

曹源一滴水

January 1995 - Number 29

New Year's Greetings from Shodo Harada Roshi, Head Abbot, Sogenji Temple

With best wishes for everyone's health and happiness I would like to open the celebration of this new year, 1995.

From the beginning of the year it was a peaceful time until the seventeenth of January, when suddenly, as you all know well, in the city of Kobe and the area around it there was a severe earthquake, a great shift.

At the hour of five forty in the morning--at Sogenji just the time when the morning sutra service had finished and morning sanzen had begun--in the midst of that a very violent, never before experienced shaking started. We are one whole hour from Kobe by the bullet train--and even so this violent tremor which continued over and over and over again, this great shaking, was felt all the way in Okayama. It really felt as if the buildings would be destroyed by such a strong vibration. Most fortunately, the area around Okayama was undamaged. There was no great affect of the earthquake in this area.

In the morning news, it didn't seem to be such a huge disaster, but by the time the evening news was broadcast it was clear what a terrible crisis had come. Minute by minute the reports were worse and worse; more and more devastation had become apparent. More than four thousand people have died. At Sogenji now there are twenty-three people training. They have come from all over the world and are continuing their zazen practice daily here. The next morning, we were all unable to just sit still comfortably while this was happening, so for the people who had gone through so much in the disaster, for the dead and the suffering people in the earthquake, there was a sutra chanted in the morning sutra service in the hondo. Still, just a chanted vow was not sufficient for this occasion. We wanted to also offer a chance to the people of the city as well to realize what had been offered in the sutra that morning. For this purpose we did *takuhatsu* in the downtown area of Okayama. On a frost-fallen morning of icy coldness everyone went out to *takuhatsu* with wholehearted energy and gathered quite a large amount of money which was given to the local newspaper which was gathering money for aiding the victims of the earthquake. We asked them to take care of it and give it to where it was most needed.

From that time on, the news of the earthquake having reached around the world, people became aware of what had taken place. From family, friends and acquaintances, from all over the world, phone calls and faxes began to arrive for the people training here. The depth of mind with which everyone expressed their concern and caring was very moving. We deeply appreciated all of these expressions of concern and support and I would like to thank everyone who wrote and faxed and telephoned. People who knew how close Kobe and Okayama are were worried that there might have been some damage here; fortunately there was no damage.

The next morning, three days later--all of us being in sesshin--everyone continued with their zazen. But with the deep karmic connection I have with Kobe, thinking that there must be something that can be done to help, with two cars we departed, planning to go to Shofukuji monastery and other temples in the demolished city, and to see how our friends there were doing and what we could do to help. We loaded up supplies and food and set off to see what could be done. We had prepared two cars with as many vegetables as possible, bread, cheese, butter, and other food supplies--loading up the cars as fully as possible--and had received whatever advice was possible on how to enter the disaster area. Since regular cars were not being allowed to enter the city and its surrounding area, we applied to the Prefectural government and received special permission and stickers designating our cars as emergency supply vehicles. With this preparation and permission completed we left the same day for Kobe. One car was driven by Doshin Koji and one car by Doitsu Zenji. They drove, with me directing, and with Bodhi Zenji and Sotatsu Zenji accompanying us to the temples in Kobe where they both have deep connections as well. There were many police barriers which we were able to pass through easily with our special permission. It was a relatively easy trip getting there.

When we saw the remains of the places where the earthquake had actually struck, it made us actually physically tremble just looking at it. The center of the city was so violently struck that one would wonder that a place could be that completely and totally destroyed. The temple of Shofukuji, standing on a stone foundation at the foot of the mountain, had its mountain gate destroyed, and tiles from the great roofs of the *hondo* and the *shoin* had also fallen off in large numbers. For even that kind of a sturdy and solidly built building to be so shaken, it had to have been an excessive, intense shock.

The monks were very grateful for the vegetables and supplies, and just as one would expect of them as monks in training they were continuing with their daily *samu* as usual, along with their zazen. They were working on the cleaning up of the debris and destruction of the surrounding areas.

There were piles of rubble in mountains everywhere, making it barely possible for a car to get through. In this way, we wended our way through to where the earthquake had hit the hardest. On our way we saw huge homes and eight-story buildings that had been leveled--flattened without even a shadow remaining. It was worse destruction than the remains after a bombing in war. The original Japanese building material was wood, although recently other materials are more frequently used. Where the newer buildings hadn't budged, the older wooden buildings next to them had become piles of garbage, mountains of debris. I was thinking of how even in this country of earthquakes--Japan--this was the worst earthquake ever. Thanks to science and modern technology there are some buildings which didn't budge an inch, but there were also four thousand people who died. Those who died, it was said, were the people who lived in those wooden homes which were so easily destroyed. These houses came crashing down on top of those who were still in their *futons* in an early morning dream when they died. The elderly were among the majority of those who died in the earthquake. Most people's houses were built without foundations, as had always been done; they were just sitting on the ground. In this kind of extreme earthquake it was as if the buildings were raised up into the air and then again smashed down to the earth. These devastated homes are the results of that.

An acquaintance of mine whose disciple is training with us at Sogenji is a priest in Kobe. After the war he rebuilt a temple little by little from inexpensive wood. While teaching school he put all of his salary into rebuilding the temple. All of his pension fund he used for the building as well, encouraging his congregation to support the temple's building with donations. He had rebuilt a fine *hondo* and other temple buildings--a truly splendid work. This seventy-plus-year-old priest often said, "This is my life work. Thankfully my vow has been fulfilled and today I am so lucky to have been able to see it completed in this way." When we went to visit this temple only the roof was still up. That huge building was this priest's whole life's work. He had put everything into it and it had all been wasted now and come to nothing at all. How pitiful and how sad. The *hondo* is still standing, but the buildings around it are

completely destroyed and another temple nearby is also demolished. Roofs are fallen, posts and beams are overturned and broken and fallen down. It's all become mountains of rubble. No electricity, no homes to live in. Of course the stranded people have all been given shelter in large public buildings which are still standing, but there is no familiar home for them to return to. Pulling around posts and beams that can no longer be used, burning these to make a fire to keep warm--seeing these adults and their vacant faces is enough to make one feel the tragedy of it directly. In this earthquake country of Japan, is this one of the given destinies of its residents?

What has been the progress of post-war Japan as we look at it fifty years later? This is also something I thought about. In the new era we made seeming progress in superficial form, but in this one instant of the earthquake that superficial form was destroyed, demolished. This is how it seems now. How transient it all seems now. As the ancients said, "Things of the world are transient and passing, only that clear Mind is of true meaning." What should we hold as our goal and our refuge in life? In today's world where is that something in which we can take refuge, and in which we can find meaning? Where is it?

Originally religion was for the purpose of realizing the True Source of the human mind. Today religion is formalized and ritualized, like a school education which should have been that clarification of our True Source and is now only a collecting and selling of information. So we have to ask, what should we be learning and discovering and understanding? What does happen to us finally? At the end of this life, how is it? This True Essence has become vague and unclear and this is our mind's greatest loss of integrity. I think that is also today's greatest problem.

We currently have a scientific culture with rapid progress in technology and with great strides in material development. The scholastic and academic aspects have also been deeply researched with high level and high quality understanding. Still, that very Source, the actual root of all of that--we have lost track of that, and when it comes to this kind of destruction of things of material form and substance, all of our possibilities for refuge suddenly disappear. This is not only true of a great catastrophe like this violent earthquake. If we look at the conditions in the whole world today--in Russia, with the Sarajevo problems, in Rwanda with African problems--all over the world conflict and disaster are found, back to back, everywhere we look. Within these circumstances people are without refuge. With a murky melancholy and hopeless state of mind they can find little hope for a bright future or a positive world. Only a sad and lonely life beckons to them. This seventy-year-old priest from that Homanji temple --right now his state of mind is probably one of not wanting to do anything at all. All the fruits of his efforts have vanished before his very eyes.

During the war, those who were able to stay alive watched their homes and warm hearths abruptly vanish. They were parted from beloved families suddenly. Of course they could no longer believe or trust in anything then, either.

In the old days in China there was a priest named Master Tozan. A monk asked him, "How can we escape from this severe heat and cold?" This is not just a problem about the severe heat and cold. It is about this very reality which we are always facing--a melancholy and difficult reality. It is truly severe and full of suffering. People who are sick and are suffering in pain, people who lose their homes in disasters and war and have nothing which they can believe in any longer and are suffering in that despair. Those whose belongings have all been destroyed--their refuge in that material world has been shown to be empty and meaningless. This kind of pain is always occurring everywhere around us.

Master Tozan answered the monk, "You have to go where there is no hot and no cold!" The monk continued, "Where is that place where there is no hot nor cold?" Where is that true place of refuge for the mind?

The priest answered, "When it's hot, to become that heat completely! When it's cold, to become one with that cold--completely and totally! When it's painful, to become that pain completely and totally and when you are miserable to become that misery totally and

vine/parade

completely! In the very midst of that to go beyond all of the thoughts you hold onto in your mind. To let go of all ideas of good or bad or gain or loss--let go of all of these thoughts--and from there to grasp that place of your very own vivid life energy! That which directly experiences that "ouch"--to feel that life energy directly, grasping the life energy that feels that pain and sorrow. More important than finding a way out of that pain and suffering or trying to find a place where there is no pain or suffering is to go directly to that place from where these are being experienced. To go to where you feel that pain and that sadness directly and totally. Touch that life energy directly and with your own experience. Use that direct awareness as your base and stand up once more firmly on that base! That actual direct experience which you've grasped--use that as your base and stand up strong and firm. This is how the Master answered the monk.

In the Japanese technological progress of today children have become taken over by computer games, losing all sense of how to enjoy themselves. In this time of crisis where the father has lost his place of work and the mother has no kitchen to work in, with vacant expressions they make a fire with debris wood to keep warm under the chilly winter sky. With just a slight warming fire they sit nearby it. The mother and father who were always too busy and had to turn their backs on their children are now nearby and the children are enjoying this and playing wholeheartedly and with abandon in close proximity. They can be close to their mother and father today--this joy of today. Of course they are sorry to lose their computer games and their own rooms, but their mother and father are there beside them and that means more than any object or toy to them. The joy of having some thing has been largely replaced by their parents' actual presence. To see the children around those adults, happily lost in their playing, is a reminder of the joy of this very moment, at this very place. The children have actually grasped this and are giving life to each moment. We do own and have things and that's fine, but even without a house, or food or things, or with just a few old clothes--if our direct touch with being alive is there, if we have that, then there is nothing stronger. When we look for something perfect and complete outside of ourselves our life becomes busy and crowded and meaningless and our inner world becomes diluted and flat.)

In the midst of seeing this catastrophe I felt that I had to come again and again, to join with the people there in cleaning up after this great ordeal and to give the people there, even a little at a time, the help to start over again--to begin again and return to their energy. I pray that they will be able to awaken to this new awareness. For this purpose I will go back and join with them in cleaning up. Buddhism is not something special but with our own life energy to feel things directly.

In modern times Shiki Masaoka was the one who brought back to life the Japanese poetry style of *haiku*. He did a lot of zazen and also was thoroughly acquainted with the world of Zen. In his later years when he was seriously ill with tuberculosis, his whole body was in great pain and he lived in great misery--his body filled with pus and phlegm. He left behind poems written about that time in his life. This man, Shiki Masaoka, spoke from his own experience, saying that he had always thought that Zen was something that would enable you to die laughing, but that as he was struggling with the pain of his illness he finally realized that this way of looking at things had been a mistake. In Zen, no matter what a difficult time of suffering we may be going through, we dig in and go through the experiencing of it. This is how he had now come to see it. This is Shiki Masaoka's own experience and deep understanding, directly grasped and then expressed in a poem:

The gourd plant is blossoming;
the phlegm is stuck, caught.
Is this the Buddha?

Shiki Masaoka, in the midst of his pain, lived it to the end. This way of doing it was his Zen. This is not something which is to be understood or not understood. All people who live, every one of them will experience this Mind's True Origin. Not limited by the name of God or Buddha, our actual life energy and the way we realize and live--this is the true religion. |

Please, for those who have lived in this catastrophe and those who are in great pain right now, from within that experience to use that *tanden* as the very base for everything in all of the heavens and earth. With both hands stretched outward, experience that joy of being alive! In this is Zen--the true quality of life of being human and alive.

I pray for everyone's most excellent quality of life in this new year.

1995 Sesshin Schedule* at Sogenji

January:

Kosesshin, 7 - 11
Osesshin, 16 - 22
Kosesshin, 26 - 30

February:

Kosesshin, 4 - 8
Kosesshin, 13 - 17
Osesshin, 21 - 27

March:

Osesshin, 5 - 11
Kosesshin, 16 - 22
Kosesshin, 26 - 30

April:

Kosesshin, 7 - 11
Osesshin, 16 - 22
Kosesshin, 25 - 29

May:

Kosesshin, 4 - 10
Osesshin, 14 - 20
Kosesshin, 25 - 29

June:

Kosesshin, 3 - 9
Osesshin, 15 - 21
Kosesshin, 25 - 29

July:

Osesshin, 4 - 10
Kosesshin, 15 - 21
Kosesshin, 26 - 30

August:

Kosesshin, 4 - 10
Kosesshin, 17 - 23
Kosesshin, 26 - 30

September:

Kosesshin, 4 - 10
Kosesshin, 15 - 19
Osesshin, 24 - 30

October:

Kosesshin, 5 - 11
Osesshin, 16 - 22
Kosesshin, 26 - 30

November:

Osesshin, 11 - 17
Kosesshin, 23 - 29

December:

Rohatsu, 4 - 10**
Osesshin, 15 - 21
Kosesshin, 24 - 28

**From time to time it is necessary to change the dates of a sesshin at the last moment. If you are planning to attend a ko- or osesshin at Sogenji, please contact Chi-san (Priscilla Daichi) for confirmation. Osesshin begins with kokoho (the opening ceremony) the evening before the specified date, and ends, except for Rohatsu, at approximately 9 p.m. the evening of the ending date.*

***Rohatsu osesshin traditionally ends with sitting all through the seventh night and into the next morning.*

Roshi's sesshin at Cloud Mountain this year is scheduled for **September 9-16**.

Roshi will also give sesshin in Hungary this spring, May 22-28. If you are interested in attending, please contact Marika Marghescu at Kirchröderstr. 40, D-30625 Hannover, Germany, as soon as possible.