



Mt. Equity Zendo Zephyr

Mt. Equity Zendo, Jihoji

Autumn/Winter, 2002

A Very Happy New Year to You, With Peace for All Beings

“It’s a Bad Idea”

Voices from every quarter are now saying that war is inevitable, that it is not a matter of “if”, but “when.” But war is not inevitable. It is our fear that has us caught by the idea of war, that has us say it is inevitable. We have become a nation with a hindrance in the mind, a nation to now know fear, and we tighten up. When we tighten up, there is trouble.

Nancy Cleaver, one of our students who comes regularly to Tuesday evening zazen, shared with us a story about her cat Mazeppa, who loved playing with a ball of yarn. She liked to be wound up with the yarn, having it criss-crossed around her paws, her body, her tail. Nancy would think, “Now we’ve got Mazeppa; she won’t be able to get out of all that yarn this time.” But Mazeppa could, every time. She just went soft. And she would come out of the massive tangle of yarn and walk away. Going soft is a very important way to win in the martial arts, such as aikido and judo. Going soft in this sense has nothing to do with capitulation. Fully applied, it is a supreme “reverse psychology.”

When Dogen Zenji returned from China, he was asked if, like the great masters before him in the 8th century, he had brought back sutras and scrolls and treasures of the Dharma. Dogen Zenji’s reply was, “I have brought back *Nyu nan shin*,” a soft and flexible mind. What greater possession could we have than a soft and flexible mind, the ability to “go soft,” for that is what gets us out of our predicaments, not tensing up.

Ideas and concepts are born, gain strength and become manifest, or are aborted by circumstances and then die. That is the way of this fleeting world. If we can hasten the demise of such an idea, like the Berlin Wall, or the former Soviet Union, then the conditions for war are no longer present. This is to know, as the Heart Sutra says, “no hindrance in the mind, no hindrance, therefore no fear. Far beyond deluded thoughts, this is Nirvana.”

The Pilgrimage to Eiheiiji in Japan

Nine students from MEZ and NiOsho left on Sept. 10th for Japan via Toronto’s Air Canada. A lay student of Noda Roshi, Mr. Kazuo Kawakami, whom NiOsho knew from 23 years ago kindly met us, saw us to our business hotel, and next morning walked with us to Sojiji, the second of the twin head temples of Soto Zen. Because Noda Roshi had been called back to his home temple suddenly, we were not able to see him, but we talked with the next in command, the *Tanto*, Yoshida Shinjo Roshi. He then introduced us to Itabashi Zenji, who had tea and sweets served to us. We offered Itabashi Zenji the handwritten *shikishi* of the “Heart Sutra” written and translated into English, French, Russian and Arabic by some of our students.

We ate box lunches on the bullet train to Nagoya to see Aoyama Roshi and the Nisodo. With recent renovations for its upcoming 100th anniversary just completed, our women’s monastery could not have been more beautiful. Several women students commented on how feminine they found the Nisodo: “It’s not like a temple for men at all.” We all felt relief to see Aoyama Roshi up and able to visit with us over tea after her fall a few weeks before. The nuns rushed up to Ryoen, grasping her hands and exclaiming, “So good to see you again!” After a tour of the buildings and garden, we left for our trip to Kyoto.

The next day we could sight-see on our own and were kindly guided by Ms. Mihoko Morita, NiOsho’s long-time friend and a supporter of MEZ. We went to Koryuji, one of the oldest temples in Japan, famous for the graceful Maitreya Buddha seated with one knee crossed and one hand by his cheek. We also enjoyed the famous garden, Ryoanji, with its vast expanse of patterned sand and 15 rocks. That evening we joined our Soto Zen group of several hundred American Zen practitioners and their teachers at a new hotel.



The representatives of MEZ at Eiheiiji with NiOsho

Next morning we began our several days’ journey by bus, going to Dogen Zenji’s site of tonsure when a young teen at the great temple on Hiei-san, reciting the sutras with many voices. We visited Koshoji, the Chinese-looking temple on the outskirts of Kyoto where NiOsho had done the last two angos of *shike* training. Renovations completed over thirteen years

made some parts of it difficult to recognize. We crossed the Japan Alps over to the Japan Sea side of the country and visited Hokyoji, the temple of Jakuen Zenji, the Chinese Dharma brother to Dogen who followed him back to Japan, where NiOsho spent the first two angos of *shike* training for the first time with all male priests. We arrived at Eiheiji, where MEZ women students were led to a large room for 300, and the men students were led to another floor and another similar sized room for staying overnight. The ceremony to officiate in offering incense to Dogen Zenji was a high point for NiOsho.

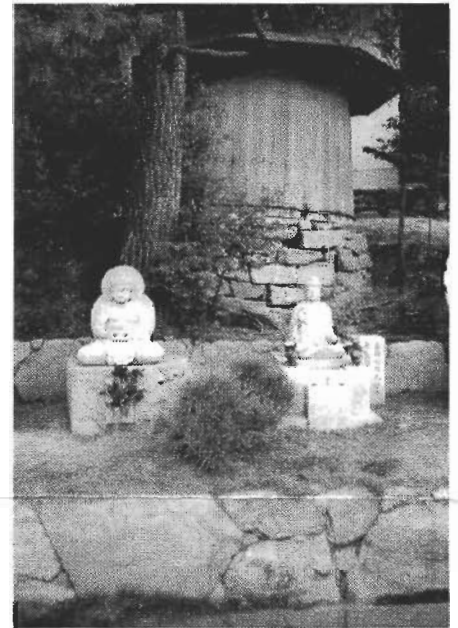
Each of the three American officiants was to have a *hogo* or poem prepared in English to read in front of the altar. Only having ever heard the ancient language of a *hogo* read aloud, and having never seen an example of the contents, NiOsho just wrote from the heart:

Your world family has gathered before you,
all of us born of your great example.
Fifty years ago,
Who would have ever dreamed it!
In your time,
That Great Horde plundered all of Asia,
Causing all to yearn for peace.
It brought forth a master like you.
So, too, now, does our world yearn for peace.
We vow to carry forth your ancient Way
As our deepest expression of gratitude.

North American Bishop Gengo Akiba Roshi said afterward, "That's the first time in history that English has been heard in front of the altar to our Founder."

The 750th Memorial of Dogen Zenji was marked with a series of ceremonies that is held every fifty years and takes place over a period of time from March to October. Several hundred selected priests are invited to be officiants. Of this number, it is believed that five women priests, mostly abbesses of women's temples, were invited this year. NiOsho considers it the deepest honor to have been included in their number. In the ceremony held the day before, three European male priests were the officiants. An international meeting was held that evening to include them and their guests and students, as well as those from the United States preparing to officiate the next day. One of the speeches was given by Noda Daito Roshi, NiOsho's teacher, which she translated.

The next day our tour continued on to visit other temples pertinent to Dogen Zenji's history, namely Sojiji Betsuin, where NiOsho's deceased Dharma uncle, Rev. Kojun Kurita had trained; Yokoji; and Daijoji. We were treated to a night in a Japanese inn and spa, luxuriating in the steamy waters with no regard to time before a meal and good fun. The next day, before taking the bus back to Kyoto with everyone from the other Zen centers, we parted company with Daishin, who went off on his own for six more weeks of practice. (Read more about his journey further on in the "Zephyr.") At Kyoto Station NiOsho saw off most of the MEZ students, who were guided once more by Kawakami-San to see the Great Buddha in Kamakura and the many little local shops before returning home. NiOsho was to remain in Japan a few more days in order to return once more to Eiheiji and serve as *Jisha* for Noda Roshi, as he was also to be an officiant. It is unusual that two priests from the same temple would be invited to do so.



Statuary & soy sauce vat hermitage
at Kappa Dojo

Back in Tokyo, NiOsho met with the brother and sister of Mrs. Sachiko Presser at the nearby Hotel Takanawa. When our friend Sachiko-san passed away the night of our Buddha's birthday celebration last May, it was decided that half of her ashes would be buried in Japan. NiOsho offered to be the envoy. After a pleasant if poignant dinner together with Sachiko-san's brother and sister, NiOsho, Gyokuen and Esho, who had stayed on for sight-seeing on their own, all returned home together the next day. David Daijo Carpenter could have been speaking for most of us when he said in leaving, "It was privilege upon privilege upon privilege; there seemed no end to the giving." The 750th Memorial was the journey of a lifetime for us all. Many more details of the Pilgrimage can be found in an article written by NiOsho for the upcoming issue of *The Dharma Eye*, and more photographs can be seen on our web site at www.mtequity.org.

Dharma Combat and Abbess Installation Dates Set

Shortly after returning from Japan, in international telephone calls with both Noda Daito Roshi and Aoyama Roshi and in consultation with North American Bishop Gendo Akiba Roshi, the dates for Ryoen's Dharma Combat Ceremony and NiOsho's Abbess Installation Ceremony were set for May 30th and 31st of 2004. This gives us at MEZ approximately one year and five months to get the sewage line connected, enlarge the Zendo, and have the road newly asphalted, fencing and privacy landscape put up, and interior painting done. Special made-to-order robes, one of them vermilion, will be necessary, and there will be airfares for perhaps up to ten people from Japan. This means that we must once again think deeply and wisely about fund raising in order to carry out these essential ceremonies. Please consider in what way you feel you might be able to help us bring this major requirement to fruition.

Prison News

A recent telephone call came from Chaplain Johnson, formerly of USP-Lewisburg and now in Florida, asking for a copy of *A Buddhist Bible* for an inmate. By good fortune Gry Esho Gambert had one that she offered to donate. Chaplain Johnson informed us that there was a new warden at Lewisburg, and suggested we consider contacting him.

Right after Rohatsu Sesshin we received a telephone call from Enjo, who has recently been transferred to a correctional facility a little closer to his family. Another inmate interested in receiving the Precepts who had been together with Enjo at a different facility is now in Allenwood, close by. We will check in the near future to see if a visit will be permitted.

Sangha News

Practice Isn't Limited to the Zafu

Jim Beddard has only recently been coming to Sesshin, but when he attended in October, some of our Sangha already "had his number." Showing his hand to Jakuen, who happens to work in a family practice physician's office, he revealed that it had become swollen from cutting carrots for the evening meal. He said he was sure the swelling had nothing to do with his dog having bitten him a few days earlier, but Jakuen saw that that it was cellulitis and advised NiOsho immediately of the necessity of getting him to the emergency room. It was almost 7:30 on Saturday evening, just about time for Interview to begin. David Wenger, just recovered from illness recently, straightaway volunteered to drive Jim's car to take him to the hospital in his town, about a half-hour's drive away. Koen Hunter, herself no stranger to illness, offered to follow in her car and bring David back to MEZ. They both arrived just in time for their own turn at Interview, with the news that the hospital had admitted Jim for a few days. Jim is fine now. At such times the students become teachers for all of us. My deep gassho to all of them.

Daishin's Practice in Japan

At the end of our Eiheiiji Pilgrimage, Daishin saw us off at the bus station and set out for his own practice journey of an additional six weeks at three monasteries. He writes:

"It was good to meet the people and see the places where NiOsho practiced. NiOsho's lineage teacher, Kappa Daito Roshi, has incredible Ki energy. I want to be able to chant like he does. Kappa Dojo, the place he made, is very wild land.

"Hosshinji's Harada Sekkei Roshi is the teacher whom NiOsho practiced under for one angu (in 1984). His teaching is that Shikantaza is not "just" meditation. Practice is to "grind up" our thoughts and return to the breath. Upon leaving there, I felt I hadn't yet really practiced.

"Hokyoji is where NiOsho did her first two years of practice in the senior teacher training after being at the Nisodo for 8 years. The teacher there, Tanaka Shinkai Roshi, teaches to put others before self. I came to appreciate the emphasis placed on hierarchy, for now I feel a greater sense of where I belong in the order of things.

"I'm so grateful to NiOsho for this opportunity to experience practice in Japan."

Since beginning to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant, Daishin said that he rises at 3:45 a.m., sits zazen in his room from 4 a.m. to almost 5 a.m., eats breakfast, and goes to work at 5:30 a.m. When he is back at 3 p.m., we have an hour lesson with Ryoen, presently from the *Zuimonki*, after which he is Supper *Tenzo* and helps us until time for evening zazen. We are happy that he has taken his new one-year status as Junior Oblate so seriously. And we are deeply grateful that he checks in on

the needs of Rakuen (NiOsho's precepted mother), now permanently at Skilled Nursing, before returning home. (Pictured: Right - Daishin with Rev. Sojun Takahashi, who trained with NiOsho at the Nisodo. The carved Jizo-sama is her work. She lives at Bukkokuji across from Hosshinji. Left - Daishin toe-to-toe with Buddha at Kappa Dojo.)



University Student Groups

- Eleven Indiana University of Pennsylvania students came to MEZ for stay-over practice the weekend of November 9-10. To a person they put themselves wholeheartedly into what they were doing. By the third meal with *oriyoki* bowls, they were serving each other and bowing in harmony as though they were at an advanced Sesshin. A deep Gassho of gratitude for their wonderful attitude! (*The IUP group is pictured at right.*)
- For the third time we were called to Penn State's Wilkes-Barre campus for a noontime "Mindfulness Meal Meditation" with pizza and soft drinks. After an orientation, all of the students and faculty present partook of the meal in awareness and silence, and then asked good questions toward the end of the gathering. I hope the students enjoy this way of practice as much as the teacher does! Two students, Dave and Ryan, asked about MEZ, saying they hoped to come by, and recently they came for Tuesday evening zazen. We are impressed and grateful for the interest of students in investigating how to "wake up."



MEZ and Mt. Equity: "Not-Two"

At MEZ we have not only sitting practice, walking practice, eating practice, cooking practice, and work practice, but also building-stewardship practice. Becoming owners of a structure whose oldest section dates back to 1810, that has spent a great part of its life as an apartment house, and that continues to house a few residents who were tenants of our former landlords has presented numerous opportunities to try to discern "what is best for all sentient beings, including ourselves" and, to paraphrase Dogen Zenji, to treat every plank and plumbing fixture as if it were our own head. How do we best apply our limited resources to meet the many needs of Mt. Equity's physical structure? How does a Zen monastery co-exist harmoniously with non-practicing tenants? With the local tax-assessment office and sewer board? With community members accustomed to the anonymity of "Mt. Equity Apartments"? With rural Pennsylvania contractors? With the neighbors' goats?

One way is by calling on friends for help. Our neighbors the Beams were able to recommend an Amish house painter, Mr. John Zook, who worked long hours this summer to give the three-story north façade of Mt. Equity a gleaming new coat of white paint. Mr. Zook's son Sam repaired the damaged joists of the sheep shed roof and put on a new metal roof. Another longtime friend, Howard Parks, recommended a carpenter who will replace the floor in one of the bathrooms, and who in turn was able to suggest someone to replace the linoleum.

Another way is through the Yellow Pages: in this manner we found Mr. Luse, a stonemason and chimney contractor who took down **some non-functioning chimneys that were in danger of falling**, repaired others, and replaced the aging furnace chimney with a **safer, stainless-steel external chimney**. Mr. Luse also gave advice and estimates for eventually enclosing this chimney with a frame or masonry casing, to make its appearance more harmonious with the materials and style of the building. Board President **Koen Hunter made several calls** before locating two excavating companies willing to explain the process of hooking on to the area's new sewer line and to help us to anticipate the cost of doing so. (We are deeply grateful to those whose special donations have ensured that MEZ will not have to borrow to meet this obligation.) It is necessary not only to rely on friends but also to go outside our comfort zone to connect with strangers; in no other way can the needs of Mt. Equity be met.

We have found that some contractors lose interest in response to the words "Zen" or "Zendo," and others do not return calls at all. On the other hand, some who come to work or give estimates end up sharing their stories of loss, their longing for a different life, or simply their love for the craftsmanship evident from cellar to roof at Mt. Equity. The ceramic hearth tiles depicting farm animals in the reception area (formerly Rakuen's living room), for instance, spoke to the imagination of Mr. Luse the mason, who wondered aloud how the tile setter decided which animals to place next to each other. After this, a conversation with the MEZ Board that had been awkward at the start moved to a different level—a place of shared appreciation and regard.

Soon there will be further calls to make as we move forward with the next tasks on Mt. Equity's list of physical needs: repaving the driveway, adding fences and landscaping for privacy, and finding skilled professionals to whom to entrust the task

of enlarging the Zendo. Concurrently, as the sewer project progresses, we will be looking for skillful ways to introduce leases to Mt. Equity's non-practicing residents and ensure that expenses are distributed fairly among all parties. The Sangha will take on the project of further interior painting this spring and summer. The challenges of maintaining the building and grounds on a limited budget seem endless; but what we are able to give to Mt. Equity is always more than balanced by what she gives to us.

--Sabrina Enmyo Kirby

Sr. Jina's Postcard from China

Dear Dai-En-san,

Greetings from China. The 1500th Anniversary Ceremony in Nan Hua Temple was impressive with about three hundred thousand people! They gave two talks at the end of the week's ceremonies. They were well attended by about 600 monks and nuns who were still present. Most of the lay-people had left. Again I see where Soto Zen is rooted. Today I heard that we eat out of 3 bowls because that was how the Arahats ate. Do you know anything about this? [Formal meals at Plum Village for monks and nuns are with a single bowl.] I hope we'll have a chance to meet in the near future. Nine bows, Jina.

(Sr. Jina is a disciple of Thich Nhat Hanh.)

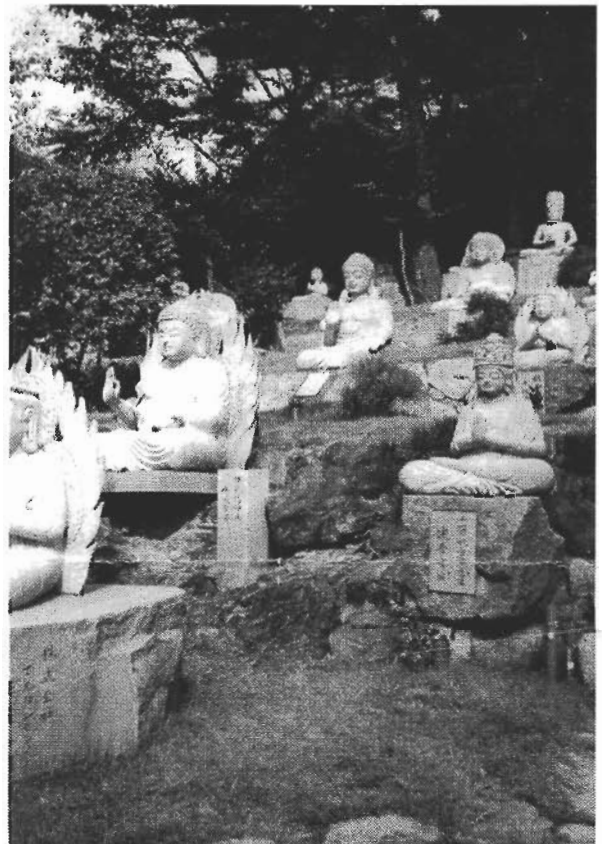
Let's Help Our Treasurer

Taking the extra moment to write on the **For:** line of our checks can help save a lot of time and guessing for our Treasurer, Jakuen Fedorowicz. If one check is for both Sesshin and Friends of MEZ, writing the separate amounts on that line means that conjecture is not necessary. For those making offerings to have ill or deceased loved ones included in the Well Wishes, or Ongoing Journey lists, please write "Care Sending" on the line.

Video Tapes Away from Home

As a rule, videotapes are not lent out at MEZ. However, occasionally they are, and as we've made no sign-out book for them, it's soon forgotten to whom they were lent. A university professor wished to borrow our *Tibetan Book of the Dead* videotape, and NiOsho wants to lend *Harp of Burma* to Cindy Peltier, who kindly permitted a videotaping of the outstanding American reclining Buddha on display until recently at Bucknell University's Samek Gallery. Please return them if you have finished looking at them.

With Warmest Gratitude This Year to: * Three anonymous donors * Baltimore Dharma group * Keith Barkett * Janice Belgradan * Evelyn Rakuen Bennage * Jim Birt/Carol Benish * Mary Boutselis * Marcy Brenner * Katrina Broach * Robert Brown * Gerald Cooke * Lee Oatey & James Crouse * Melita Cutcher * Howard Enfiejian * Lucine Gyokuen Folgueras * Gry Esho Gambert * Barbary Tokuen Gray * Christina Heintzelman * Melissa I'en Hess * Robin Jarrell * Harry Jennings * Laura Kamienski * Alison Krieger * Margaret Myoen Kurtz * Dwayne & Bev Limbauer * Alan Little * Eric Daishin McCabe * Donna McElroy * Byron Mellinger * Kiyoko Nakamura * Richard Normand * Alice Petersen * Alice Rader * Alexis Reed * Richard Reiley * Shintokuji Temple * Rev. Tohru Tchikyo Takeda * Fujiko Robbins * Becky Meigetsu Robishaw * Harriet Ryugin Ross * Gary Sexton * Maureen Shea * Margie & Doug Sturm * Jackie Warnick-Piatt * Carmen White * Maxine Woodie * San Francisco Zen Center With special gratitude for the devoted work of our Board Members: Koen Hunter, Shin'en Turaki, Jakuen Fedorowicz, Enmyo Kirby.



Statuary at Kappa Dojo

2003 Winter/Spring Schedule

Sesshin

Sesshin & Communication Workshop with Rev. Kyoki Roberts
Nirvana Sesshin with No Ritual/Seeing Off Project
Early Spring Sesshin/NiOsho is "24" – with Jiko Nakade from Hawai'i
Full Spring Sesshin
Deep Spring Sesshin
Summer Solstice Sesshin
Long Summer Sesshin with Calligraphy

January 24th ~26th
February 14th ~16th
March 14th ~16th
April 25th ~27th
May 16th ~18th
June 20th ~22nd
July 19th ~26th

Full Intro to Soto Zen Sesshin

(1:30 p.m. Saturday ~ 2:30 p.m. Sunday)

February 8th~9th, March 22nd~23rd, April 12th~13th, June 28th~29th

Half Day of Mindfulness

(Saturday, 1:30 p.m. ~ 4:30 p.m.)

January 4th, February 1st, March 1st, April 5th, May 3rd, June 7th,
July 5th

Full Day of Mindfulness

(Sunday, 10 a.m. ~ 4 p.m.)

January 5th, February 2nd, March 2nd, April 6th, May 4th (Buddha's
Birthday), June 1st, July 6th



Day of Silent Sitting

(Saturday, 9 a.m. ~ 5 p.m.)

February 22nd, April 19th, May 10th, June 14th

(simple lunch of soup, bread, fruit. Friday stayover possible: arrive 8 p.m., lights out 10 p.m., breakfast 7:15 a.m.)

Monthly Sunday Morning Sitting

10 a.m. ~ 11:30 a.m.)

January 12th, February 9th, March 9th, April 20th, June 8th

Mt. Equity Zendo, Jihoji is incorporated under the Nonprofit Corporation Law of 1988 of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Our mission is "to provide training in the spiritual practice of Soto Zen Buddhism in the shikantaza (serene contemplation) tradition, and to serve the community in a spirit of compassion." Members of Board of Directors, and the years their terms expire, are:

Head Teacher: Patricia Dai-En Bennage

President: Pamela Koen Hunter 2004

Secretary: Sabrina Enmyo Kirby 2005

Vice President: Natasha Shin'en Turaki 2005

Treasurer: Christine Jakuen Fedorowicz 2004

Mt. Equity Zendo, Jihoji – 280 Mt. Equity Road – Pennsdale, PA 17756 – www.mtequity.org