—Mu Shin—
Complete Tao**
Anne Vitell

I began sitting at New York Zendo in 1991. I had already begun Zen practice, but circumstances were such that I was not able find a correct connection with a teacher and a group, so I was still a bit lost. I came to Shobo-ji because of a small ad placed in *The New York Times* about a Zen art sale—that was interesting. (Apparently, this was the last large art sale the New York Zendo ever held.) I went. Mostly I remember the welcoming energy of the place. There was grace and beauty and authenticity. I do not remember the art specifically, although I did purchase a translation of the Rinzai Roku at that time. Eido Roshi was there, chatting with various people. He was obviously the master, an older Asian

man in elaborate Zen robes. I did not speak with him then.

Karma is interesting. I sat with the Sangha as often as I could for years, but somehow spoke with almost no one. Aiho-san was always warm and welcoming—and in dokusan, I spoke with Eido Roshi—but that was it. Since I was living and working quite far downtown, almost at the opposite side of Manhattan island, getting to New York Zendo involved a long, difficult subway commute. On a good week I came twice: on Wednesday, when evening sitting included Kanzeon chanting, and on Saturday, for morning service and sitting. On Saturdays there was a tea afterward for the group. As it turns out, I met my future husband at one of these teas, in 1995. There was an instant and deep connection. For me, it still feels as if the connection was there before we met face to face.

Our lives and practices intersected. We have been practicing together ever since, sometimes in more connection with the group, and sometimes less. I feel we are linked to each other, and to Shobo-ji and Dai Bosatsu, through something that transcends this lifetime. When I was

pregnant with our son (now 16), I remember sitting weekly at New York Zendo, even attending weekend sesshins until I was so pregnant that deep bowing become impossible. I chanted Kanzeon with energy and sincerity—for my child not yet born, and for the world in which he would be living. I remember different people at the zendo had different guesses as to whether the baby was a boy or a girl. One day Aiho-san asked me when the baby was due. I told her, and she said, "Every day is a good day."

New York Zendo is fifty years old this year, and so am I, actually. Sometimes events seem to happen on the thinnest thread of chance, but then afterward, it seems they were meant to be—and therefore completely correct. Roshi used to talk about "with the readiness of time." I feel this about the inter-twining of my life karma with the Dharma energy of New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu. These days we are still very occupied with family concerns, and we live far from the city and mountain zendos. We sit here, just two of us, in our small zendo. And I believe that maybe, somehow, beyond form, time, and space, our connection with Shobo-ji and Dai Bosatsu continues.



New Year’s Eve at Shobo-ji

Joan Weinstein

I have celebrated many New Years’ Eves at Shobo-ji, chanting and taking turns striking the gong 108 times. Each ceremony has been special in its own way.

I will never forget the turn of the millennium. We sat silently in darkness and just before midnight, through the wall, we could hear the neighbors’ party next door counting down: 10...9...8...Happy New Year! I glanced up and saw a woman who I did not know sitting across from me in the zendo. Our eyes met. We smiled. Happy New Year.

Manhattan Monkey

On New Year’s Eve eighty people attended Oshogatsu service. Two strong sits were followed by a Dharma talk given by Eido Roshi. In his talk Roshi mentioned that it was not necessary to know the meaning of “Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo” but to totally “combust” yourself in chanting. This combustion is the true meaning of the three famous monkeys covering their eyes, ears and tongue. With strong chanting and ringing the main gong 108 times, the

celebration concluded with a party on the second floor. Special thanks to Aiho-san for making traditional toshikoshi soba noodles, a symbol of the bridge between the old and new years, and karumame, black beans, a symbol of good health for the coming year.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2004

Nen! Blooming Flowers

On the morning of July 8 a beautiful stone monument and a new Jizo statue were unveiled and dedicated at New York Zendo. Inscribed on the stone is the poem *Nen Zureba, Hana Hiraku* composed by Shinmin Sakamura Sensei. The English translation carved on the back reads “Nen! Blooming flowers.” This monument is the compliment to a larger version enshrined at Dai Bosatsu Zendo for the 25th Anniversary. In the pouring rain Eido Roshi conducted a Kaigen eye-opening ceremony



in the garden. In his formal dedication verse he recited:

*Unexpected summer rain
Purifies both Jizo
Bodhisattva and new
monument,
But they have never been
defiled,
Since prior to Heaven and
Earth.
Be that as it may,
With our Universal Nen
Let us chant the Jizo
Dharani:
On ka ka kabi sam ma ei
sowa ka!*

In spite of the weather, many Sangha members and eight guests from Japan attended. Myoyo Tanaka donated both the stones. Fujin and Subaru gave the Jizo statue standing previously in the garden. It will return to Dai Bosatsu Zendo to the memorial for William H. Johnstone in Sangha meadow.
From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall 2001

September 11th, 2001

Aiho

On the fateful Tuesday we all will remember, Aiho-san felt strongly that we must keep the zendo open for the afternoon sit and continue the regular schedule despite the uncertain time. Many came to do zazen strongly and silently on that day and throughout the months ahead. Our deep sitting not only helped ourselves, but also eased the pain of those who died in this tragedy.

Buddhist Compassion

Rev. Daiho Hirose, a Japanese Obaku monk, hearing of the events of 9/11 asked his congregation, friends, other monks and nuns to write one copy of the Heart Sutra. With great intensity and with zazen energy each person hand-wrote the Heart Sutra. Hossan collected over 850 calligraphies, and sent them all to Eido Roshi in the hope that their saturated “nen” would be able to appease the suffering caused by 9/11. Half of these sutras were taken to Dai Bosatsu Zendo and half are

Opposite page: “Every Day is a Good Day” by Kogetsu Roshi. This page: Eido Roshi



enshrined in the altar at Shobo-ji. We would like to thank Hossan personally and all those individuals who took the time and energy to hand write the Heart Sutra. Your concern was a gentle encouragement of calm and peace and a testament to Buddhist compassion.

Ihai

To always remember the victims of the tragedy, Eido Roshi asked Mrs. Yanagisawa to make a special Ihai (memorial plaque) dedicated to all deceased victims of 9/11. Mrs. Yanagisawa hand painted the plaque herself, writing one side in Japanese and on the other in English. These Ihai will forever stay at both zendos.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Summer/Fall 2002

As Time Goes By—35 Years

It has been 35 years since the opening of New York Zendo Shobo-ji on September 15, 1968. NYZ commemorated its 35th Anniversary with a weekend sesshin and a full zendo. In a Thursday night Dharma talk on December 4, 2003 Aiho-san reminisced about the early days of the zendo with many interesting and funny stories. She

said, “in comparison with the old days, where there were no bells and gongs to ring, people sat on pillows instead of zafus, and it was necessary to sew cushions by hand. Nowadays all these essentials are a given. All that we must work on now is faith in practice and a gentle-hearted spirit. This attitude of humility and tender-heartedness, with less and less ego, is called “Sunao” in Japanese. With ‘sunao’ heart and mind, our Zen practice will surely bloom; this is the fruit of our zazen and a time to truly enjoy life. As Shakyamuni lived in India 2500 years ago and spread the Dharma to India, China, Japan;



so too, now in America, Shobo-ji was born 35 years ago, Dai Bosatsu 28 years ago and all these events were meant to happen.” She concluded her talk, “As Time Goes By,” with whatever should happen, True Dharma will absolutely continue; and what is essential is ‘Sunao’ spirit.”

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2004

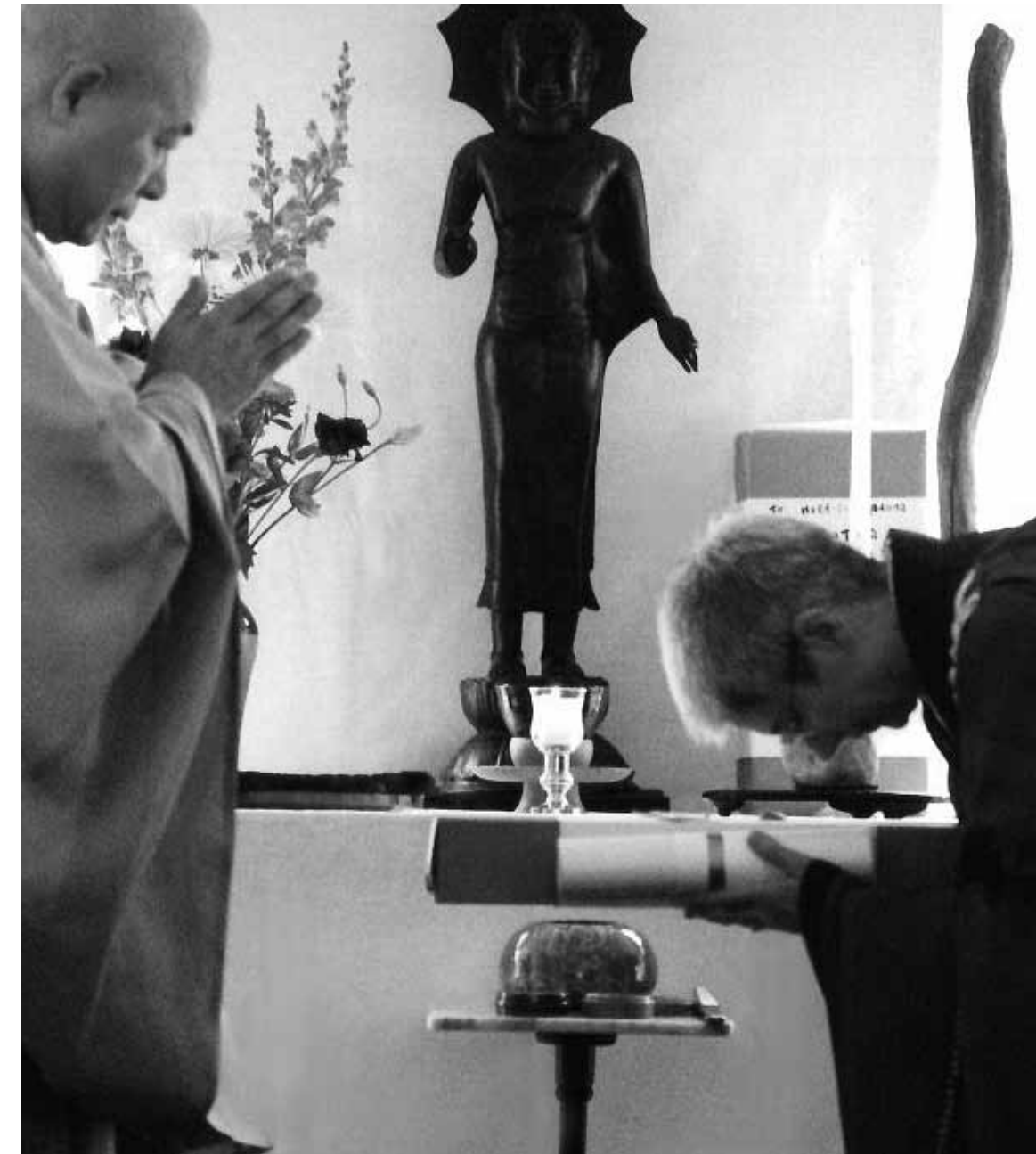
Thousand-armed, Thousand-eyed Bodhisattvas

This spring, Eido Roshi donated two statues of Senju Kannon, the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Kanzeon to New York Zendo Shobo-ji. Kanzeon in this form represents the Bodhisattva’s multitudinous powers to save all sentient beings. Both statues now flank the main altar Buddha of Infinite Light and Life.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2006

Heart/Mind Flowering

2008 was a significant year for the Zen Studies Society. Not only was the 40th anniversary of New York Zendo Shobo-ji celebrated, but on October 12, a Shitsugo (room/name) Ceremony was conducted at the Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji to



acknowledge Roko Sherry Chayat (then Roko ni-Osho) as a Roshi in the Hakuin-Torei-Soen lineage of Rinzaï Zen Buddhism, the first American woman to receive transmission in the Rinzaï lineage. As a symbol of the acknowledgement, Eido Roshi gave her the name of Shingeshitsu, “Heart/Mind Flowering.”

Taken from The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2009, and Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji: 40th Anniversary (a Commemorative Book)

Ginko in the Garden

In the Spring of 2007, visitors to New York Zendo included the cultural group Rinrikai, a Japanese cultural group based in NYC, that was treated to a special Dharma talk by Eido Roshi, and twenty-two Rinzaï Zen Okuri-san (temple wives), who performed a special “Goeka” chanting service, as well as several of Eido Roshi’s relatives, classmates and friends from Japan. Eido Roshi turned seventy-five.

Two young trees were planted in the garden. One, a ginko tree, was donated by Fujin Attale Formhals, and the other, a small Japanese maple, was donated by Seigan Ed Glassing in memory of his mother.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2007

Shobo-ji Turns 40

New York Zendo Shobo-ji celebrated its 40th anniversary with a special four-day sesshin that concluded with a ceremony held on Sunday, September 14th. Over fifty Sangha members participated in the retreat, including Roko ni-Osho [Shinge Roshi], Genjo Osho, and representatives from Dai Bosatsu Zendo, the Zen Center of Syracuse, Chobo-ji, Endless Mountain Zendo, Brooklyn Aikikai, Hollow Bones Zendo, and Wild Goose Zendo.

Each day, Eido Roshi told incredible stories about the opening of New York Zendo Shobo-ji, and about the efforts of Soen Roshi, Chester and Dorris Carlson, Aiho-san Yasuko Shimano, and the many known and unknown deceased Dharma brothers and sisters



who have woven a strand in Shobo-ji's mandala web. He also expressed his gratitude to the Dharma for actualizing his Impossible Dream of an authentic Rinzaï Zen Buddhist temple in the middle of New York City.

As our sesshin concluded, fifty guests joined the Sangha in a celebration to mark the founding of our city temple. Roko ni-Osho acted as Master of Ceremonies and introduced special guest speaker Dr. Tenzin Robert Thurman, Professor of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University. Dr. Thurman gave a lively talk about Dharma in the West, after which Ryugan Robert Savoca Sensei, Yuho Carl Baldini and students from Brooklyn Aikikai led a misogi purification ceremony in the main zendo. Next, Sangha member Dr. Chi-in Lionel Party introduced and performed a harpsichord concert, featuring pieces by Domenico Scarlatti, J.S. Bach, Girolamo Frescobaldi, and Francois Couperin. Eido Roshi was asked to give closing remarks, and he spoke about how important it is for each of us to have a vow and a dream—to march on no matter how difficult—and to trust in the Dharma.

From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Winter/Spring 2009

Just Breathe

Kokan James Borowiec

The new students arrive at the beginners' class at Shobo-ji. They have a diversity that reflects the world. Some in high school, others with white hair from a long life. Their backgrounds include most religions under the sun, or no religion at all. But a commonality of the students is a search for something missing. What can I do to stop being so stressed all the time? Why do my relationships keep failing? Why am I not happier? They search for answers and relief from their perceived incompleteness.

After the students arrive, simple zazen instruction is provided in the Dharma Hall. Keep your back straight. Watch your inhalation and exhalation. Count your exhalations. Be still. Although brief instructions on prostrations and kinhin are included, we focus on awareness of breath.

When I first started teaching the beginners' class about twenty-five years ago, I initially provided more detailed information on the practice. More things to remember, and more things to forget. After leading the class for a couple of

This page: Eido and Shinge Roshi.
Opposite page: 40th Anniversary



years, I learned that most people can only retain so much information. More words do not mean more understanding. Like other aspects of life, do not overcomplicate things. Keep it simple. Just breathe.

Many students find the act of zazen more challenging than they expected. Newcomers often encounter discomfort (or perhaps even agony) during the first few times that they sit. New York City also attracts the overcommitted individual who, misquoting Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, tries to do six impossible things before breakfast. It can be difficult to find the time to just be still, to just watch the breath, to just be HERE. But even with all the distractions of modern life, students occasionally find themselves at home at Shobo-ji with the quiet and the practice. This is a wonderful thing.

When I started my own practice at Shobo-ji more than thirty years ago, it wasn't so easy to find a place to sit. People would use a book called the Yellow Pages and scroll to the middle to locate "meditation," or to the back to find "Zen." Only a handful of listings were found (they weren't called hits back then). Now a Google

search for "meditation in NYC" returns over *10 million results*. Imagine that. While the huge number of results suggests—rightfully—that one can meditate anywhere in the city, it also means that we can find ourselves instead enticed (or possibly frightened) by ads for "part meditation session, part networking group for young creative entrepreneurs." We can get side-tracked into an endless search for the very best meditation practice without seeing that it has always been right here.

The gift of being able to teach first-time visitors to Shobo-ji is priceless. Students often ask thoughtful questions, and these queries can cause the instructor to look more closely at his or her own practice. Instruction for the student transforms into instruction for oneself. The emphasis on watching the breath is not only imparted to the student, but reinforced for the instructor. What else could one ask for but this?



All things we do in life require the simple act of breathing. Everything to be discovered about ourselves and the world starts with watching our breath. So let's just breathe.

Sit!
Jikei Jean Bankier

"Sit!," a man roared at his dog on the sidewalk outside; and several members of the New York Sangha obediently straightened their spines.

Such can be the interplay between the street world and the New York Zendo. Clanging and rumbling fire engines. Mu. Tuneless passerby whistling. Mu. Road enraged horns. Muuuuuu...

...It is the everyday sittings that matter. The stillness—even when the city roars. The unsentimental scent of "Zen" incense. The sudden sight of flowers reaching from the altar; of pebbles raked in advance of ripple; of black ink dashed across a scroll. Of an elegant, energetic Aiho-san

Opposite page: "Visionary Flowers in the Air" by Eido Roshi.

in robes and tabi and bound-up hair. Thank you Roshi, Aiho-san, Carlsons. Thank you, Dharma sisters and brothers.
From The Newsletter of the Zen Studies Society, Fall/Winter 1998

Ode to Shobo-ji
Daigi Thomas Stabb

What's the use of any insight gained on the mountaintop if it cannot be integrated into daily life in the city?

For the past fifteen years, Shobo-ji has served as the vital tissue connecting my busy life in the city with my infrequent, but transformational experiences at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. I must confess that, despite residing in New York City, I have long considered Dai Bosatsu Zendo my spiritual home and that participating in Anniversary Sesshin is the heart of my Zen practice. That said, it's been easy for me to romanticize fast growth at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, but the slow and steady growth I've found at Shobo-ji has been perhaps more helpful for integrating Zen practice into my ordinary life. For me, New York Zendo is as an oasis of deep silence amidst a maddening city. It creates

a meeting place between two worlds by submersing the life-ways of Dai Bosatsu Zendo into a sea of street noise, car horns, and jackhammers. Standing as a testament to non-dualism, Shobo-ji proclaims daily that there is no meaningful distinction between Dai Bosatsu Zendo and New York City. Inside her doors, one actually feels this to be so.

Over the years, every time I'd walk in off the street, Shobo-ji has served

as the most reliable mind mirror, reflecting my state. There's no fooling her. If I made any "progress" at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, it would be continually tested on the cushions at Shobo-ji until it yielded some positive result in my life. How much have I seen and come to accept while sitting at Shobo-ji? How many difficulties have dissipated in her silence? If only her blank white walls could speak!



Finding Shobo-ji

Choren Karin Drew

I have a good friend whom I've known for decades. From the time we met, he'd sometimes mention a magical place called Dai Bosatsu Zendo, where he'd gone for just one weekend many years before. So when my father's 70th birthday was approaching and I decided that a weekend in a Buddhist monastery would be a perfect gift, I knew where we had to go.

To me—a longtime New Yorker—Dai Bosatsu seemed impossibly remote. “We must have passed it,” my dad and I kept saying to each other as Beaverkill Road wound endlessly upward, narrowing from two lanes to one lane to a narrow dirt road with blind curves, no shoulder, and an alarming drop-off to one side. When we finally arrived, the silence and the enormity of the landscape amazed me. The monastery itself looked like an apparition, the soaring lines of its Japanese roof rising improbably from the dense Catskills woods. It all seemed very exotic, and very far from home. But inside, I found that the stillness of the zendo and the sounds of the chanting and the bells were things I'd needed desperately without even realizing the lack. I fell in love with the practice, and the place.

I started to return for weekends, and gradually became aware that Zen Studies Society had a second temple, one that was located right in my own city. And so, two years after discovering Dai Bosatsu, I came to Shobo-ji for the first time.

Shobo-ji is in the center of Manhattan—possibly one of the least remote spots on earth. But its rooms are unexpectedly and almost strangely quiet. A heavy stillness seems to radiate from its walls. And like Dai Bosatsu, Shobo-ji has an extraordinary, nearly magical beauty: the elegant proportions of the zendo; the narrow hallway illuminated only by nightlights, where people's shadows dance on the walls during kinhin; the perfection of the tiny garden.

Both temples are ideal and inspiring places for zazen. But in contrast to Dai Bosatsu's seclusion, Shobo-ji is surrounded day and night by a maelstrom of human activity. Gentle reminders of the city's presence are frequent. Sounds sometimes drift in, especially in summer when the doors to the garden are open—distant horns and sirens, the wheezing of the M67 bus, faint voices



and laughter. Occasionally the reminders are less gentle: during the expansion of the Second Avenue subway tunnel, our sits were punctuated by muffled explosions of dynamite that literally shook the building.

During a recent all-day sit, we had to strain a bit to hear the Dharma talk over the sounds of a Native American dance ceremony being held next door. (Fortunately for us, the zendo's silence is absolute at times as well.)

And re-entry into the world from Shobo-ji happens fast. There's no drive back down the mountain, no buffer: you step out the door directly into the chaos of Manhattan. During sesshin you can leave during after-meal breaks and go

to Starbucks. This sudden change of perspective can be disorienting. Once, when I was exhausted from serving as jisha for a weekend sesshin, I splurged on a cab home to Brooklyn on Sunday night. An ad for the makeup emporium Sephora was playing on the screen in the back seat as I climbed in, and for a moment the prancing, brightly made up models bewildered me completely; they seemed like alien beings.



However, this quickness of transition can also help the calmness and clarity of mind that zazen can bring follow you out into the city. I leave Shobo-ji less hurried and preoccupied; I'm more patient with people who block traffic on sidewalks or subway stairs. Everything seems brighter and sharper. I'm more often startled by the beauty of ordinary things: I vividly remember a blazing sky reflected in the East River during one summer twilight, the whiteness of a snowfall against a old brick warehouse alongside the BQE, countless other moments.

In this way Shobo-ji has brought the practice of Zen home for me. It has helped me see my own everyday world with new eyes, and taught me that it isn't necessary to go sit on top of a mountain to clear your mind and sharpen your perceptions. The temple has also given me many other gifts over the years. It's been a bridge connecting me to Dai Bosatsu: sitting regularly with a group at Shobo-ji has helped keep my body and mind prepared for the rigors of the five- and seven-day sesshins I've attended at the monastery. In fact, I doubt I would ever have mustered the courage to sign up for my first seven-day sesshin if I hadn't first attended—and survived—a few all-day sits at Shobo-ji. I've also

met wonderful people at Shobo-ji, kindred spirits who have become close and (I fully expect) lifelong friends.

It's too easy to forget how extraordinarily lucky we are to have this place. Life in New York is busy, and sometimes I don't make it to Shobo-ji for weeks or even months at a time. That's not good, for me or for the temple. We should all try our best to remember that it needs us as much as we need it.

Restoring the Buddha *Togetsu Johanna Schwarzbeck*

There are several stories I would like to share....



My first time ever visiting the Dai Bosatsu mountain monastery was for a Thanksgiving weekend celebration with my then-husband Paul Peterson on a stormy wintry day in 1985.

For several years after that, during my studies at the Ohashi Institute, I continued going up to the Dai Bosatsu Zendo monastery to study more advanced Ohashiatsu courses. There I met many new people and made friends from all over the world; I still have fond memories of our parties at the end of each class, and specifically with tenzo (kitchen chef) Seppo Ed Ferry. It was in the kitchen where we all shared a lot of bonding through working and laughing together.

I learned the art of restoration and gilding when I was younger and still living in Austria—in the town of Salzburg—where I studied for three years in an apprenticeship program. My boss there was engaged in practicing Zen meditation and regularly traveled to a monastery in Japan. I was introduced by him first to TM (Transcendental Meditation), and then to Zen meditation, at the young age of 16.

It was there in Salzburg that the idea of sitting and becoming involved with Zen meditation became formative. Many

years went by and then one day, as I sat in a sesshin at Shobo-ji, I suddenly remembered that this had been an earlier dream of mine. Well, that dream had become reality: "I am sitting on a zafu in New York Zendo!"

More years passed and I sat in meditation in the morning at home, or went to Shobo-ji and to Dai Bosatsu Zendo for weekends or week-long sesshins. I also very much enjoyed the samu weekends (work weekends) and the various celebrations throughout the years. I even attended a two-month-long kessei training, and then participated in a Jukai ceremony in 2008. There, together with Gangyo Larry Gagler and Hojun Laura Jackson, I received my Dharma name, Togetsu.

But what I really want to share is the story of the restoration of the centerpiece of the Zendo at Shobo-ji—the Buddha statue—which Eido Roshi commissioned me to undertake that same year.

During the restoration, Eido Roshi came to visit the statue and me at my home and studio in New Paltz. He and his driver, a monk from the monastery, got out of the car. They both walked, under the eyes of onlookers, wearing their monastic Japanese garments, towards



my studio with its wide-open doors. There the Buddha statue stood on the work-bench, ready to be seen.

Upon seeing the statue from a distance, Roshi stopped, brought his palms together and slowly bowed facing the Buddha. He had a big smile on his face seeing his beloved statue, and I had a big smile on my face witnessing his joy.

Breathe/Read/Write **Lisa Freedman**

New York Zendo Shobo-ji has become a home for Breathe/Read/Write, the meditation and writing group I lead. Breathe/Read/Write grew out of the writing circles I started doing during Healing and Wellness weekends at Dai Bosatsu Zendo a decade ago. I'm grateful for Shobo-ji's hospitality for many reasons. First is the space itself, its tranquil beauty: the embrace of all the wood, of each room, each altar, the meditation garden. I'm fortunate to have had the chance to guide companions into meditation, free-writing, and sharing in different parts of Shobo-ji, and to have breathed and written alone in its garden. I'm also grateful to Shobo-ji for the idea of a container for Breathe/Read/Write. I

leave something—a water bottle, notebook and pen, hairbrush, scarf—behind after every session. It's not intentional. Somehow the quiet and concentration make me more floaty than usual. It was this—my intrinsic floaty-ness—that made it seem that Zen was not for me the first time I tried to do zazen (having arrived with very little other meditation experience) up at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. But I realize now—having led at least a dozen or so Breath/Read/Write sessions at Shobo-ji—that its clarity and peace is slowly sinking in, cultivating in me more calm and a greater awareness of my stuff and where it lands.

The chance to do Breath/Read/Write sessions at Shobo-ji is also teaching me the benefits of finding a structure and sticking to it. This hit home one day when I arrived at the zendo and opened the door to find seven people in the tiny entryway vestibule. The kind person who had volunteered to open the doors for the Breath/Read/Write participants and me had accidentally closed



the self-locking main door with her keys inside. While she, in her bare feet, borrowed a phone to call her boyfriend for rescue, the rest of us decided to take Breath/Read/Write to Bedford Falls, the bar across the street. We settled into the back room there and proceeded to meditate, listen to a poem to prompt our free-writing, write, and share. It worked! But we were grateful to be held again by Shobo-ji's sacred space the following month.

Gratitude **Miki Nakura** ***Shin Buddhist minister of Higashi Honganji, Kyoto and Jodo-Shinshu Shin-Buddhist New York Sangha***

First of all, I always deeply thank the New York Zendo Shobo-ji and the Zen Studies Society from the bottom of my heart, because they have generously and

“Tai Enso” by Soen Roshi.

consistently allowed me to use New York Zendo for my Dharma sessions of Shin Buddhism (Jodo-Shinshu) and Seiza (quiet sitting) meditation for more than four years because I have no temple in New York.

It was March 2013 when I first visited New York Zendo with Kobayashi Gentoku Roshi of Shokoku-ji Zen Monastery in Kyoto, Japan. I have consistently been following the Shin Buddhist path for about thirty years, but once, in 2002, I entered the gate of Rinzaï Zen at Shokoku-ji and experienced the severe Rohatsu Sesshin in the monastery. Since then I have respected the Zen spirit and practice very much.

For me too, the influence of D.T. Suzuki is enormous, especially his deep interpretation of Shin Buddhism. So I am so happy and grateful to be able to have my Dharma sessions here at New York Zendo of the Zen Studies Society, which was established to support D.T. Suzuki in his effort to introduce Zen to the West when he lived in New York in 1950s.

There is no doubt that New York Zendo is a very important place for people to encounter zazen and to experience the true Zen spirit in order to realize real peace and happiness.





Selling Light & Air: True Dharma Continues *Gangyo Larry Gagler*

In late 2015 we found ourselves in a dire financial bind: we needed to raise funds to cover an unanticipated expense resulting from the troubles of 2010. Having no other options, the board was forced to seriously entertain selling Shobo-ji. We had begun discussions with a broker when a dear friend, Patrick Nolan, suggested we find a good real estate consultant and explore other options.

We conducted a six-month project evaluating half a dozen options whereby we would partner with a developer to construct a six-story building on the site,

sell four or five floors, and retain one or two for our own use. At the end of this phase, while interviewing attorneys to help us structure a deal, one attorney asked if our neighbors’ windows were “lot line” windows. We learned that if we constructed a six-story building, the neighbor’s windows on the property line would need to be replaced with walls—which meant they would not be able to use those rooms as living space but only as an office or for storage.

As Buddhists, we were reluctant to cause harm to our neighbors by obstructing their windows with brick walls, and naturally our neighbors would not have been happy with that outcome either; but we were in a bind, and it seemed inevitable. Even if we chose to sell the entire building, the issues related to the lot line would inevitably come up with the new owners.

The very next day we sent our architects to the Department of Buildings to get the floor plans and prospectus for the neighbor’s building and hired an attorney to help us figure out how best to monetize the situation. We instructed our attorney to negotiate with our neighbors and gave him a target that would get us out

of the bind and provide a small reserve that would enable us to make much needed repairs at Shobo-ji and upstate at the monastery.

Fortunately, our neighbors had wealth to spare, and by negotiating with them, we were able to exchange some of their wealth for some of our light and air by selling them a “Light & Air Easement.” A common practice in New York Real Estate, the easement restricts Zen Studies Society from building any higher than the existing 3-story temple and allows our neighbors keep their access to “Light & Air” and their views East, in perpetuity.

It is ironic that, by selling “Light & Air” to our neighbors, we not only were able to save Shobo-ji but could afford to replace the roof and install new skylights, which brought more “Light & Air” into Shobo-ji. True Dharma continues.

The Lighthouse *Hokuto Daniel Diffin*

Our translation of Atta Dipa begins: “you are the light.” But sometimes the light needs a lighthouse, and that lighthouse, for me, has been New York Zendo. We cannot do this practice



alone. Dharma friendship and Dharma fellowship is essential. When I was a confused young man, new to Zen, I heard about New York Zendo. One

48th Anniversary sesshin.

Thursday night Zen Intro turned into three years at Dai Bosatsu Zendo and ordination. The light of New York Zendo illuminated the path for me, helping me to discover my own light. And now, all these years later, I have the opportunity to return to New York Zendo

from time to time, sharing Dharma friendship with our wonderful Sangha. The unique beauty and flavor of this temple and the practice we engage in together there surpasses any attempt to put it into words. It is precious beyond measure.

Growth and Vigor *Shinge Roshi*

We just completed Martin Luther King Sesshin at New York Zendo, and what a sorely needed and much appreciated time it was. Some 30 of us sat in our renovated building and rejuvenated Sangha. There was a sense of deep togetherness based on everyone's intensive sitting and hard work. The atmosphere was open and clear. We had sold a legal easement of air and light to keep this beautiful building; we received a Dharma easement of air and light to continue on this endless Way.

This is an exciting time of growth and vigor for the Zen Studies Society. Toward the end of this year—on Saturday, November 25, 2017—we will have an event of major consequence for our Rinzai Zen lineage: inka shomei. In this ceremony I will give Dharma transmission to my first spiritual heir, Dokuro Jaeckel Osho, who trained for more than thirty years with Kyozan Joshu Sasaki Roshi. Shunan Noritake Roshi, abbot of Reiun-in at Myoshin-ji in Kyoto, will take part in the ceremony. Dokuro will join us at DBZ more frequently from 2018 on, and in ensuing years, will undertake more teaching responsibilities. ***Zen Center of Syracuse Hoen-ji newsletter; From the Abbot—January 2017***



Sange (懺悔; atonement): On the Dedication of the Shobo-ji Garden Zendo as Koin-do (光陰堂; Light and Darkness Hall) *Kyo-On Dokuro Roland Jaeckel*

Shortly before I moved from Austria to the United States in 1994, my first Zen teacher, Genro Seiun Osho, asked me to write a contribution for a book commemorating the 15-year anniversary of the Bodhidharma Zendo in Vienna. At that time, I wrote an article entitled “The

next step still lies ahead...”, which was included in the publication. Since then, humanity and I have taken many next steps; without much effort, almost a quarter-century has passed, and today I find myself writing another commemorative article, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the opening of New York Zendo Shobo-ji.

In his last admonition to his disciples Kozen Daito used the words “Time flies like an arrow” (光陰矢の如し; koin ya no gotoshi) to communicate the preciousness of the limited time that we have in our human existence. Our human lifespan is short, especially in comparison to the billions of years science tells us that it has taken for this universe to arrive at its current state. From the point of view of a Zen practitioner, the linear measure of time cannot even capture the essence of a single moment. New York Zendo and the many people who have passed through it, those who have practiced zazen, read sutras and dharanis, and listened to teishos by many Zen masters, are the living testament to the timeless aspect of the practice of the Buddha.

Rinzai Zen came to America first in 1893, personified in Soen Shaku

This page: Koin-do. Opposite page: Transmission, 2017.



Roshi, who participated in a Japanese delegation to the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. Later, his students Nyogen Senzaki and D.T. Suzuki were among the first pioneers to bring the Rinzai tradition to practitioners and scholars on this continent, from the point of view of Zen master and Zen scholar, respectively. Now, of course, as Zen practitioners we know from our experience that Zen is not "about" anything, that it is just THIS. Over the course of the twentieth century various Japanese teachers representing the Rinzai tradition made their way over the Pacific Ocean to America.

Most significant to the Zen Studies Society was Soen Nakagawa Roshi, representing Rinzai Zen as it established its home on the East Coast of the United States of America. Joshu Sasaki Roshi, who arrived in Los Angeles in 1962, four years after Nyogen Senzaki's passing,



established centers and taught Rinzai Zen on the West Coast.

New York Zendo Shobo-ji, the city home of the Zen Studies Society, and Cimarron Zen Center (later renamed to Rinzai-ji

Zen Center) in Los Angeles both came into existence in the same year, 1968. It was a year of great significance, and we must remind ourselves of the state of the American nation in 1968. The country was at war in Vietnam, and within its own states, cities, and towns other conflicts raged. It was a time of demands for racial justice, demonstrations, and political assassinations. A year before New York Zendo was founded, riots had engulfed Newark, only eleven miles away

as the crow flies, at times closing it down completely. January 1968 marked the peak of the Vietnam War, with the North beginning the Tet offensive. A string of political assassinations left an agonizing trail: following those of John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Malcolm X in

1965, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4th, 1968, and Robert F. Kennedy was killed in Los Angeles on June 5th, 1968, just three miles away from the place that was to become Rinzai-ji.

The term koin (光陰) in Japanese is often translated into English as "time." When we examine the individual characters of the compound phrase, we learn that 光 (ko) means "light" and 陰 (in) means "shade," or "shadow." The characters together signify the activity of time, where day and night alternate. Light is often used as a metaphor for the obvious and easily comprehended, while darkness refers to the obscure, hidden, and occult. What we learn in our practice is that neither light nor darkness carry inherent value—they are just as they are: THIS and THUS. All judgments that are attached to light and darkness originate from the human vantage point of an individual, of a society, a culture.

When New York Zendo and Rinzai-ji were founded, a lot of what we might call "dark" events had recently occurred, including violence, hatred, and warfare. The founding of the two Zen centers was timely in helping us

This page: Nyogen Senzaki, seated, and Soen Nakagawa.



to cope with these realities, to build a foundation for the practice that the historical Buddha himself undertook: investigating the human condition and getting to the bottom of who it is who perceives, thinks, suffers, enjoys....

When we practice Zen and undergo the strict training that the Rinzai School, our teachers, and their Dharma ancestors have brought to us, we can discover for ourselves the underlying conditionality of all existence. Duality within the world of the 10,000 things comes into existence with the arising of a fixated, thinking, and discriminating self. At the same time, Zen practice allows us to learn to recognize and appreciate the inevitable return to the complete manifestation of oneness, zero. As human beings we have to become aware that our mere presence in this world of the 10,000 things comes at a price. In order to live and survive we require and consume energy-producing fuel. The transformation of that fuel also creates byproducts that we return to the 10,000 things. Every breath we take extracts oxygen from the atmosphere and in exchange gives back carbon dioxide. We are intricately and inseparably interconnected with everything that exists in this fantastic world,



and at the level of an organism, we partake in its constant transformation.

Being so deeply interrelated on a purely physical level, we can already imagine the enormous impact of the actions that we humans willfully take. With the self-aware consciousness of a human being comes the great responsibility to use that innate will very carefully; it has a devastating life-taking and miraculous life-giving power. Over the course of the history of the human species, more and more sophisticated and complex systems of society have evolved, as have art, music, science, and, of course, religion. Zen practice asks us to look deeply in both directions—the contraction towards the complete dissolution of a self, as well as the expansion of a full manifestation of a self that embraces everything. Our insight into the functioning and experience of this Dharma activity leads us to the development of wisdom, the ability to see clearly. While this clarity may be brilliant and bright, it is not sufficient by itself. We need to apply it in the human world, where the self-aware consciousness willfully acts. The lotus flowers of an awakened mind grow, bloom, and bear fruit through the

“Jo Nen Kanzeon Bosatsu” by Hakuin.



warmth of compassion, which melts the ice-cold brilliance of wisdom into the manifestation of love. That said, we have to acknowledge that the richness of the world of the 10,000 things, or dharmas, is solely based on the incompleteness of each and every of these dharmas. No matter how much we awaken, the conundrum of being human, which some call original sin, lies in the fact that we and our consciousness are born into a split and broken world of opposites. We make mistakes; our existence is based upon taking life and causing harm. Our discursive thinking comes up with all kinds of rationalizations as to why it is all right to cause harm—these rationalizations are the basis of world-views that brought us slavery, economic exploitation, abuse of power, the commodification of human life and the



environment, and so many other ills that cause problems and strife in human society. The best synonym for these rationalizations is delusions. In Zen practice we learn how to spot these delusions as they arise, and we work on not letting them grow roots and cause unnecessary and unintended harm.

Light and dark—光陰—both make up the human condition. Sange (懺悔) is the practice of acknowledging the harm we may have caused, as

individuals, as a community, as a species. The dedication of a place for such atonement at New York Zendo adds this important aspect to our communal and individual practice. Let us be clear: atonement cannot erase the past. What it must do is to strengthen our resolve and vows to contribute to society

through actions that enhance and support inclusion, diversity, justice, equality, respect, and universal compassion.

Twenty-four years ago I wrote about “the next step still lying ahead.” Since then, additional time and practice have made clear to me the importance we need to give to the present step. Attention, awareness, and open-heartedness in what we are doing right here and now is essential. THIS is where light and dark meet. Let us not get caught up on previous, current, and next, but give our full being to the realization and actualization of our vow. And if we have to talk or write about it, let it be in the service of making this world a better place for all sentient beings.

50 More Years *Tenrai Fred Forsythe*

Thank you New York Zendo Shobo-ji for being an oasis in a troubled world. Who will have the courage to patiently accept the zendo’s penetrating silence? Who will have the cheer to make everyone in the Dharma Hall laugh? 50 years is a good start. Let’s do 50 more.

Opposite page: Martin Luther King Sesshin, 2018, post-sesshin gathering..



Acknowledgements

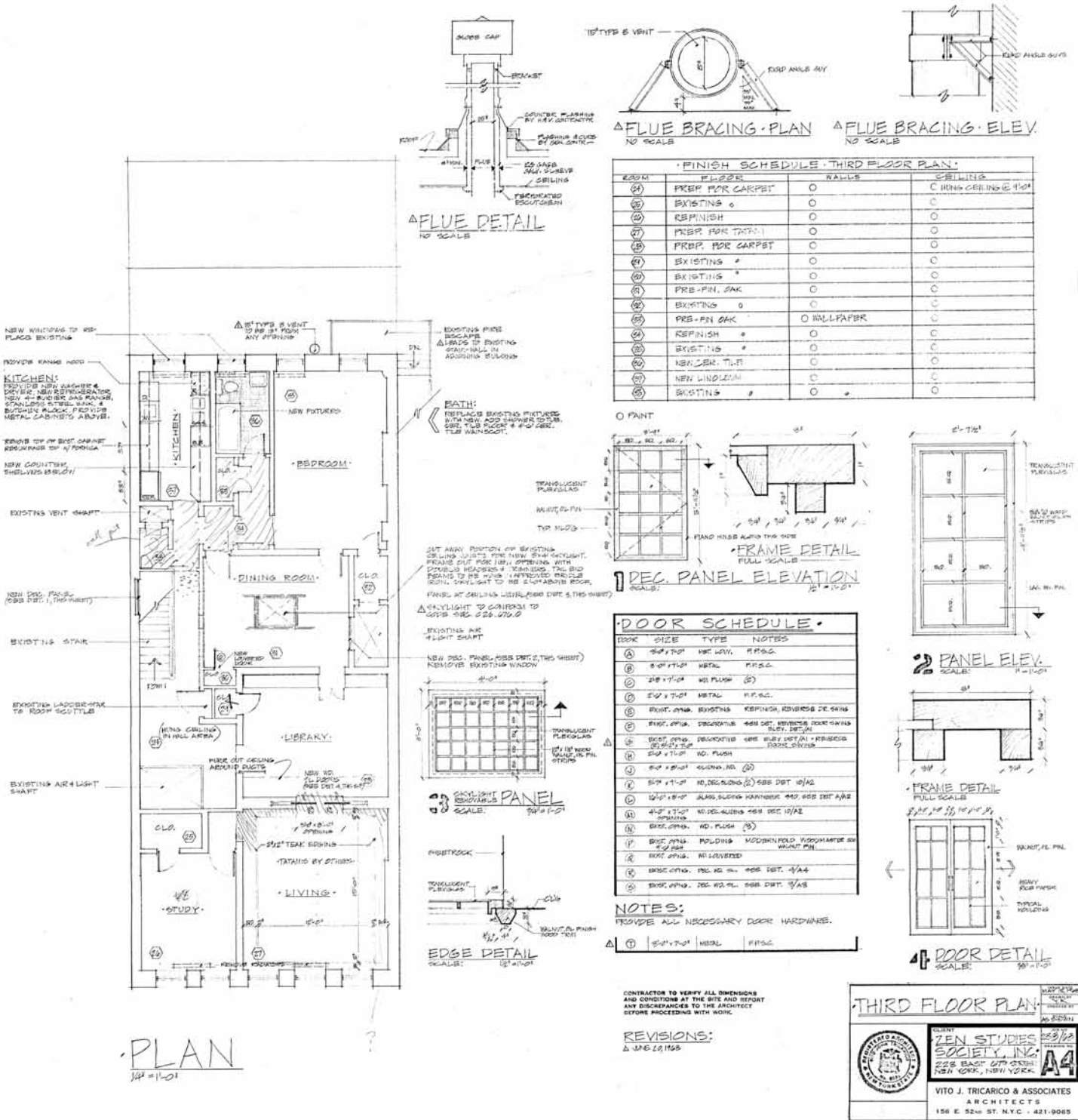
Photos

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Passages

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