



Hakuun Yasutani Roshi

ZEN MOUNTAIN CENTER REPORT

YASUTANI ROSHI AND SOEN ROSHI VISIT TASSAJARA

In July Zen Mountain Center was visited by the masters and teachers of the Zen Studies Society and affiliated zendos, and of the lineage of Nyogen Senzaki, the first Zen teacher in western America. In the group were Hakuun Yasutani Roshi, successor of Harada Roshi; Soen Nakagawa Roshi, abbot of Ryutakuji and Senzaki Sensei's choice as his successor in America; Eido Tai Shimano Sensei, resident monk of the Zen Studies Society and disciple of Soen Roshi; Robert Aiken, Chairman of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu and a former disciple of Senzaki Sensei; Charles Gooding, President of the Los Angeles Bosatsu-kai, the organization of the students of Senzaki Sensei; Ryoju Yasutani Sensei, the son of Yasutani Roshi; and Hakuyu Maezumi Sensei, teacher at the Los Angeles Zen Center.

Suzuki Roshi had not known Soen Roshi and had only briefly met Yasutani Roshi, so this coming together in America was both unique and significant. Their feeling was that Zen should not be sectarian, that, as Yasutani Roshi suggested, "ancient Chinese Zen should be our model." Suzuki Roshi explained to the students later that "in China the Zen schools were formed by the disciples and descendants of the Sixth Patriarch. These disciples and descendants knew each other and considered themselves dharma brothers and would advise their students to leave them and go study with another of the Sixth Patriarch's disciples and descendants. Most of them came back to their teacher, but some did not. It is a good idea to give students freedom to study whatever teaching they want."

Most of the Zen center students had not met masters from other schools before, though some had attended sesshins conducted by Yasutani Roshi and one had studied with Soen Roshi at Ryutakuji. The visit of the Roshis gave the students the opportunity to compare the Roshis' differences with the similarity of their spirits. Some said that with all three Roshis together the feeling was like that in a sesshin.

The leaders of the Zen Studies Society also had the opportunity to experience Zen Mountain Center. Although about a dozen of their students practiced at Tassajara this summer and several others had done so previously, the teachers themselves had not been there. But the 'baby monastery' seemed to please them and they were very complimentary. Tai-san said that "Tassajara will become, in fact already is, the *hara*, the center of gravity, of Zen Buddhism in America."

The group arrived early in the evening of the 9th and next morning Yasutani Roshi lectured in the zendo. He began by saying that Soto and Rinzai have the same content but different wrappings. Then he spoke about the training of Dogen Zenji, the founder of Japanese Soto Zen. "Dogen was the disciple of Eisai, the founder of Japanese Rinzai Zen, and at the age of fourteen had a big experience in Eisai's monastery. Later he went to China with Eisai's successor, Myosen, and he had difficulty finding any teachers with deep understanding. How could he have known this if his own understanding wasn't already advanced? Eventually Dogen did find a teacher and experienced full enlightenment by doing *shikan taza* (just sitting). Does this invalidate his

fifteen years of *koan* training? An archery student hits the bull's eye with his hundredth arrow because of the practice he got shooting the first ninety-nine."

That afternoon the Roshis did calligraphy in the fireplace room and talked and exchanged their work with one another. Suzuki Roshi later said that there was much that he could learn from Yasutani Roshi and Soen Roshi, and gave calligraphies by them to some of his disciples.

In the evening Suzuki Roshi spoke to the students and said that Yasutani Roshi's lecture had painted an eye in the dragon that he, Suzuki Roshi, had been drawing for years, and that he looked forward to Soen Roshi putting in the other eye for him. "Before, when I heard the word *Rinzai* I always felt a little uncomfortable. I see why. It was because I felt a separateness. Now when I hear the word *Rinzai* I feel complete."

Zazen followed lecture and after zazen everyone drove up to the top of the mountain to watch the full moon rise. As the moon edged over the ridge to the east, Soen Roshi began the Heart Sutra and the teachers and students chanted with him as the moon rose, clapping their hands in time to the voices. When the Sutra had been recited twice and nearly everything else the students knew in Japanese once, Soen Roshi chanted in English "May we all exist in unity" and suggested "we form our own moon" by joining hands and dancing in a circle. "This is true hippie dance," he said. "May Tassajara help all sentient beings to achieve peace."

Later that night, Soen Roshi said the next morning during his lecture, he was out walking and met the fire-watchman who imagined for him The Narrows in the moonlight. They ended up hiking all the way downstream, swimming, and returning just in time for zazen. "There is a *koan* in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, by Nyogen Senzaki, about two monks who are going to visit a famous nun. They are walking up a path beside a stream which runs by the nun's temple when they see a radish top float past them. They turn and go back down. Yesterday I couldn't bring myself to unwrap one of the cakes of soap in my room and finally found some used soap in the washroom. When I was young I thought that Americans were very fortunate to be able to take one drink from a paper cup and throw it away. Now I think that is a great shame."

In 1958 Soen Roshi came to America to perform the funeral service for Nyogen Senzaki and had returned to Japan with half of Senzaki Sensei's ashes. This year Soen Roshi was bringing the ashes back to enshrine them at the new Zen Studies Society Zendo during its dedication on September 15th. On the second day of his stay at Tassajara the ashes were placed on the zendo altar. The next and final morning he offered to leave some of the ashes at Tassajara. During zazen it had rained—extraordinary for July—and as Suzuki Roshi was accepting the ashes during the service that followed zazen, it began to rain again and a double rainbow extended from the mountains to the west into Grasshopper Flats. The ashes remained on the altar until two full moons later. Then, on the evening of the third day of summer sesshin, Suzuki Roshi, Chino Sensei and the students drove up to where they had watched the moon rise before, and, chanting the Heart Sutra, hiked a freshly cut trail to the highest peak visible from Zen Mountain Center, and there enshrined the ashes.



Soen Nakagawa Roshi



From left to right: Maezumi Sensei, Soen Roshi, Tai-san, Suzuki Roshi, Dick Baker, Yasutani Roshi, Yasutani Sensei and Chino Sensei

VISITORS TO ZEN MOUNTAIN CENTER

Many of the visitors to Zen Mountain Center are interested in observing the possibilities of Zen practice for westerners. Often they have their own Ways, are poets or psychologists, musicians or priests, and come to Tassajara with aesthetic feelings about Zen but with little idea of its practice and no experience of it as everyday life. But they have a kinship with the students in their feeling for the suffering of men as they exist in this time and this space, and their ultimate urges to fulfillment, freedom, enlightenment, joy. By sharing this with the students, the visitors help to deepen the community and bring something of Zen away with them when they leave.

Among the poets who have been to Zen Mountain Center are those who began experimenting with Zen in the fifties. Gary Snyder visited Tassajara when its purchase was first being considered. Gary led one of the first sesshins in America with seven of his friends in 1956, including Zen Center Vice President Claude Dalenberg and poet Michael McClure, who has twice read to the students. Several Zen Center students began practicing because Gary had proven someone could do it. Other poets and writers who have visited Zen Mountain Center are Denise Levertov, Mitchell Goodman, Richard Brautigan and Herbert Gold. Allen Ginsberg, Daniel Moore and Lawrence Ferlinghetti came together and accompanied one another on a harmonium, Chinese horn and Hindu bells, as they read their poems and chanted mantrams and sutras with the students.

DEDICATION OF ZEN STUDIES SOCIETY ZENDO

from a description of the ceremony sent by Brother David

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.

On the altar was the Buddha statue Soen Roshi had brought with him as a gift—a wood-carved, four-foot standing gilded figure that came from China to Japan probably in the 13th century. Soen Roshi calls it "The Buddha of Endless Dimensions Universal Life." In front of it stood a wood-carved figure of Bodhi Dharma. (It looks like a statue of St. Benedict. I guess they had more in common anyway than merely being contemporaries.) The main statue was flanked by a figure of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, carrying a sword, and by Fugen, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, on an elephant. There was also on the altar a photograph of Nyogen Senzaki, the man who had introduced Zen practice to western America and whose successor is Soen Roshi.



While we were silently waiting, one could catch glimpses of the garden whenever the soji-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: Josu Sasaki Roshi of Los Angeles, Rev. Hakuyu Maezumi of Los Angeles, Rev. Kan of the Buddhist Academy in New York, and Rev. Boris Erwit 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.



*Eido Tai Shimano
Sensei
at Tassajara*

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 Dimensions 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 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 stroke. 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?"