

PROLOGUE

The Zen Environment is an attempt to present an ecological zen experience, to integrate zen philosophy, zen practice, and zen life. Strictly speaking, this is impossible to do in words. But I had to try it anyway. Even if I failed. Failure is a good zen teacher. If someone were to ask me today, "What is zen?" I'd say, "Zen is the art of failure." There were times when I was writing this book that I thought I'd call it *Zen and the Art of Failure*.

Which brings me to a warning: Readers unfamiliar with zen meditation and zen life should be careful not to jump to the conclusion that the zen environment explored in this book is a representative one. Even though the practice of zen meditation may be the same for everyone, the impact is always unique. There can be no such thing as a typical zen environment, or a typical zen master, or a typical zen student. The practice of zen, which is not only a unique form of sitting meditation but also an attitude that affects every aspect of the zen student's life, is what makes me uniquely me, and you uniquely you. It is what reveals our true identity.

Neither should readers expect to react to *The Zen Environment* in the same manner as the zen master who wrote the in-

roduction to it. Just because Katagiri Roshi found satisfaction in reading this book doesn't necessarily mean that you will. In fact, there may be many sections of the book that you will find disturbing. The impact of zen meditation on a good zen student is like the impact of a river upon a salmon fighting its way upstream to spawn. A zen master, having made this journey upstream many times, feels at home in the river. No matter where he finds himself in the river, he always realizes his direct connection with the source. The ordinary person has lost this connection. As you can probably see, there is a big difference in the impact of the river, depending on whether you are flowing *with* it like a baby salmon or *against* it like a mature salmon.

So, to the zen student, the first journey up the stream of zen life is usually a rough one. There are many obstacles in the way: rapids, waterfalls, narrows, nets, and hooks. And beautiful calm pools that invite the weary traveler to give up the struggle and just settle down under some big rock. But there is no settling down in the zen environment—not even after reaching the source.

At this point you probably would like me to clarify for you, in a few words, what the zen environment is. I don't think I can. The zen environment is something that has to be experienced directly with the whole body and mind, and all I can do is try, in this book, to show you a way to experience it yourself. But if it were absolutely necessary that I define the zen environment right now, in a few words, I might just point to the calligraphy Katagiri Roshi painted especially for this book. He chose the characters that mean "the sound of falling in drops" and explained his choice this way:

Zen environments lie nowhere but in our everyday living, existing just like the process of falling in drops. How do we listen to the sound of falling in drops? By leaving no space between ourselves, as listeners, and each drop. And by not clinging to any special drop. At this very

moment can you be alive to this sound? Can you be aware of the process of your own life falling in drops—without freezing a drop of it?

One of the greatest problems in writing or reading a book on zen is the danger of freezing the flow of zen life into a solid block that cuts off movement in all directions. But if there are no gaps between the reader and the writer, and there is no clinging or resistance to any of the words, then there is a possibility that a book on zen can remain fluid, and its impact can be a freeing, rather than a freezing, experience.