



RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY

Is Monastery Relevant to the 21st Century?

The idea of “monastery” is not on most people's radar these days. People are surprised to hear that there is a monastery here in northeast Iowa. Monastery has been core to multiple religious traditions. So what is its relevance to “modern” times?

My first experience of monastery was at Hokyoji Zen Practice Community in southeast Minnesota. Katagiri Roshi established the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis in 1973. Five years later, MZMC bought 280 acres of land in southeast Minnesota for a monastery. Katagiri Roshi then began conducting one month *angos* or *practice periods* there.

The buildings were built out of green oak that had been cut by a local power company. These were intended to be just temporary buildings (which actually lasted for forty years). People slept in tents. Water was carried from a spring. We learned to be content with what we had, and live and work together in harmony with each other.

I visited Katagiri Roshi when he became ill with cancer. During that visit he asked me about going to Japan for a year of monastery practice. I was interested in going, but said I didn't know Japanese. He said, “It doesn't matter, just go and taste the root.”

I entered Zuioji Zen Monastery in Japan and practiced there for three years. Narasaki, Ikko Roshi and Narasaki, Tsugen Roshi were the respective abbots of Zuioji. Narasaki, Ikko Roshi passed on, but Narasaki, Tsugen Roshi has continued serving as abbot and is now retiring at age 93.

During part of my time in Japan, I was at a satellite monastery of Zuioji called Shogoji. Shogoji was established by Daichi Zenji, a dharma successor of Eihei Dogen, founder of the Soto Zen lineage in Japan (13th C). This monastery was deep in the mountains of Kyushi. We were at 6,000 feet elevation. It was there I learned that “*deep in the mountains*” means to bloom wherever you are and in whatever the circumstances you may be.

Katagiri Roshi died during my stay in Japan. I didn't come back for his funeral. I felt he would have wanted me to stay. His life had become my life. I *tasted the root* more deeply.

Monastery is a great teaching – it is to flourish wherever you are. Usually we're always trying to shape our future. Ultimately, there's no escape from life and death. We are all caught by life and death and the turnings of the Universe. The real monastery is the Whole Universe. There's no escape because Universe is us. It's beyond our ideas of how things should be. In monastery, the door of escape is to be where you are.

The Japanese word for monastery is *sorin*. *Sorin* means *many species of trees all grow together in peace and harmony to make one forest*. We are all different like the trees in a forest. The real challenge of the human species is: *can we live together in peace and harmony on this one planet that we share together?* This is the core practice of monastery.

Katagiri Roshi valued the importance of monastery. He said, “Sooner or later, I would like to build a monastery.” He also said, “I would like to build a place and an environment to promote the quiet sangha life in unity. Modern life is artificially protected. When the artificial environment collapses, for instance in a natural disaster or an economic calamity, people suffer severely. Modern people, therefore, need to live in direct contact with nature and find a practice method in tune with nature's rhythm. Old ways of life fit this purpose. Therefore I am convinced we must build such a practice place in America.”

Katagiri Roshi's vision is relevant to where we are in the 21st Century. His vision has stayed warm in my heart for many years. Ultimately it led to the establishment of Ryumonji. I wanted to establish a place to be in direct contact with nature's rhythm. Nature's rhythm is the rhythm of the Universe.

Monasteries are not just for monks. For me, I don't see a difference between living in the monastery or living in the world. The whole world is the monastery. We are all called to be monks of the Universe in whatever century we find ourselves.

Rev. Shoken Winecoff
Ryumonji Zen Monastery

Ryumonji Happenings . . .



2019 Winter Ango

Ryumonji held Winter Ango during January and February of 2019. Despite the very cold and snowy winter weather, the Ango was warm and supportive.

Rev. Kyoku Lutz served as Shuso for the Ango. The Hossenshiki Tea took place Saturday, February 9, 2019 and the Hossenshiki Ceremony was held Sunday, February 10. Rev. Shohaku Okumura gave a teaching during the tea and served as Jokeshi for the ceremony.

2019 Summer Ango

Ryumonji will offer a six week Summer Ango during 2019. Ango will begin on Friday, June 21 with a two day sesshin and conclude on Sunday, August 4.

Shuso for the Summer Ango will be Rev. Eishin Houghton. In addition, several of Shoken Roshi's dharma heirs will be in residence at different times during the Ango to offer teachings.

Ango is open to partial participation if full time attendance is not feasible. Please register on Ryumonji's website, www.ryumonji.org, if you wish to attend.

Buddha's Birthday

Ryumonji celebrated Buddha's Birthday on Sunday, April 9. Local practitioners participated in the traditional Buddha's birthday observation with a decorated flower house and special service.

Upcoming Ryumonji Retreats

Ryumonji will host its annual Men's Retreat on Aug. 16-18, 2019 and its annual Women's Retreat on Nov. 1-3, 2019.

Registration for the Men's Retreat is now open. Please visit Ryumonji's website to view the flyer and to register.

Information about the Women's Retreat will be forthcoming on Ryumonji's website.

2019 Jukai Lay Ordination

Ryumonji will hold a Lay Ordination ceremony on Sunday, November 17, 2019. This is the traditional precept ceremony and receiving of rakusu and kechimyaku lineage papers presented to lay disciples.

Those who are interested in taking the precepts and sewing the rakusu should contact Shoken Roshi soon. Weekly sewing classes will begin early this summer.

Entry Walkway Paving

This summer we hope to pave the entry walkway path. Paving will begin at the main parking lot and extend across the front of the monastery buildings to the back parking area. It is a \$16,000 project. Already \$10,000 has been donated. We hope to raise the additional \$6,000 during the capital development fundraiser this summer.

2019 Ryumonji Calendar

May 17-19	Sesshin
June 21-23	Sesshin & Summer Ango Opening
July 19-21	Sesshin
Aug 4	Summer Ango Closing
Aug 16-18	Men's Retreat
Sept 20-22	Sesshin
Oct 6	Taste of Ryumonji—Open House
Oct 18-20	Sesshin
Nov 1-3	Women's Retreat
Nov 15-17	Sesshin & Jukai Ceremony
Dec 1-8	Rohatsu Sesshin
Dec 31	End of Year Sesshin New Year's Eve Celebration



Public Sittings

Thursday Evenings

7:30 p.m.

Sunday Mornings

9:00 a.m.

For orientation to zazen

please arrive

15 minutes early

*To receive future issues of the
newsletter electronically,
please e-mail:
office@ryumonji.org*

2018 Ryumonji Work Days

Ryumonji work days begin at 10:00 a.m. and conclude at 3:00 p.m. A pot luck lunch is served at noon. Work days are a great sangha activity and support for Ryumonji. Below are the remaining dates for 2019. Please join us if you can!

Jun 1	Sep 7	Dec 14
Jul 6	Oct 5	
Aug 17	Nov 9	

To register for retreats, sesshin or angos, please complete the Event Registration Form at www.ryumonji.org

RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY



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Decorah, IA
Permit No. 2452
Zip Code 52101

Ryumonji's Solar Project

Ryumonji's five year Solar Project was completed this past year with the installation of the final section of 12 panels located near the care-taker farm house. This set of panels also supplies electricity for the monastery well and equipment barn. Altogether we have installed 90 solar panels. They will supply our electrical usage for the next twenty-five years. Since installation was staggered over a five year period, future replacement will be spread out over several years as well.

The solar energy powers the geothermal heating and cooling systems as well as our other electrical needs. In the summer when the sun is high we generate more electricity than we use. In the winter, however, when the sun is low in the sky and the days are shorter, we end up buying some electricity from the power company.

Thank you for your invaluable support during this five year campaign. It will enable Ryumonji to minimize our carbon footprint on the planet and to manage our assets wisely.