



RYUMONJI ZEN MONASTERY

Twentieth Anniversary of Everydayness

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of Ryumonji. A celebration was planned to mark this milestone, but it was cancelled due to Covid-19. Nonetheless, anniversaries are to be celebrated. So this article is a story of the events that have brought us to where we are. I think it's a story worth telling.

I don't know how many people have asked me how a Buddhist Monastery came to Iowa. Katagiri Roshi wanted to found a monastery in southeast Minnesota where land was bought for that purpose. But after early development, the land had to be closed for some years after Katagiri Roshi's death.

I was part of it in those early days. We planted pine trees on a steep hillside behind Katagiri Roshi's one room cabin. The cabin was a simple structure built from green oak. There was no plumbing, no indoor toilets, and no kitchen to speak of. People slept in tents, and the zendo was initially a big army tent. We planted pine trees to beautify the land and future generations. That was forty years ago. Little did we know that some of those same trees would become the post and beams of Ryumonji's meditation hall.

I had no idea where to go after the land was closed, and how to carry on Katagiri Roshi's vision of building a monastery. A few folks from Decorah, Iowa had been coming to this land for zazen sittings. They drove almost forty miles every Tuesday evening. So at one of those sittings, someone said, "Why don't you come to Decorah?" So that's what I did!

When I moved to Decorah (Iowa), I lived in a granary building on a farm outside of town. The granary had been renovated into simple living quarters. I lived there for almost three years. The granary became my temple. Cows were my first parishioners. They chanted the Heart Sutra with me. And eventually a few people started to come, including the farmer and his wife. We sat zazen and chanted the Sutras. Towards the end of my second year there, Rev. Jikan Kondrick came and together we established the Decorah Zen Center.

A I knew from Katagiri Roshi and from my own experience in Japan that training monasteries would be core to cultivating the roots of Zen in North America. I did not want to let Katagiri Roshi's vision fall to the wayside. I don't think he was attached to when or where the monastery would be built. His friend, Tsugen Narasaki Roshi in Japan, told me, "If you can't build it where he wanted to build it, build it someplace else".

I told people in Decorah I was interested in looking for country land to build a monastery. One day someone stepped forward and said he had some land, and maybe we could work something out. Ultimately, he ended up donating forty acres for the building of a monastery. That's how it started!

Someone gave the Buddha some land. His disciple Ananda stuck a blade of grass in the sand and said, "The monastery is built!" It's been twenty years now since the land was given to us. We stuck a shovel in the ground, and the monastery was built! We offered thanks at that ground breaking ceremony for the myriad beings that laid the way. Day by day Ryumonji was built. We're celebrating the 20th year of that wholehearted effort.

We never know what's on the other side of each hour. Time and circumstances are always arising and disappearing. You plant the seeds and water the plants. With day to day efforts you hope the flower blooms, but there are no guarantees.

This is the story of how a Buddhist monastery came to Iowa. It's our 20th Anniversary! And a matter of everydayness!

Rev. Shoken Winecoff,
Abbot, Ryumonji Zen Monastery



2020 *Virtual Taste of Ryumonji*

Although Ryumonji has cancelled all in-person events, we are working to offer an alternative *Virtual Taste of Ryumonji*, our annual Fall Festival and Open House. Typically, on a Sunday afternoon in October, Ryumonji opens its doors to welcome friends and neighbors for a celebration of the season. There is food, music and fellowship, rounded off by the highlight of the event, a PIE AUCTION. Sangha members and friends of Ryumonji produce a variety of sweet and savory creations to tempt pie lovers. This event is a fundraiser for Ryumonji and one of the most enjoyable events of the year.

During this time of Covid, Rev. Kalen McAllister, one of Shoken Roshi's Dharma Heirs who lives in St. Louis, MO, is offering an alternative idea. Kalen operates Laughing Bear Bakery in St. Louis. Laughing Bear Bakery assists formerly incarcerated individuals in their transition back into society. More information about Laughing Bear Bakery can be found at: laughingbearbakery.org.

The tasty creations from Laughing Bear Bakery make up a large portion of the pies auctioned off at Ryumonji's pie auction. In lieu of an auction this year, Kalen has offered to provide a 3 pound box of Laughing Bear cookies and caramel corn to anyone who makes a donation of \$100 to this year's Virtual Taste of Ryumonji event. These treats will be delivered directly to your door.

There are several ways to donate. Ryumonji accepts Paypal donations on its website. If you make a Paypal donation, please follow up with an e-mail to: office@ryumonji.org to provide your name and mailing address for shipping of the Laughing Bear thank you gift. Or you can complete the form below and mail it along with your check to: Ryumoji Zen Monastery, 2452 Ryumon Rd., Dorchester, IA 52140

I wish to participate in Ryumonji's 2020 *Virtual Taste of Ryumonji*. Here is my \$100 donation. I am looking forward to receiving my gift of Laughing Bear Bakery products. Please send my gift to:

Name: _____

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Please note: Ryumonji is a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. Receipt of any goods or services in return for a donation reduces the amount of the donation by the dollar value of goods or services received. In this case, the value of your gift from Laughing Bear Bakery described above will change the value of your Ryumonji donation to \$60.



Ryumonji Happenings . . .

As announced in Ryumonji's Spring newsletter, Ryumonji has suspended all ongoing activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will continue through the remainder of 2020 and into 2021. When it is deemed safe to do so, the regular monthly sesshin schedule will resume, along with Ryumonji's schedule of Summer and Winter Angos and special events. Everyone is looking forward to that time!

Although Ryumonji has been closed to the public, daily activities have continued throughout the summer and now into the fall. These activities have been overseen by Rev. Shoken Winecoff and supported by Ryumonji's corps of volunteers. Following appropriate protocols and health department guidance, these volunteers take care of mowing, weeding, garden and forestry work, and garden produce processing. Many thanks to those dedicated individuals!

If you are interested in volunteering for Ryumonji, please e-mail volunteer@ryumonji.org. Volunteers are asked to avoid Ryumonji if they are experiencing any symptoms of illness.

During 2020, Ryumonji utilized teleconferencing technology to successfully offer a virtual Men's Retreat in August. Ryumonji's annual Women's Retreat will also be held virtually in November.

Passing Through the Dragon Gate

On the occasion of Ryumonji's 20th Anniversary, we have collected the articles written by Shoken Winecoff Roshi in past issues of this newsletter. Ryumonji's newsletter began publication in 2007 and has continued for 14 years. The front page article from each issue will soon be published in a new book, *Passing Through the Dragon Gate*. Our target publication date is November of this year.

The price of the book will be \$20.00, including shipping and handling. If you would like to pre-order a copy of this new book, there are several options. You can make your payment through Paypal and follow up with an e-mail to: office@ryumonji.org. Please include your name and shipping address as well as the number of copies requested in your e-mail.

Or you may complete the order form on page 4 of this newsletter. Please mail the completed form along with your payment to: Ryumonji Zen Monastery, 2452 Ryumon Rd., Dorchester, IA 52140.

Please note: An announcement will appear on Ryumonji's website when *Passing Through the Dragon Gate* becomes available. If you have preordered, your book will be shipped as soon as possible after that date.

**RYUMONJI ZEN
MONASTERY**



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