



Koko An Zendo occupies a large white house in the hills above Honolulu. Over sloping vistas of coconut and banana trees lies the crater Koko Head, close to where Robert Aitken grew up, not far from Pearl Harbor. On the main altar inside the zendo, looking grumpy as ever with his sagging fleshy jowls and fierce scowl, sits the unmistakable Bodhidharma. Aitken bought this statue in Japan in 1951 after studying Zen there for a year. A few days before returning to Hawaii, as he meandered through the back streets of Tokyo with Nakagawa Soen, Bob Aitken confided his misgivings about his accomplishments, if any. Passing a Buddhist bookshop, they spotted the Bodhidharma image in the window. Dismissing the self-preoccupied doubts of an American beginner, Soen urged Aitken to purchase the statue, telling him that someday it would be the central figure in a temple that he would establish in the United States. At that time, recalls Aitken, "such a thing was beyond my dreams." Slow in coming, Soen Roshi's prophecy took a course that Aitken would later describe as "Willy-Nilly Zen."

Zen master, scholar, author, and radical pacifist, Aitken Roshi is the unofficial American dean of Zen, a respected elder to Zen Buddhists across the United States. Born in Philadelphia on June 19, 1917, he came to Hawaii at age five and was educated with children who were to become prominent state leaders. But since his early childhood, conventional values had so eluded Aitken that his contribution to society, however willy-nilly, seemed destined for another direction.

In 1959 he and his wife, Anne Aitken, opened their living room in Honolulu two evenings a week to anyone interested in zazen. The meditation periods were opened and closed by the rap of a wooden spoon hitting a Pyrex mixing bowl. At first these meetings were attended by only one other couple, but they marked the beginning of the Diamond Sangha. Ten years later the Aitkens moved to the Hawaiian island of Maui, settling in an area propi-

tiously named Haiku. There they started a Maui extension of the Diamond Sangha, and it was from this remote tropical paradise that Aitken emerged as leader of American Zen Buddhism. For fourteen years he traveled frequently to Honolulu, and in 1983, with the energy of the sangha as a whole stabilized in Honolulu, the Aitkens moved back to the capital city.

Sitting barefoot in the living room of their rented house near Koko An, wearing blue jeans and a faded work shirt, Aitken conveys the dignity of a gentleman farmer, while his gray hair has the slightly disheveled look of professorial abandon. His current reading selection, scattered on the nearby coffee table, includes *The Tales of Genji*, *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, *Childhood, Youth and Exile* by Alexander Herzen, and a photographic study of Hawaiian birds. Reflecting on his relocation back to Honolulu and all the years of self-doubt that followed that first year of Zen training, he says, "What with all the problems we had in establishing the Maui zendo and the turnover of people and all the problems with having two centers and going back and forth between Maui and Honolulu—I don't think I've ever gone through a crisis of faith at anytime. But I'm always on the edge of doubting method, questioning method. Are we doing it the right way?"

Aitken, a lay roshi, has been described as a teacher who asks a lot of questions and doesn't pretend to know all the answers. His qualifications were certified in 1974 when he received dharma transmission from the eminent Japanese roshi Yamada Koun. The only Westerner who is a documented successor of Yamada Roshi at this time, Aitken is also the only American member of the recently established Zen sect *Sanbo Kyodan*, the Order of the Three Treasures. While this sect retains orthodox methodology, its founder, Haku'un Yasutani Roshi, departed from the Zen monastic convention by starting a temple for nonordained, nonresidential students.

With the Sanbo Kyodan lineage invested in Aitken Roshi and the American expression of Zen still evolving, Aitken has unintentionally become the authority on lay practice. Removing a pair of thick glasses, he rubs his eyes and repeats wearily, "What's lay practice? That's like asking a fish, 'Hey, how's the water?'" But his life doesn't beg the question. He demonstrated against nuclear testing in the fifties, for unilateral disarmament in the sixties, and against the Trident submarines in the eighties; he counseled draftees during the Vietnam War and cofounded the Buddhist Peace Fellowship in 1978. He has called himself a feminist, performed ceremonies for aborted

babies, and advocated sexual equality within a Buddhist community where historically none has existed. In 1982 he and Anne crossed the legal line for the first time by withholding from the Internal Revenue Service that portion of their federal income taxes slated for military expenditures, a stand they have continued to take each year. This action alone departs radically from the Japanese Zen tradition in which opposition to political authority has been negligible and civil disobedience unknown.

Aitken's political convictions developed long before the Diamond Sangha existed, so that his involvement with politics—however contrary it may be in terms of Japanese Zen—has never aroused controversy in his own community. As a lay roshi, he cannot ordain students; he has never taken monastic vows nor advocated traditional monkhood as a model. Yet he has continued to invest in the traditional practices of his spiritual discipline. His radical divergence from the cultural expression of Eastern Zen, combined with his adherence to orthodox Zen training, represents a direction that has far-reaching implications for Zen in the West.

By the age of twenty-two, Bob Aitken had quit college once, flunked out once, and was working with a construction crew on Midway Island where he had risen from messman to timekeeper. In July 1941, after a one-year contract on Midway, he returned home to Honolulu. His father, a first lieutenant in the reserves, had just been called into active duty; his younger brother was also in uniform. Everyone was talking about the war. Two years earlier, Aitken's patriotic father had persuaded him to join the National Guard. To Robert Aitken Senior the sight of an American flag unfurled past sundown was so blasphemous that he felt morally obliged to rebuke whoever was responsible for the violation. In Honolulu the inescapable signs of the coming war were so oppressive to Aitken that he stayed drunk for several days in a row. When he sobered up, he made his way to the construction employment office again. He registered for the draft, which had just come into effect, and after one week in Honolulu shipped out for his new construction job as timekeeper again—this time in Guam, the farthest U.S. possession in the western Pacific.

From the moment he arrived on Guam, he felt caught behind enemy lines. Many men could see the war coming; they could predict the consequences, but inertia and fear kept them from taking action. A superintendent assigned

to Aitken's construction crew arrived two days after Aitken and left immediately. "He knew," Aitken recalls. "I knew. But he acted on what he knew and none of the rest of us had the guts to do it. We just waited it out."

Some forty-five years later, Aitken's hoarse, searching voice recaptures waiting it out on Guam: "The war began on December 7th here and December 8th there, across the date line. There were something like fifty-seven marines on the island and a couple of hundred sailors. There was no way we could defend the island at all. The second morning we climbed to the highest peak, where we could see the whole island ringed with Japanese ships. So we knew that we had to give ourselves up."

After being imprisoned on Guam for a month, Aitken was taken by steamer to the Japanese port of Kobe. For the next three years and nine months he was held under the classification of "Military Civilian Prisoners of War." The enforced labor of the military camps was not required here, but the men were more restricted than civilian prisoners. "We never had barbed wire; we never had to work. There was only one brief phase where we were intimidated and threatened with execution if Japan lost the war, but otherwise we had a good relationship with the guards." For the first nine months he was interned with seventy-five other men in the British Seaman's Mission, which contained an extensive nineteenth-century library that nourished Aitken more than his meager meals. After this he was moved to Marks House, the five-room former home of a British banker in the foreign district of Kobe, where he was kept until the spring of 1944. The men were permitted to take books from the mission library to their new camp, and Aitken's sustaining immersion in literature continued uninterrupted.

Toward the end of the war, the diet of both prisoners and their captors was reduced to scanty rations of soybeans, contributing to the death of some of the older men and leaving many others critically malnourished. At the best of times Aitken's health had not been robust; he had suffered from psychosomatic illnesses, starting with extreme eczema in his infancy and then asthma in his childhood. The dampness and lack of heating in Japan further exacerbated an already weakened respiratory system. But the brutality inflicted systematically by the Japanese on their prisoners throughout Southeast Asia was not, according to Aitken, evident in their home camps. The prisoners were allowed, for example, to leave camp for visits to the dentist that included stops at the foreign bookstores. To supplement the Western

classics offered by the mission library, Aitken used his stipend to buy translations of Oriental poetry. He was already familiar with Arthur Waley's translations of Chinese and Japanese poetry, which he had read along with the poetry of A. E. Housman and Walt Whitman during his erratic attendance at the University of Hawaii.

Aitken's reliance on books did not originate in the prison camp. At the start of each school term he had devoured all the materials distributed for the entire course and remained bored and alienated for the rest of the semester. "In a lot of ways I was a mess. As an adolescent I was totally lost, confused, unable to find an acceptable way of relating to the world around me. I think that, really, from the very beginning I was a kind of marginal person. Even as a baby. I grew up feeling completely outside all the social and athletic and academic work of my peers."

Against all odds, an internment camp was the fortuitous circumstance that allowed Aitken's marginality to become his best ally. As an internee he stayed remarkably detached from the pervasive ennui that enveloped the prison-striped psyche of the average inmate. Surrounded by men who were spending their days dividing an intense fantasy life between the past and the future, he methodically proceeded to capitalize on the present: "I didn't feel any desperation at all. I just woke up each morning thinking, what am I going to do today? We had complete freedom. We didn't have any responsibilities except to keep our camp clean, and so I would sort of map out my project for the day and do it: 'Today I am going to work on my Spanish or today I'm going to finish *As You Like It*.'"

One evening during his stay at Marks House a drunken guard entered his room waving a book in the air and announced in English, "This book, my English teacher." The guard had been a student of R. H. Blyth's, and the book was *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*, then recently published in Tokyo. Without suspecting that Blyth himself would soon become a fellow inmate, Aitken read that book ten times straight through. It was his "first book," the way *Walden* was for many of his friends. Blyth had learned Italian to read Dante, Spanish to read *Don Quixote*, German to read Goethe, Russian to read Dostoyevski, and Japanese to read Basho—to list just some of the languages he had mastered. He then used classical works to elucidate for the Western reader the treasures of Zen, which, according to his singular insight, had been buried undetected within their own traditions. By this stan-

dard, Don Quixote merited a chapter all to himself, being for Blyth “the purest example, in the whole of Zen literature, of the man who lives by Zen.” Also noted for their exceptional expressions of “Zen attitude” were Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Born a British subject, Blyth became a conscientious objector during the First World War and was summarily imprisoned. Following his release, he left England for his long curious odyssey through Asia. In 1940 he accompanied his Japanese wife from Korea, where he had been teaching at the Seoul Imperial University, back to the Japanese port town of Kanazawa, where he taught at the local high school. When Japan entered the Second World War, he was interned in a camp for civilian enemies.

In May 1944 all the camps around Kobe were combined, and Blyth and Aitken found themselves housed together at Futatabai Koen, in the hills above Kobe, in a complex of three interconnected buildings that had previously been a reform school. Blyth was initially put off by Aitken’s adulation, but succumbed to not only his interest in Zen but his capacity to convert a prison cell into a seminary, to use his days for self-transformation. Indeed Blyth, whose internment interfered little with his furious work habits, was the only inmate whose study program could compare with Aitken’s. At Futatabai Koen, he spent his days reading Japanese texts and translating haiku poetry. After a cautious introduction, the intellectually flamboyant Englishman became an unofficial tutor to the malleable young American. He lent Aitken D. T. Suzuki’s *Essays in Zen Buddhism* and translations of Chinese Buddhist texts. They agreed that Aitken would learn Japanese, and Blyth secured an elementary text through his wife.

In the evenings Aitken joined Blyth in the room the Englishman shared with five other men. More evenings than not, the smoke-filled room became crowded with seasoned residents of the Orient arguing about the virtues of East and West, politics and religion. “Mr. B.,” as Blyth was affectionately called, was considered pro-Japanese by the Americans and a Johnny-come-lately by the part-Japanese internees. The discussions were often heated, accusatory, even wild; for Aitken they were far more challenging than anything he had ever known. In his determination to contradict his father, Aitken had pitted political philosophies against each other, assessing comparative merits without investigating their internal strategies. Blyth, however, had absolutely nothing good to say about any philosophy or system that legitimized a

nation-state. His brand of free thinking offered an imaginative, eagle-eyed watch on cultural and political shifts, and his analysis of international power-plays remained detached from the sentimental patriotism that provided most of the homesick captives with whatever little hope they had left.

Blyth had started the application procedures for Japanese citizenship before the war began but then allowed the process to lapse, vowing to renew his application only if Japan lost the war. In an essay on Blyth, Aitken later explained that "somehow he sensed how badly the Japanese were handling their responsibilities as occupation forces in Southeast Asia, and he knew that a national defeat would be the salutary experience the country needed for true maturity." While this kind of creative logic infuriated other inmates, Aitken learned from it something of the wisdom of paradox.

When the Japanese surrendered, the American occupation forces offered the internees the option of remaining in Japan. Aitken did not want to stay. He left Japan knowing that he would study Zen, a decision not influenced by Blyth, who had little use for formal Zen training. He also knew that he did not want to be Japanese, making a distinction between Zen and Japanese culture that often escaped Western enthusiasts of Japanese Zen, especially at that time. He did not realize, however, that the war had altered the collective consciousness of the United States. In the midst of a national community celebrating its victory, his inglorious exile from military duty left him isolated, ashamed, and more cut off from the mainstream than he had been in Japan. Even his knowledge of the atomic bomb had been delayed. The Japanese-English newspapers had reported "a new type of molecular bomb," and engineers detained in the camp had figured out that the new bomb had been achieved by splitting the atom. "But the implications of it didn't hit me until I got back to the United States," Aitken says. The dampness and poor diet had aggravated his bronchial ailments, moreover, and he returned to Honolulu gaunt and infirm. The immediate effect of coming home after the war was a crippling disorientation that lasted for several months.

Then, determined to overcome past academic failures, Aitken reapplied to the University of Hawaii and was accepted on probation. Confident and content in school for the first time, he easily earned his B.A. in English Literature. He continued to explore political ideologies but, influenced by Blyth, did so with new-found discrimination. He also attended meetings at the university to discuss peace and labor issues. In the cold-war climate of the



times, these activities, however innocuous, were enough to get him investigated by the FBI.

In 1947 Aitken married for the first time and with his wife, Mary, left for Berkeley, California, where he enrolled in a Japanese studies program at the University of California School of Far Eastern and Russian Studies. During the Christmas recess, he traveled to Ojai, a town north of Los Angeles, to meet the Indian teacher J. Krishnamurti at Happy Valley, a school established to disseminate his teachings. Krishnamurti, however, was in India, so Aitken went on to Los Angeles, where he visited P. D. and Ione Perkins' Oriental Bookshop. Richard Gard, now a distinguished Buddhist scholar, was then the clerk at the bookstore and had been a prewar friend of Aitken's at the University of Hawaii. He told Aitken about Zen teacher Nyogen Senzaki, who was then living at the Miyako Hotel. Aitken learned that while he was interned in Japan, Senzaki had waited out the war in Wyoming at the Heart Mountain camp for Japanese-Americans.

Aitken left the bookstore and went directly to Senzaki's hotel, where he found the squat, elderly master, his white hair fastidiously parted on one side, sitting alone in his small library. By then Senzaki was seventy-seven years old and had already spent half a century in California. Over tea, Aitken engaged Senzaki in a conversation about haiku and Zen. It was the first of many erudite discussions; Senzaki was well educated in Western philosophy, and their subjects ranged from Basho to Kant. (He once told Aitken, "I like Immanuel Kant. He's very good, but he just needs one good kick in the pants.") Senzaki was eventually to give Aitken the Buddhist name Chotan, which means "Deep Pool." A few months later the Aitkens moved to Pasadena to be near Senzaki.

Aitken has described his first Zen teacher as "a marginal Zen monk," Senzaki's rejection of conventional monasticism, political criticisms of Japan, and subsequent residence in the United States all earning him that title. While the early American practitioners of Zen were turning to Japan for orthodox directives, Senzaki's investigations of the Buddhadharma in America were isolated and intuitive. He tried his best, moreover, to be an American gentleman, as he said, going so far as to take lessons in social dancing. Having once watched mischievous boys sneak up to rub Soyen Shaku's shaved head on a streetcar in San Francisco, Senzaki let his own hair grow—one of his many ways of protecting the dharma from ridicule. His hotel

rooms were furnished Western-style, and he conducted his meditations sitting on chairs rather than cross-legged on black cushions, which he considered un-American. Aitken laughingly recalls that “by the time I met him, he had trouble sitting on a cushion because he was so very stout.”

Although Senzaki was the first Zen teacher to live in the United States and to advocate Zen practice, he gave his students relatively little instruction. According to Aitken, students were inspired mostly by his kindness, modesty, patience, and humor. He was an unassuming monk who did not dress like a monk because he so valued his anonymity. Nor were his spiritual merits marked by official seals and titles. Aitken respectfully refers to him, as he does to Blyth, as *sensei*, the Japanese word for teacher. Although among American students the term *sensei* has become associated with formal teaching credentials, Aitken’s usage is correct. Senzaki, for his part, outspokenly disdained the titles of Japanese Zen clergy and criticized the monks, abbots, and bishops for straying from what he believed was the true monk’s path of celibacy and utmost simplicity. He claimed that for true Buddhists titles were mere business labels, and he abhorred the corrupt practice of selling government-issued Buddhist teaching licenses. He called himself a “kindergarten nurse,” a “mushroom monk,” “a nameless and homeless monk,” embodying the very transience he had known from his start in life as an orphan. “You may laugh,” he wrote, “but I am really a mushroom without a very deep root, no branches, no flowers, and probably no seeds.” And indeed, having never received formal dharma transmission, he left no dharma heirs. His given name, Nyogen, means “like a phantasm,” and his Buddhist name, Choro, means “Morning Dew.” Both images appear in the final part of the *Diamond Sutra*:

All composite things are like a dream,  
A phantasm, a bubble and a shadow;  
Like a dewdrop and a flash of lightning—  
They are thus to be regarded.

Although the Aitkens were progressing in their studies with Senzaki in Los Angeles, Mary grew homesick for Hawaii, so they returned to Honolulu in 1949. At the same time that he worked with second- and third-generation Japanese at the Moliili Community Organization, Aitken completed his master’s degree in Japanese studies at the University of Hawaii with a disser-

tation on Basho. In his book, *Zen Wave: Basho's Haiku and Zen* (1976), Aitken writes that his dissertation drew a sharp admonition from one member of his thesis committee: "He said that just because its subject is everywhere, I must be careful not to claim universal manifestation for Zen Buddhism." Aitken concludes that Zen Buddhism "does not pervade the cosmos. It presents essential nature—universal mind—but it does so as a particular teaching. Confusing the specific teaching with its vast and undifferentiated subject is a trap that has caught many tigers."

One of these tigers, Aitken realized, was Blyth, whose attempt to illuminate the universal truth of Zen through world literature made him a ready victim of this trap. Like D. T. Suzuki, he stressed the amorphous, ecumenical Zen spirit; for Western readers this spirit contributed to Zen's influence on the life of the intellect, but it obscured the practical efforts of Zen training. "I used to think afterward," writes Aitken, "that both Suzuki and Blyth were presenting Zen the way a florist presents flowers, minus the dirt and the roots. And you just presume that—boom!—there are the flowers." So Aitken resolved to study formal Zen. In 1950, with the help of D. T. Suzuki, who had been in residence at the University of Hawaii the previous year, he received a \$1,000 fellowship to study Zen in Japan. That same year his son Thomas was born, and Aitken returned to Japan alone.

In November 1950 Aitken sat his first sesshin—a week-long intensive meditation practice—at Engaku Temple in Kamakura, where both Senzaki and D. T. Suzuki had trained together almost fifty years earlier. Senzaki had never held formal sesshins, but in a dharma talk to his American students he had explained that "sesshin has two meanings—since there are two Chinese characters, both having the same pronunciation. One meaning is concentration of mind, the other, unification of mind. In the first sense, mind has a psychological meaning. For example, when one reads a book and forgets his surroundings, he is concentrating his mind on that book. This is sesshin in the first sense. In the second sense, mind means the essence of mind. It is *this* sort of sesshin we are concerned with. In Zen meditation we think non-thinking—that is, we think nothing. What this means is that our whole psychological mind ceases to function, and as a result, our whole being becomes united with the essence of mind, which we signify by Mind. You call this essence the God within you, absoluteness, Ultimate Reason—it doesn't matter. No matter what you call it, to unite with this essence is the very reason we are gathered here to meditate together."

On that first morning of sesshin at Engakuji, Aitken at long last took his assigned seat in the meditation hall of a Japanese monastery. The heady smell of incense and the staunch resolve of the black-robed monks were just as inspiring as he had always imagined. Unsmiling and self-contained, Asahina Roshi, the abbot, fulfilled Aitken's image of a Zen master. The boom of the wooden fish drum accompanied the recitation of the monosyllabic sutras, the Buddhist scriptures. Then Asahina Roshi made nine formal bows before the altar. Suddenly Aitken realized that he, too, would have to make nine formal bows. And just as suddenly, Zen practice appalled him.

Until that very moment, Aitken's studies had not included any aspect of traditional Buddhist services. From Senzaki he had learned only the Four Great Vows: to save all creations ("sentient beings") without restriction, to put an end to ever-arising delusions, to perceive reality, and to embody the enlightened way. Now he was expected to perform the Japanese full bow, which requires standing with palms flat together at the chest, then kneeling and placing the top of the head on the floor between opened and upraised hands in a gesture of supplication, vulnerability, and surrender. "Not just three bows, you know, but nine bows, before and after service," remembers Aitken. "And I was thinking, what is this bowing? What am I doing? It was as though all the beliefs that I had about the righteous importance of the individual were suddenly just snatched. And I thought, my God, what am I doing?"

It wasn't until after Aitken started studying with Yamada Roshi in 1971 that he began to internalize bowing practice. In *Taking the Path of Zen* (1982), a detailed manual for Zen practice, Aitken explains that when bowing, "we are lifting the Buddha's feet over our heads. It is a sign of throwing everything away, or as one of my students described it, the act of pouring everything out from the top of the head. All our self-concern, all our preoccupations are thrown away completely. There is just that bow." But for his very first sesshin, Aitken persevered by telling himself, "This is your sitting-up exercise." And as he pressed his swollen knees into the wooden floor, perhaps he was beginning to learn that, as another of his students put it thirty-five years later, "the wonderful thing about Zen practice is that you get to do it whether you like it or not."

Aitken got to do Zen practice, but without the kind of guidance that his own *Taking the Path* provides. Newcomers to a monastery traditionally received no prior instruction in form, ritual, or sitting practice. As a Westerner

in a Japanese monastery in 1950, Aitken was quite an oddity, and the monk seated next to him was assigned to help him along. But while this big brother system offered some comfort, he still left Engakuji to seek out Nakagawa Soen, the English-speaking friend of Senzaki's.

Soen invited Aitken to come to Ryutakuji in Mishima at the base of Mount Fuji and do sesshin with the abbot, Yamamoto Gempo. Aitken recalls that, "The first time I met Gempo Roshi, he was already in his mid-eighties. It was winter and he sat bundled up against the cold he felt keenly in his old age, sipping sake, and munching toasted mochi (a glutenous rice cake). He exuded warmth and love and was a great teacher for a young Westerner uptight with aesthetic preoccupations."

For the next seven months Aitken remained at Ryutakuji. While he studied under Gempo Roshi he became friendly with Nakagawa Soen, whose appetite for all forms of art was rare for a Zen monk. "The artistic talents of the roshi," explains Aitken, "are pretty much limited to calligraphy and tea ceremony. They tend to be uninformed and somewhat philistine when it comes to art and when it comes to music and poetry, even within the Japanese tradition—not to have a real sense of what haiku is, not to have a real sense of Noh drama and so on." In addition to writing haiku and studying Western literature, Soen had obtained a standard museum slide set of the history of Western art. "I remember him looking at this Venus on the half-shell," says Aitken, "and then passing it to a monk who said, 'Oh pretty, isn't it?'" Soen also had recordings of Gregorian chants, which he explained to the other monks "as the way Western monks chant their sutras." The monks were always respectfully amused by Soen but thought he was just about as odd as Aitken.

Soen had been warned by Gempo Roshi that "poetry is a loss of virtue." But that didn't stop him from writing, and years later Gary Snyder called him Japan's greatest haiku poet of this century. Nor did it diminish his reverence for Master Gempo. With Soen's example before him, Aitken learned to see no conflict between Zen practice and making art, nor much point in attaching significance to the aesthetic limitations of Japanese teachers. "I think it's just that most people are philistines when it comes to art and music."

Aitken's notions about the discipline of surrender and spirited creativity, however, were once again challenged by bowing practice at Ryutakuji. Particularly galling were the avid devotions of his friend. "I would see Soen

Roshi bowing his head off before Kannon, the Bodhisattva of compassion, invisible behind a screen. And my reaction was that he was my beloved friend, a free-minded poet, and what was he doing bowing away like that!" But Aitken vowed to suspend judgment, to maintain "beginner's mind," to be a student, and to concentrate on zazen. The pain in his knees was unremitting. Only years later would he repeat Yamada Roshi's claim that "pain in the knees is the taste of zazen." His respiratory system was again troublesome. The steady diet of rice gruel and pickles did not help his declining health. Yet Aitken still had no hesitation about what he was doing. "It wasn't that I was so determined, it was the only thing I could do. I can't explain that."

During a spring sesshin, Aitken accompanied the monks on a begging trip to Namazu City, where he caught dysentery; with this new affliction, he stoically suffered through the subsequent June sesshin. After that Soen took him to a local doctor, but it was not until he went to Tokyo and got antibiotics through Blyth that his symptoms were relieved. Shortly afterward he returned to Hawaii. For the second time he left Japan set back in his tiresome struggle to maintain his health; once again he arrived home emaciated.

The next five years were dismal. In Honolulu he faced a dissolving marriage and soon moved on to Los Angeles. Flat broke, he stayed at a YMCA and worked at a bookstore. But his respiratory ailments, aggravated by his year in Japan, along with the emotional strain of a divorce, culminated in a critical bronchial illness for which he had to be hospitalized. Friends helped him through a tedious recuperation, and then an unexpected mid-term request for an English teacher landed him a job at the Happy Valley School.

Aitken arrived in Ojai in 1956, and there he met Anne Hopkins, then assistant director of Happy Valley. They married the following year. Born in Chicago on February 8, 1911, Anne was raised in a well-to-do family that fostered the Christian ethics of charity and social responsibility. As a young woman she had worked in a settlement house in one of Chicago's grim immigrant neighborhoods and served as a professional Red Cross hospital worker during the Second World War. In an autobiographical sketch, Anne wrote that her parents' commitment to Christianity "was belied—enriched—by the fact that they were religious seekers. Christian Science, seances with mediums, Christian mysticism, astrology, graphology, theosophy, spirit guides, Krishnamurti's lectures—all these were, at one time or another, a part of our lives as we were growing up, and, with varying degrees

of tolerance among the four children, taken for granted along with music lessons and summer camps on Wisconsin lakes.”

The liberal spiritual investigations of her family did not predispose her toward the rigors of Zen training. Her romance with Aitken did little to dispel the cautions of a neophyte, and she approached Zen practice very warily. Years later she was startled to discover a letter she had written to her father at the age of eighteen; having just read a book on Zen, she wrote that she had now found her spiritual path.

In the summer of 1957 the Aitkens traveled to Japan on a wedding holiday. They arrived at Ryutakuji, where Aitken had trained seven years earlier, one day before sesshin began. Anne had tried zazen in Ojai and had no intention of doing it for seven days. Soen Roshi, now the abbot, had arranged for her to stay in a guest room that looked out over a small pond and garden, and he sent her gifts of fruit and cake along with whatever books he had in English. “One of these books provided me with a fine pitfall,” wrote Anne. “It was a nineteenth-century translation of some sutras and precepts, and I happened upon a section that was enumerating the various ways in which one accumulated merit. Somehow that word ‘merit’ set off a strong reaction. Accumulating merit! What was this anyway? Was Zen a kind of superior Boy Scout hierarchy with little gold stars and an Eagle badge on a flapping black robe as a goal? With no one to talk to who might provide some sensible frame of reference against which my indignations could bounce back at me, I indulged in finding increasing causes for irritation, never stopping to consider that there might be some mistake in my perceptions.”

After an isolated week of such disturbing ruminations on Zen, Anne found herself traveling with her husband and Soen Roshi to yet another sesshin, a very special one she was told. It would be led by Yasutani Roshi, the independent, fiery Zen master who had removed himself to a rural outpost of Tokyo. In the community of Tokorozawa, in a temple not much bigger than a house, Yasutani worked with nonresidential lay students. What made this sesshin so special was not only the singular attributes of Yasutani himself, but also that Soen Roshi, abbot of a prestigious Rinzai monastery, was traveling to Yasutani’s humble environs to be his attendant. Soen’s teacher, Gempo Roshi, had been the spiritual adviser to the emperor, so it was said, and now his successor, the current abbot and most famous haiku poet in Japan, was leaving his monastery to attend a Soto Zen renegade. In Japanese

social hierarchies, all of which are reflected in Japanese Zen, this behavior turned the tables upside down. It was, explains Anne, “unheard of, even for one always doing the unexpected.”

Once the Aitkens arrived at the small country temple, Soen Roshi failed to locate the inn that he had chosen for Anne while her husband did sesshin. So he arranged for her to stay with a doctor-friend and share a room with the doctor’s aged mother, herself a devout practitioner. By the second morning Anne was accompanying the old lady down the dark path to the zendo, where Yasutani provided her with a stiff high-backed Western chair upholstered in bright blue plush and invited her to attend *dokusan*, the face-to-face encounter between master and student that takes place during zazen. “I sat the sesshin looking past the shoji panels to the green bushes on the other side of a public path, watching the passers-by watch me,” recalls Anne. “I didn’t care. I didn’t want to do zazen. I had no idea really how to do zazen and—at least half the time—I kept telling myself, I wasn’t going to try. And yet when I would go to dokusan with that wonderful old man with the burning vitality, it was impossible not to be moved; and so at intervals, I did begin to try.”

In the fall of 1957 the Aitkens left Japan and went back to Ojai for their final year at the Happy Valley School. They had planned to return to Honolulu the following summer so that Aitken could spend more time with his young son. In May 1958 Nyogen Senzaki died. Soen Roshi came from Japan to lead two memorial sesshins with Senzaki’s students. The Aitkens attended the first one before leaving for Hawaii. The sesshin was conducted in Senzaki’s ground-floor apartment on Second Street in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles. Soen Roshi, always inventive, swept out the garage behind the apartment for his dokusan room and brought in a folding chair, a portable card table, and a candle. Each morning everyone rose at 4 A.M., and under the cloak of darkness Soen Roshi led the fifteen retreatants on a quick-paced, single-file walk to Hollenbeck Park. During the day students left the apartment for walking meditation, crossing the enclosed laundry yard where Soen Roshi led them through a forest of hanging wash.

Senzaki’s memorial sesshin was the first full, seven-day traditional sesshin to be held in the United States. While Senzaki wished to be as ephemeral as a mushroom, with his help Zen had taken root, and he has emerged as the most widely shared Zen ancestor of American students. As for Soen Roshi,



lines of hanging laundry barely hinted at the mazes through which he would lead his American students.

Back in Hawaii the Aitkens opened a second-hand bookstore in Honolulu's Chinatown, a raunchy and dissolute section of town. The store specialized in Asian literature and featured the best selection of Buddhist books in the city. The Aitkens kept the names of all those interested in Buddhism, and when they started the sitting group in 1959 they sent invitations to these people. Soen Roshi's prophecy that Aitken would someday have a Zen Buddhist temple was beginning to unfold. In January 1959 Soen came to Honolulu to lead sesshin at the Koko An Zendo. The Aitkens chose the name Koko An because at that time they were living close to the crater Koko Head and because in Japanese it means "the hermitage right here." And they named their group the Diamond Sangha to reflect the Buddhist text *The Diamond Sutra* as well as the Waikiki landmark Diamond Head.

Soen Roshi returned to Hawaii in 1961 and held two sesshins. In his autobiographical portrait, "Willy-Nilly Zen," Aitken writes:

At that first spring sesshin, I felt particularly determined. I sat up for a portion of several nights and found myself in rather a deep condition. I experienced a makyo [mysterious vision occurring within zazen] in which I was seated on the floor of a huge old stone temple, with enormous pillars extending to a lofty ceiling. Very tall monks dressed in black walked slowly around me in a circle reciting sutras in deep voices. The total experience had the flavor of something from the ancient past.

On the afternoon of the fifth day, Nakagawa Roshi gave a great "Katsu!" [shout] in the zendo, and I found my voice uniting with his, "Aaaah!" In the dokusan, he asked me what I now know was a checking question. I could not answer, and he simply terminated the interview. In a later dokusan, he said that I had experienced a little bit of light and that I should be very careful.

In his closing talk after sesshin, the Roshi said, "Someone got a little bit of light." I knew he was referring to my experience, but I did not treat it very seriously. However, I found the ceiling of my mind to be infinitely spacious. Everything was bright and new. I felt that I had had a good sesshin.

Following Soen Roshi's visit to Hawaii, the Aitkens started the *Diamond Sangha Newsletter*, which now serves as an invaluable compendium of Zen activity in the United States during the years 1961 through 1971. At its most personal, it addressed the extended family of practitioners, recording the American itineraries of Japanese roshis, the passing away of Soen Roshi's

mother, a book in progress by Philip Kapleau, a new temple construction at Tassajara; it also listed contacts for the sitting groups that had begun all over the United States. The newsletter also served Aitken's scholastic and inquiring mind. He reviewed books on Japanese Zen, Chinese Buddhism, Zen Catholicism, haiku, and Basho. He often referred to Blyth, and his articles combined the same eclectic scholarship, personal search, and literary attention that he admired in Blyth's work. The newsletter contained articles by "R. A."—as his byline read—on "Zen and Marriage" and "Zen and LSD and Hippies." An editorial on "Zen and the Art of Merchandizing" turned into a lengthy and defiant campaign against the Shiseido Cosmetic Company of Tokyo for exporting a line of "Zen Cosmetics." And in a new look at Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Aitken concluded that "waiting not religion becomes the opiate of the people."

In the fall of 1961 the Aitkens returned to Japan for seven months of study with Yasutani Roshi, who then joined them the following year in Honolulu to hold a sesshin that attracted about fifteen middle-aged, conventional-looking adults. The New Age progeny of Beat Zen had not yet joined the Diamond Sangha. "The first sesshins in Hawaii," explains Aitken, "saw the tag end of widespread interest in theosophy and general occult things. There were folks who had studied Blavatsky and her successors and who had gone through all kinds of spirit-writing episodes and astrology. The young people didn't start to come in until the dope revolution."

Within a few years, however, the Vietnam War caused such painful ruptures within families that for the younger generation the only attractive direction was any which way but home. The urgent need to deny the past revitalized the singularly American belief in the possibility of starting life over. With disdain for both political power and materialism running high, nothing promised to turn that belief into a reality more than spiritual practice.

From 1962 to 1969 Aitken worked for the University of Hawaii in various administrative positions, most of them connected with the university's East-West Center. From Hawaii's most prestigious campus he delivered the kind of anti-Vietnam War warnings that would soon disrupt universities across the mainland. In 1963 he became a member of the Hawaii Committee to End the War; at the time, most Americans, their vision still distorted by Kennedy charisma, did not even see that a war was already on. During these years, Aitken continued to participate in the letter-writing campaigns of the

American Friends' Service Committee (AFSC), which he had joined during those difficult years in the early fifties.

The Aitkens always announced their ongoing political activities to the Diamond Sangha in hopes that some members would join them, but these announcements were usually to no avail. For the most part the sangha took the view that, as Aitken puts it, "If you are a Buddhist then you're not political."

In 1965, with both the "dope revolution," as Aitken calls it, and the Vietnam War well under way, Yasutani Roshi came to Honolulu to hold sesshin. By then the composition of the Diamond Sangha had shifted from older theosophists to younger dropouts. One evening a man with his hair in a pony tail asked Yasutani Roshi, "What should I do if I'm drafted into this unfair bloody war in Vietnam?" "If your country calls you," replied the venerable master, "you must go." In the days that followed, Aitken, in the role of senior student, tried to explain that Yasutani Roshi, like anyone else, was subject to the time and place of his own karma, and that he had come of age during the Russo-Japanese War, which had evoked jingoistic fervor in Japan. Most students were troubled by Yasutani Roshi's answer but tended to suspend judgment; a few could not fathom it, however, and dropped out of the Diamond Sangha right then. For those students, Zen Buddhism seemed to be as allied with right-wing patriotism now as it had been with the Japanese military a generation earlier. And although some could accept Zen's association with a warrior code that exalted the loyal samurai, no one could abide the war in Vietnam.

Unlike the young man who had asked Yasutani Roshi about being drafted, Aitken had a firm grasp on the distinctions between Zen practice and Japanese culture. He also had learned from the Japanese something of the diplomacy of discretion; familiar with the political allegiances of most Japanese teachers, he had long ago concluded that certain activities were simply not discussed.

By the time of Yasutani's visit, Aitken was counseling draft resisters. Following the guidelines established by the AFSC, he presented to the draft inductees all their options and what consequences they could expect from their decisions. If an inductee decided to plea for conscientious objection, then Aitken made an all-out effort to help arrange his papers.

The pressure of leading the Diamond Sangha in the ambiguous role of senior student had become exhausting for Aitken, for it required taking responsibility without having authority. In June 1965, however, Katsuki Sekida, a lay student from Soen Roshi's monastery, joined the Diamond Sangha, bringing with him a simple, impersonal version of the way Zen was practiced in Japan. Endless, steady, and undramatic, Sekida-san's version was dubbed "Applied Zen" by a student who explained that "Zen was so unfamiliar to us, it was hard to just get past its newness. Sekida-san showed us a way of doing this practice and not making such a big deal out of it. It began looking less like some quixotic American fad."

In 1967, with Sekida-san in residence at Koko An, the Aitkens vacationed in Haiku, an area of Maui rich in pineapple plantations. There they came across a former plantation house for sale—a small wooden house shaded by banana trees and approached from the road by a path lined with mango-colored day lilies—and they spontaneously purchased it as a future retirement home. Aitken was then fifty and Anne six years older. They returned to Honolulu after arranging for the current tenants—"some very unusual young people"—to pay twenty-five dollars a month in rent as well as cut the grass. "Finally," recalls Aitken, "we just said, 'Forget about the twenty-five dollars, just keep the grass cut.' Well, they didn't do that either. They were very interesting people who were experimenting with many different substances."

Maui was one of the many beautiful havens discovered in the late sixties by New Age nomads in need of refuge from mainstream America. The island offered a variety of rent-free shelters, isolated from the towns and public beaches. "The New Age people"—as Aitken respectfully calls them—could live in the open, wash in the sea, and stumble stoned and naked upon bananas, pineapples, and guavas that had fallen onto public ground or could be unobtrusively "liberated" from private gardens. Everything about the island offered a welcome contrast to segregated housing, restrictive clothing, chemical food, and parents who confused the reality of who their children were with who they wanted them to be.

While the 1968 Democratic Convention galvanized the political components of the counterculture, Maui attracted hard-core hedonists from flower children to jock surfers. Though the surfers may have taken adoles-

cence way past its limit, they did not challenge middle-class values and were able to claim free and easy domination of the public beaches. In a reenactment of the larger cultural panorama, the New Age people were consigned to the untended peripheries, where the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness took a peculiarly Dionysian twist.

McKena's Beach, at the end of a long, bumpy dirt road, was home to almost two hundred people; the Banana Patch, an area formed by the floor and sides of a valley, accommodated another fifty to one hundred. The only shelters were lean-tos constructed from found materials and covered with scraps of corrugated metal. The Aitkens visited Maui frequently from 1967 to 1969 and discovered that their new house was one of the most popular crash pads for residents of McKena's Beach and the Banana Patch. Its tranquil setting, indiscriminate hospitality, and loving vibrations had already earned it the nickname "the House of God."

The Aitkens stayed with their young tenants and their transitory friends. With each visit, Aitken felt more compelled to help the children in the House of God—and each time he mowed his own lawn. "No one was working with these New Age people at all except a Christian program called Teen Challenge—and the Maui police department." As lost or laid-back as these New Age people appeared, their refusal to be a part of what they regarded as a disintegrating and corrupt society indicated to Aitken some degree of moral awareness and spiritual vitality. "A lot of them were really searching, and we felt we could be of some use here."

Aitken retired from the University of Hawaii in 1969 and moved to Haiku with Anne and Sekida-san to start the Maui Zendo. On leaving Koko An, they rented the house to tenants, who though not affiliated with the zendo, agreed to open the house for the scheduled zazen meetings. After a year, however, Diamond Sangha members took over the lease, and soon a daily zazen schedule was maintained by the students in residence. The membership at Koko An continued to grow, and Aitken soon began returning to Honolulu each month to participate in the sitting group. After 1974, when Aitken was authorized to lead sesshin, serious students from both Maui and Honolulu routinely traveled between the two locations.

Maui provided Aitken a chance to become fully involved in a community. He attracted—and responded to—people who were as disoriented as he had

once been. Whereas at their age, Aitken, reserved and isolated, had turned to his books and kept his dreams private, this generation had a tribal support system; collective disorientation was converted into social rituals that could be as fragile and appealing as they could be destructive. What Aitken had kept guarded, the Maui hippies expressed not only in alienated behavior and despair but also in a quest for joy, free love, and sanctified union with nature and each other. What attracted Aitken was the acting out of these needs, not their fulfillment, for he clearly understood that most often his new friends could not transcend their inhibitions any more than he had. What also drew Aitken to these people was that like Zen followers they trusted experience over speculative thought and strove to grasp reality from within rather than have it imposed on them. Having lost their bearings in the ideological bogs of the sixties, they had been brought to the edge of Zen; they had not been prepared for a disciplined path of realization, but they had less to lose for trying it than their conventional counterparts. In the process of *zazen*, one's external identifications begin to fall away, the social face dissolves, and the mask cracks. With the Vietnam debacle, the mask of the whole culture began to crack. "When Big Daddy LBJ betrayed us as he did," says Aitken, "we lost everything. And so we needed to find our way."

When they first moved to Maui, the Aitkens found themselves sleeping on the floor of their retirement home next to half-dressed adventurers with dilated pupils and names like Squeak, Flower, Blue, and Cloud. In the process of converting their home into a residential Zen center, the Aitkens counseled and consoled, cooked and provided sleeping mats. Financial arrangements were loose. Anne's graciousness and warmth made her "mother to us all," recalls a woman who now studies at Koko An. "The early days were truly pioneering days," Anne says. "The walls leaked, there were never enough beds, there were never enough pots or *zabutons*; there was usually enough food because we grew it ourselves, but everything was makeshift. And everybody accepted this."

The new *zendo* might have received the entire population of both Mc-Kena's Beach and the Banana Patch but for one factor: the schedule. For all of their leniency and support, the Aitkens strictly enforced a traditional monastic schedule. Payments, clothing, sexual conduct, and food preferences were subject to personal need and whim. The schedule was not. Grueling

and rigid, it quickly screened out students who were not committed to Zen practice. Marine boot camp is the only American experience that has ever been compared to life in a Zen monastery. For Maui's new population boot camp was the last hell, and few could sustain this daily routine:

5:00 A.M.	rise and wash
5:10	zazen
5:50	study period
6:30	breakfast
7:00	work meeting, cleanup, work period
9:30	refreshment break
10:30	work period ends
11:10	zazen
11:50	zazen ends
Noon	dinner, short rest
1:00 P.M.	work period
3:00	work period ends, refreshment, rest
4:30	zazen
5:10	zazen ends
5:20	supper, silent rest
7:10	zazen (talks twice a week)
9:00	lights out

The designated work periods, or *samu*, involved household and gardening chores. For many students new to Zen, the emphasis on work was associated with bad memories of a detested Protestant value. In "A Note on Samu," Aitken writes: "Terms in Zen Buddhism often point to both the world of practice and the world of essence . . . [samu] refers to the work necessary for the upkeep of the monastery, and on the other hand to the act itself; just the sweeping, just the hammering." Samu lacked the exoticism that glamorized Zen and it contradicted preconceived ideas of spiritual practice. "Getting high" on drugs had been an invitation to "space out"—not to take care of business, cook, or wash dishes. When the spaciousness induced by zazen became as seductive as the spaciousness induced by drugs, then work practice became the equivalent of "coming down." "We used to think," recalls an early member of the Maui Zendo, "what a terrible waste to apply this wonderful meditative quality of infinite mind to washing the dishes! We just didn't get it."

Another student remembers that it wasn't just the rigidity of the schedule

that challenged a nebulous sense of freedom: “Roshi himself seemed very rigid to us. He was kindly, but formal, like a minister. But some of us, like myself, were so tired of floating around. And suddenly, like a mirage, this good man appears and says, ‘Here, my child, why don’t you sit down on this black cushion.’ You could call it meditation. You could call it Zen. I didn’t care. I just needed to stop.”

Some people floated briefly through the Maui Zendo but have identified their experience there as a turning point in their lives. Whereas in cities and on campuses across the mainland the ideals of the counterculture had gained respectable adult support, Maui was divided by segregated polarities, with the middle-class and middle-age residency at odds with nomadic and younger members of the counterculture. There the Aitkens were a rare cross-breed: adults who could be trusted. For some wanderers, this alone was a welcoming road sign. Anne calculated that at one point as many as seventeen people were living in their house, and that over two hundred people had passed through in one year: “People came for a night, three nights, or a week or as long as they could stand our program, and we tried to do our best for all of them—not realizing at the time that you can’t do everything for everybody. You have to define your objectives and limit them in order to be of the most help.” In general, very few of these people had the will, stamina, discipline, or interest to pursue Zen studies.

Then there was the man who arrived at the Maui airport, walked up to the information desk, and asked, “Can you show me the way to the monastery?” The information clerk was clearly baffled, but a man standing nearby directed the newcomer to the Maui Zendo. He was led into the house to meet Aitken, who was standing next to a beautiful young woman wearing a flimsy summer dress. Aitken recalls this man saying in a very solemn manner, “‘Greetings! I have come to enter the monastery,’ one huge suitcase in each hand, all the while looking out the tail of his eye at the young woman. I said, ‘I’m sorry, this isn’t a monastery, but come in anyway.’ He’s still here.”

Aitken was skilled in diplomatic relations with social agencies, having worked in several community organizations, and he arranged a meeting with the mayor of Maui to introduce himself and foster good relations between the city and the zendo. Word filtered down that a professional man, an older, conservative, well-educated gentleman, was interested in Maui’s new population. Subsequently, if under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs



someone ended up in the police station or the mental ward of the local hospital, Aitken was often notified. At various times extremely disturbed people were placed in his care. They were segregated in an extension of the main house, and the daily schedule continued uninterrupted. Some of these people eventually joined the practice, while others collected themselves and moved on. "Once, at the Maui Zendo, some people had a flat tire on the road in front of the temple. They came in to use the telephone and stayed six months. There is significance to each human encounter," concludes Aitken, "so you need not conjure up a deep reason for coming to Zen practice."

As it happened, virtually all of the new inquirers at both the Maui and Honolulu centers in the early seventies, according to Aitken, "learned about religious possibilities through taking dope. There were exceptions . . . but these were rather strange people." Aitken smoked marijuana several times and experimented with LSD once in 1970. He understood from the residents in his house that the spaciousness induced by drugs could lead to meditation. What he learned from his own experience was "what a limited perspective one got from marijuana." He spent a day on acid at the top of a mountain, watching Roman soldiers float in and out of the clouds and musing over his inability to remember even the first syllables of the *Heart Sutra*. It had been, for the most part, "a wonderful day, but what a waste of time! A whole day shot."

"We've always had a No Dope rule at Maui Zendo and at Koko An Zendo," says Aitken. "I once told some people that what they did on their own time was their business. But soon I began telling them that they shouldn't smoke ever, because I find that people who are off marijuana for a while, and then smoke again, go through a period of having to get back into practice. It's not really worth it. And besides they're putting themselves in a stratum of society that is really nasty. We have former members who haven't been able to break the habit. I'm as cordial to them as I can be, but you see, they just can't come around."

Aitken encourages "right livelihood," and drug dealing has not been the only occupation he finds problematic. "I told a girl who was a barmaid, 'I can visualize over the course of time that either you would stop being a barmaid or stop coming to the zendo.' That's as close to directive counseling as I've come with a student. A person is a barmaid for a deep reason, you know, like everything else. There is some very deep need that is being satisfied with that

kind of life. So it's very difficult to change. I also worked with a masseuse, one of those marginal masseuses—I have other students who do massage and they're professional but they're straight. This gal wasn't straight. And I told her the same thing. But she was fascinated by *zazen*."

Aitken may have seen himself as the adviser, older brother, senior student, and *tanto* (*zendo* monitor); but surrounded by students thirty years his junior, he was cast into a parental role, as an authority figure, with all the convoluted emotional ambivalence that attends that projection. When the Maui Zendo first started, he himself still harbored a political and psychological mistrust toward authority figures. He was an anarchist by preference, a leader who wanted to guide without goading, direct without enforcing, be patient and permissive; but he could not readily abandon his own rigidities and judgments. His facial gestures and finger tapping gave away his disappointment when discussions didn't go his way. And to students young enough to be his children, disappointment was generally experienced as disapproval. Students now recall that his style in the beginning was tentative, hesitant, groping, and that he compensated with a carefully ordered environment. When it came to ethical codes of behavior and the daily schedule, he was inflexible. A therapist, after studying for fifteen years with Aitken on Maui, said: "People came here looking for this nonhuman and what they found was this guy in his sixties wrestling with the integration of his character through Zen practice."

Aitken's ideals were sometimes at odds with his personality. He encouraged democracy but inclined toward paternalism. He encouraged openness and direct expression, but he was hard to get to know. "Roshi's desire to be open," said the therapist, "did not automatically make him open, but his commitment to the process was always in evidence. He made every effort to reveal his personality, to show us his 'imperfections.' Students who wanted a demigod were disillusioned by his humanity; students who wanted a hero were abused by his humility."

"I came to practice wanting to idealize a teacher," said a woman in her early forties. "And so anything that was 'human' shook up my faith. But then I saw that if he was in any way like me, then I could attain what he had attained. His humanity inspired me. The very things that were obstacles fifteen years ago became the most valuable assets."

Not everyone around Aitken has been able to use his personality or his

struggles for integration as a source of inspiration. For some students the gap between the real and ideal democratic process for community decisions became untenable. Although Aitken Roshi has strayed far from the autocracy granted the Japanese roshi, for some American students it will never be far enough.

In an essay entitled "The Vocation of Zen," Aitken outlines the basic differences between Japanese and American notions of authority:

In our Western society we don't have a built-in support system for cleaning up the residues of self-centered compulsions. In the East, an authority figure stands forth and says, *you* clean the toilets and *you* ring the bells. The students know that cleaning the toilets and ringing the bells are both part of the practice and that the likes and dislikes of particular tasks are vain and ultimately empty. So they just do what they are told. I am sure that often it is difficult to accept orders in the Asian monastery, but the precedent is there in the Confucian ideal of loyalty to the superior. So the students stick it out, obey orders, and gradually their rough edges are worn smooth, and character change does occur in conjunction with their zazen and their koan study. They are able to face their selfishness and overcome it and to give their experience of empty oneness a good chance to expand and fill the universe.

Thus the monastery works in the East, but in our own Western egalitarian society there is no authority figure to set forth a program of change, and indeed, if some such figure does emerge and is the ultimate boss of everything, then by our heritage, naturally we feel a lot of discomfort, a lot of questioning, a lot of doubt, a lot of dissatisfaction.

So really for us the responsibility of change lies with ourselves, individually and as a community. We are faced with resolving the uniqueness of the individual and with the unity of the Sangha, entirely on our own.

Although never able to shed the vestiges of authority entirely, Aitken has steered clear of formal teaching modes that reinforce the autocracy of the Japanese roshi. To attend the roshi is, by Japanese standards, a privileged position that allows for an intimate relationship between the master and an exceptional disciple. For Aitken this is not only antithetical to American ideology but reflects the complex investment that Japan places in social hierarchies, religious or secular. And as far as he is concerned, this is not intrinsic to Zen. The Aitkens employ students to help with household and office work, and they pay them the going hourly wage. In restaurants Aitken insists on paying his share and discourages gifts. "When it comes to money

matters," explains one student, "Roshi is like a fanatically honest cop. Hardly a free cup of coffee."

Throughout the late sixties, while Aitken was leading the Diamond Sangha, he and Anne made lengthy trips to Japan to continue their studies. They worked with Yasutani Roshi, as well as with his principal disciple, Yamada Roshi. After conferring with both Nakagawa Soen and Yasutani, the Aitkens invited Yamada Roshi to lead the Diamond Sangha. Yamada arrived in Hawaii in 1971, just as the county decided finally to close down McKena's Beach and the Banana Patch. An inordinate number of the dispossessed landed on the lawn of the Maui Zendo. "Very strange, very unusual," Yamada Roshi kept murmuring. As for the Zen students, their style too was perplexing, and Yamada Roshi was alternately amused and offended by their informality but consistently impressed by their sincerity.

Aitken's studies with Yamada during this visit were critical, and in "Willy-Nilly Zen" he writes: "Looking back, I understand my 'dark night' from 1961 to 1971 much better than I did a decade ago. My experience with Nakagawa [Soen] Roshi in the first 1961 sesshin was not deep enough to give me significant insight and it took several more years of zazen to prepare me to really begin Zen practice. This kind of chronology is not usual but I do occasionally meet others with similar histories."

During each spring from 1972 to 1974, the Aitkens returned to Japan and engaged in intense koan study with Yamada Roshi. When Aitken received dharma transmission in 1974, it was a point of maturation for the entire community, at once a public recognition from teacher to student as well as a confirmation of the faith that the Diamond Sangha had already placed in Aitken. Yamada Roshi's acknowledgment did not put an end to all the questions that Aitken or his students had about the authority of the teacher in general or about Aitken's authority in particular. According to sangha members, however, it did spur a sense of confidence in the practice and in the development of the community. Not coincidentally, it was now time for the Maui Zendo to move out of the Aitkens' home.

The new zendo was relocated a mile down the road in a secluded hilltop lodge that had been built during the First World War. After the war it was purchased from its Japanese-American owners by the Baptist Church and used as a retreat for overseas Baptist missionaries. Surrounded by gardenia bushes, birds of paradise, banana and guava trees, the house was sold to the

Maui Zendo by a New Age idealist who had failed to establish his utopian commune. The purchase was initially financed mostly by Anne Aitken, who had used her inheritance to buy the first Maui Zendo as well as Koko An. Sangha members labored over roof repairs, the meditation hall, the grounds, and the vegetable garden.

By the mid-seventies the membership of the Maui Zendo showed signs of the postwar lull that befell most social activists of the sixties. But Aitken remained convinced that the role of a contemporary Bodhisattva—one who has vowed to save “all creations without restriction”—is effectively served by social action, specifically by radical pacifism. In 1967 he had become associated with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an organization devoted to world peace that was founded in England in 1916 and spread to this country shortly after the end of the First World War. Then in 1976 Aitken and two students, Nelson Foster and Stephen Cockley, decided to form their own chapter of the fellowship on Maui. “We attracted members of our group, and also some from outside the Buddhist community, and we tried to get something started in prison visitation. We also began to investigate what was going on at Haleakala Summit where there are observatories connected to satellite tracking and space warfare. As we talked, it gradually became clear to us that what we really wanted to do was form a Buddhist Peace Fellowship and so we just switched it.”

The nonsectarian Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) is still an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation; its newsletter functions as a critical networking guide for the political activities of what the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh has called “engaged Buddhism.” The most active Buddhist organization to promote world peace, the BPF cosponsored an inter-religious delegation to Honduras and Nicaragua in 1987 for the purpose of gathering firsthand information on the crisis in Central America.

In his effort to confront global greed with the politics of compassion, Aitken has had to leave behind the biases of the Japanese Buddhist establishment, which historically has been too dependent on political approval to function as a moral witness. “The Buddha,” Aitken has written, “did not live in a time like ours, when dangerous competition between nations threatens to blow up the world. He was not faced with the probability of biological holocaust. . . . I wonder what he would say today.” But given the threatened state of the world, the Buddhist way of “being peace” for the sake of peace

has taken on a political urgency previously unknown in Buddhist societies. In *Blind Donkey*, a journal published by the Diamond Sangha, Aitken writes:

In the West we have a clear sense of personal and group responsibility for the government and welfare of everyone, set forth by Locke, Rousseau, and others in the late eighteenth century and developed for the next two hundred years in the democratic societies in Europe and the Americas. As Western Buddhists, we are building on one tradition of social responsibility that has been developing from Moses, Jesus, and Plato, and on another tradition that has been cultivated in monastic settings by yogis, Taoists, and Buddhists, as well as in the institutes of Confucianism, where highest probity was sought. With such a synthesis of traditions, Buddhism in the West is sure to apply the Precepts in a new way.

Aitken himself applies the Buddhist precepts directly to the world's most pressing ecological and political problems, which historically have been ignored by the monastic Zen tradition. As he explains in *The Mind of Clover* (1984): "The experience of peace is not enough. *Samadhi* [deep concentration] on one's cushion is not enough. Unless that whole mountain is swallowed and digested and you sit with sightseers on your scalp, zazen is altogether incomplete." He reiterates that caring for oneself and others on this planet, however threatened and fouled it may be, must not be avoided—and certainly not in the name of Zen practice.

Aitken has always scrupulously ensured, however, that his own political activities neither solicit nor discourage interest in traditional Zen training. BPF events, for example, are announced to the sangha but with no pressure for members to take part in them. So far Aitken's American students have displayed little more interest in politics than Zen adherents have in Japan. "There is still not the widespread concern about planetary affairs in our sangha that I hope might appear someday," Aitken admitted in 1987. Still, discussions about Zen and politics are not uncommon in his presence. One afternoon on the porch at Koko An a woman asked if there was a difference between the state using Zen for its own purposes and the peace movement using Zen for its own purposes. Aitken answered, "I don't suppose there's any difference really. Exploitation is exploitation. But I think that Buddhism has something to say to the peace movement. That's different from exploitation. What we're coming down to here is a question of morality. What is

the basis of morality? Ultimately, good is the Tao. Recently in Los Angeles, this fellow from Vietnam asked me, 'Is warfare real?' 'You bet your life it's real, if anything is real, warfare is real.' That's what I told him. We can't duck around such issues. Emptiness is form."

In Zen the tendency for spiritual seekers to cling to the mountaintop—despite the universal pleas for them to return to the lowlands—is reflected not only by traditional monasticism, but in the proclivity of monks and laymen—Japanese and American alike—of “getting stuck in emptiness,” of overestimating the value of emptiness at the expense of form. “It’s really hard for students to get this,” Aitken says, and he repeats, “emptiness *is* form.” That one cannot use an encounter with emptiness to justify staying on top of the pole has been an especially difficult lesson for students who discovered Zen in America while America was in Vietnam and who identified spiritual practice as a noble and somewhat romantic exit from the profanity of material greed and political passion.

While Aitken avoids imposing social concerns on his Zen students, his planetary-political vision reflects basic Buddhist teachings and, furthermore, elucidates that aspect of Buddhist doctrine recently complemented in the West by quantum mechanics. His teaching emphasizes a classic understanding of the Jeweled Net of Indra, the Buddhist image for “the interrelatedness of all things without restriction.” Each intersection of Indra’s net has a jewel that reflects every other facet of every other jewel. No thing exists outside this net, this “one body.” According to quantum theory, the world can no longer be disassembled into independent entities. The isolated building blocks of the past are now perceived as a complex web of interrelations within a unified whole, and trying to maintain even the illusion that any man is an island is fast becoming impossible.

Baby mice in their nest  
Squeak in response  
To the young sparrows.

Aitken writes on this poem by Basho: “Not only baby mice and sparrows, but all people, animals, and things are intimately interconnected. The word ‘symbiotic’ means the living together in mutual dependence of dissimilar organisms. That says it all. We are a symbiotic universe, a symbiotic family of nations, a symbiotic country, state of that country, island, community, fam-

ily and even individual (for we have all kinds of creatures living in our insides).”

According to Zen teachings, each individual has the capacity to change his or her own consciousness, and as the one body is “all creations without restriction,” it follows that changing one’s consciousness *is* changing the collective whole. This reasoning has been used to advocate meditation as the supreme political act. If *zazen* is the molecular seed of change—the most effective, the most potent activity—then why, Aitken was asked, leave the cushion? Aitken responded, “Why did the Buddha get up from the bodhi tree? He walked the Ganges Valley afterward all his life. Turning the wheel of dharma. Never stopping. I don’t think that people are ready to hear this, for one reason or another, and besides, just as there are people who are not active in my own sangha—most people are not active in my own sangha—they’re not ready and that’s all right.” With all his political commitments, *zazen* is still the most important activity for Aitken. “Unless you yourself are clear,” he said, “nothing you do will be clear. If you have a busy mind, you get burned out.”

Aitken values the ritual of Japanese Zen and, comparing ceremony to cooking, says that “every cultural entity has its own way of cooking, and we need to develop our own way; but unless there’s some configuration to the ceremony, then it’s tasteless and secular.” Like many American Zen centers, the Maui Zendo has served as an experimental kitchen, testing recipes and assessing the results. English translations have long since been added to the Sino-Japanese sutra recitations, for example, and a ceremony called *juhui*, which publicly acknowledges a student who has passed the koan *mu*, was dropped from the program after provoking too many complaints that it induced an uneasy and useless sense of competition.

Aitken has advocated communication workshops as a way of replacing the Japanese monastic model of submission to a well-defined authority with one that relies on consensus as a method of governing the center. Over the years he has tried to shift the decision-making operations of the sangha from a democratic voting system to a nonvoting method of group consensus. It never worked on Maui, but in his absence it met with some success in Honolulu. “People aren’t used to this way of working,” Aitken says, “and it has taken a long time to get used to the idea. The responsibility imbued in the voting members of the sangha shifts considerably with consensus. You have to



learn to let go of fixed opinions. You have to learn that you don't come into a meeting determined to get a certain point of view across and to reach a particular decision. You don't have a zero/sum attitude at anytime. That is, zero for them and a hundred percent for me. The Quakers have been doing this for centuries, so it's possible, it just takes a long time. It takes more trust in the group and in other people. That's why I used to push for the communication workshops."

To diffuse competition in the sangha and instill an awareness of community has not been easy. Aitken hoped that the communication exercises would help "clean up the residues of self-centered compulsions," but as a social worker explained: "When we started the Maui Zendo there was this naive idea that Zen practice would take care of all our personal and social problems. But none of us was raised to consider the group over our individual needs, so it was unrealistic to expect Zen to teach us about community."

The problem of government by consensus at the Maui Zendo came to a head in 1982. Ever since the zendo moved from the Aitkens' home to its new location, it had been maintained by a resident caretaker. During the intensive three-month training periods when the center filled with residents, the zendo generated the concentrated energy that comes from daily formal practice. But in between retreats the dispersion of energy that comes naturally became excessive. Even members who lived nearby appeared only when Aitken gave interviews or talks. Only the occasional guest joined the caretaker for the daily schedule of morning and evening zazen, plus three hours a day of samu. Consequently, the caretaker, who also functioned as guestmaster, cook, zendo monitor, and sangha host, occupied a position that was too often lonely and short-lived. He had to rise at 5 A.M., ring bells, light incense, chant sutras, and fill the zendo with strong sitting. Situations like this may fire the aspirations of a youthful zealot and are not in fact uncommon in hill-top hermitages all over Asia, but it takes a rare American to stick it out without resentment and self-pity. The job, like Aitken's previous role as senior student, entailed too much responsibility with too little authority. The authority continued to be vested if not ultimately in Aitken himself, then in the voting members of the community, who were not residents and therefore had no commitments to the daily schedule. Maui members organized their employment around the retreat schedule, but daily input slowly drained out.

Some of the difficulties at the Maui Zendo have been attributed to the in-

dulgences of island living. "People came to Maui to get something," said a student. "Space, sun, quiet, Zen. But 'getting' didn't fuse with 'giving.'" Maui's high unemployment rate, its lack of growing industry, the seduction of the sun and the beaches all combined to promote an indolent and languid life. One Koko An member who left Maui several years ago to escape an encroaching lethargy said, "You bring your whole bag of tricks with you to the zendo. If your lifestyle is indulgent and pleasure seeking, then it seems counterproductive to practice."

By 1982 the energy of the Maui Zendo had ebbed so low that in an effort to revitalize it the Aitkens drew up plans to build a residence for themselves on the zendo property. This measure was not endorsed by the membership, however. The island had stopped attracting new Zen students, while many of the older ones had moved to Honolulu. Some of the members did not share Aitken's assessment that his presence would regenerate the zendo, and others resented the possibility of feeling pressured into attendance. Still others who had arrived on Maui drugged and disillusioned at the age of twenty had grown up and married and had children to support. As the years went by it was no longer feasible to rely on young parents for daily participation and even less so when it came to the three-month intensives; not even installing the roshi in residence could change this.

The discussions about the Aitkens' residency plans intensified conflicts in the decision-making process of the Maui community. It brought to the fore questions concerning the authority of the Zen teacher and Aitken's authority in particular. The students had been getting crossed signals, which, as they saw it, reflected Aitken's confusion as to where to draw the line between the teacher's authority and the students' autonomy. No one mistook them as teaching devices, for Aitken has been openly critical of what he calls the "Gurdjieff syndrome": "I want to get away from this whole guru-image that if I disrupt a student's life it's always for his own good. Gurdjieff was an extreme violator of this sort of thing, sending a woman back from the Crimea through the battle lines between the Reds and the Whites, back to Moscow to pick up a rug that he left there in his apartment. It was an incredibly dangerous trip and she writes about it as if it were her practice! You see the same thing in early Benedictine history where they told neophytes to plant the carrots upside down. I want there to be some substance in what I tell people to do and if they ask why I want to be able to meet their challenge."

“I think that to some degree I’m always the teacher and I never lose that role,” Aitken continues, “but I don’t have a guru role and don’t want it.” In distinguishing himself from a guru, he has implied an invidious comparison between Vedanta and Tibetan traditions on the one hand and Japanese Zen on the other. In *Taking the Path of Zen* he writes:

The guru, too, encourages falling away, but in the act of identifying with the guru. The guru is omnipotent, and though he or she may try to encourage the student to find independence, the Dharma will have a specific name and face and the student cannot truly be free.

I may not be making an accurate presentation of guru-student relationships that would apply in all cases, but I want to show that the roshi wishes each person to develop to the highest potential. The roshi is not interested in being deified and will refuse to be placed in such a position.

Just as one must have faith in one’s own guide in order to traverse an unknown forest, so faith in the roshi is essential. This is not a matter of personal aggrandizement for the roshi, but a matter of utmost importance for the student. Without that faith, zazen becomes only a sterile practice in concentration, with no movement toward realization and beyond. The student cannot trust himself or herself truly to let go.

At the persuasive counsel of three senior students, plans for the Aitkens to relocate to the zendo grounds were abandoned. By 1983 it had become obvious that the most effective forum for Aitken’s energies was no longer the Elysian fields of Maui, and he made plans to return to Honolulu. “I don’t want to be like a junior high school teacher,” he said, “left high and dry on the podium. I want to be in the life of the community.”

The following year Yamada Roshi came to Honolulu to perform a ceremony that permitted Aitken formally to transmit the precepts and officiate at the *jukai* ceremony. During this ceremony the student receives a *rakusu*, a black halter that represents the Buddha’s robe. To Aitken’s displeasure, *jukai* has been defined in the United States as “lay ordination.” According to Aitken, there is no such thing: “There are no etymological roots for that term. It certainly isn’t what *jukai* means. You either receive the precepts or you don’t.” Students strongly resisted wearing a *rakusu* because of the way it distinguishes between sangha members and because of its particularly American association with the ordination of monastics. In defense of laypeople’s Zen, Diamond Sangha members have been openly disdainful of what they

perceive as the false piety of American Zen monks, with their ostentatious robes and shaved heads but secular lifestyles; for these students, the overt distinction of the American Zen monk contradicts the teachings. Aitken has made it clear, however, that offering jukai is not within the jurisdiction of the sangha, and the ceremony is held for those senior students who elect to have it. In Aitken's case, furthermore, offering jukai reflects his commitment to making the Zen precepts as personal as possible. For his students, Aitken exemplifies the application of the precepts in one's daily life and the world in which one lives rather than in some kind of moral vacuum.

In Zen, the Ten Grave Precepts are guidelines for an ever-changing present that by its nature demands both creative and appropriate response. Writing on the first precept, "No Killing," Aitken recalls "that someone once asked Alan Watts why he was a vegetarian. He said, 'Because cows scream louder than carrots.' This reply may serve as a guideline. Some people will refuse to eat red meat. Some people will not drink milk. Some people will eat what is served to them, but will limit their own purchases of animal products. You must draw your own line, considering your health and the health of other beings." Aitken, who generally maintains a vegetarian diet, has said that if he goes to a dinner party and is served meat he will eat it because "The cow is dead and the hostess is not."

Similarly, there are ways of understanding the Ten Commandments in terms of time, place, and function—not as hard-and-fast injunctions. But for those Americans who came to Zen through rejection of their own Judeo-Christian heritage, the Ten Commandments represented a rigid, blind, superstitious belief system perpetuated for the good of the nation-state. The myth about Zen and morality, partially inherited from Beat Zen anarchists, suggests that in the falling away of body and mind, in the *realization* of life, all belief systems have to go; correct behavior will then arise spontaneously, rendering ethical systems obsolete. Aitken, however, challenges students to investigate their attraction to Zen practice and reconsider their own beliefs about Zen itself. In his essay "Zen and Ethics," he writes: "I have heard some people say that since Zen says we must be grounded in the place where there is no right and wrong, it follows that Zen has no ethical application. But if there were no application of our experience of the unity and the individuality of all beings, then Zen would be only a stale exercise in seclusion, the way of death."

In Japan the precepts traditionally come at the end of formal studies, suggesting, as does Aitken himself, that without the experience of realization the precepts can be misused as dogmatic substitutes for true understanding. He often quotes his teacher, Yamada Roshi, who said that “the purpose of Zen is the perfection of character.” Like the term “ethics,” “perfection” and “character” have been difficult notions for American Zen students to digest. Not only does “character” imply a social archetype, but “perfection” further suggests goal-oriented, idealized behavior—the very models that Zen students have tried to abandon. In *Taking the Path of Zen*, Aitken illustrates Yamada Roshi’s phrase with the story about Bird’s Nest Roshi:

He was a teacher who lived in the T’ang period and did zazen in a tree. The governor of his province, Po Chu-i, heard about Bird’s Nest Roshi and went to see him. This Po Chu-i was no ordinary politician. He was one of China’s greatest poets, well known for his expression of Zen Buddhism.

Po Chu-i found Bird’s Nest Roshi sitting in his tree, doing zazen. He called to him, saying, “Oh, Bird’s Nest, you look very insecure to me up there.”

Bird’s Nest Roshi looked down at Po Chu-i and replied, “Oh Governor, you look very insecure to me down there.” All things are under the law of change and political position is the most ephemeral of all. Po Chu-i knew very well what Bird’s Nest Roshi was talking about. So he took a different tack.

“Tell me,” he said, “what is it that all the Buddhas taught?” Bird’s Nest replied by quoting from the *Dhammapada*:

Never do evil;  
always do good;  
keep your mind pure—  
thus all the Buddhas taught.

So Po Chu-i said, “Always do good; never do evil; keep your mind pure—I knew that when I was three years old.”

“Yes,” said Bird’s Nest Roshi. “A three-year-old child may know it, but even an eighty-year-old man cannot put it into practice.”

Although he recognizes the potential for misuse, Aitken nevertheless prefers to present the precepts at an early stage of Zen studies: “Without the precepts as guidelines, Zen Buddhism tends to become a hobby, made to fit the needs of the ego. Selflessness, as taught at the Zen center, conflicts with the indulgence encouraged by society. . . . In my view, the true Zen Buddhist center is not a mere sanctuary, but a source from which ethically motivated people move outward to engage in the larger community.”

The very idea that the world needs ethically motivated people departs radically from the views of Beat Zen. With Aitken's help, one aspect of maturation for American students has been to stop using Buddha's expression of his enlightenment—"How wonderful, how wonderful, everything is enlightened just as it is"—as a justification for not trying to effect social change, and again to ask why the Buddha returned to society to practice, preach, and help alleviate suffering.

During Aitken's fourteen-year residency on Maui, the Honolulu sangha became "community-centered." The membership has now grown to about one hundred, the average age is around forty, and, unlike the situation on Maui, students have not identified their practice with the presence of the teacher. Continuing to come to Koko An, they regularly sit together, and the center runs with an impressive degree of coordination. Furthermore, in Honolulu students may apply their Zen studies to social services. Training periods have included morning work periods at hospitals and prisons. In 1980, with Aitken's support, students in Honolulu started *Kahawai: A Journal of Women and Zen*, which has been supportive to women all over the United States disheartened by the masculine dominance in traditional Buddhist studies. *Kahawai*, as well as Aitken's books, has attracted widespread attention, and visitors from the mainland and Europe commonly attend sesshins. The Diamond Sangha now has affiliate centers in California, Arizona, and Australia, and Koko An often hosts students from these as well.

When Aitken left Maui, there were still plans to hold retreats at the Maui Zendo, but after Aitken's departure there was so little support for the idea that in 1986 the Maui Zendo was sold. The following year Anne and Aitken Roshi were once again embarking on a new residential project. In 1987 the Diamond Sangha purchased property in upper Palolo Valley, about four miles from Koko An. In this mountainous terrain Aitken, who had just turned seventy, envisioned a village with his own residence, a meditation hall, and a dormitory for families that would enable parents to attend sesshin. The House of God that the Aitkens had purchased twenty years earlier for their retirement has yet to be used for that purpose. With this new project retirement itself has become an outdated plan.

The Palolo Valley project may be difficult to realize, but no more so than any step of the enlightened way. "What you do in one lifetime is open the door," says Aitken Roshi. "You realize, 'yes, that's true: this very body is the

Buddha,' just as in the Christian ceremony you take the flesh and blood of Christ into yourself. But that doesn't mean that you are a saint like Jesus. You open up the way and then it's important for you to pursue that way. You could just let it close up again. Yamada Roshi uses the image of cutting a piece of mochi with a sharp knife. He said that if you just cut that piece of mochi with a sharp knife it's going to come back together again. We spend our lives actualizing what we realize. There is a saying in Zen: 'Buddha Shakyamuni is only halfway there.'"





Priest Paô-ch'è of Ma-ku shan was fanning himself. A monk approached and asked, "Sir, the nature of wind is permanent, and there is no place it does not reach. Why, then, must you still fan yourself?" "Although you understand that the nature of wind is permanent," the master replied, "you do not understand the meaning of its reaching everywhere." "What is the meaning of its reaching everywhere?" asked the monk. The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed with deep respect.

This is the enlightened experience of Buddha-dharma and the vital way of its correct transmission. Those who say we should not use a fan because wind is permanent, and so we should know the existence of wind without using a fan, know neither permanency nor the nature of wind.

Because the nature of wind is eternally present, the wind of Buddhism actualizes the gold of the earth and ripens the cheese of the long river.

*From Genjo Koan, Eihei Dogen Zenji*