

# Myōju

Soto Zen Buddhism in Australia



March 2018, Issue 71



## LINEAGE: BEGINNINGS

ABBOT'S NEWS  
Hannah Forsyth

I CANNOT STEP ON  
THEIR SHADOW  
Seido Suzuki Roshi

REMEMBERING  
NARASAKI ROSHI  
Nonin Chowaney

RAISING A WALL  
Katherine Yeo & Karen  
Threlfall

INDIA STUDY ABROAD  
Sunao Ekin Korematsu &  
Jake Kepper

BUDDHA'S BOUNDLESS  
COMPASSION  
Ikko Narasaki Roshi

RETURNING HOME,  
SITTING PEACEFULLY  
Ekai Korematsu Osho

DIRECT REALISATION  
HUT  
Deniz Yener Korematsu

BACK TO THE FUTURE  
John Hickey

SOTO KITCHEN  
Karen Threlfall

Ikko Narasaki Roshi

Essay #2

# BUDDHA'S BOUNDLESS COMPASSION

**T**hese days it is said that we are in the space age. The space (or the universe) means 'infinite space-wise and unlimited time-wise'. Actually this boundless universe is active as one body and in fact, this is Buddha.

There is a big statue of Buddha in Nara city. It is called Dai-butsu in Japanese (big Buddha), Vairocana in Sanskrit. This big statue of Buddha was created in the belief that Buddha was the inexplicable and infinite marvel of heaven and earth, and of the whole universe.

How many millions of years ago human beings were born, I do not know, but these numbers do not express this inexplicable marvel. We humans, either being born or going to die, do not have to worry about being out of this inexplicable marvel, namely, Buddha's boundless compassion.

The solar system in the universe is moving with tremendous speed from one corner to the other, but, I was told, there is no destination. Look at the stellar world of tens of thousands of light years, it is boundless universe. And this is Buddha. Then, we tend to think that Buddha is far away, but actually we are the Buddha, we become Buddha.

It is not that this body, after stopping breathing and being dead, becomes Buddha. While we are still alive, we become Buddha, accepting this universe in our body and mind. That is what Shaku-san taught us. He also said that everything has Buddha nature, not only all sentient beings but also everything in nature.

There is a Zen phrase: "Heaven and earth are of the same root. All things are one body". Even though they have multifarious aspects, the whole universe is based on the same root and is one body, forming one organic state. If the nature of this state applies to just one thing, it is not necessary to name it. However, the person who has experienced this nature is called an Enlightened Person, namely, Buddha; that is how it was named Buddha nature. This is the

reason why "Buddha nature is said to be the second Dharma".

Owing to a strange connection, I am also in charge of Shogoji in Kikuchi city, Kumamoto prefecture. At present I have a plan to make Shogoji into an international training monastery and I am in the process of asking people to work together towards this aim.

The Patriarch of Shogoji is Daichi Zenji who is the sixth descendant of Dogen Zenji and the second descendant of Keizan Zenji. Daichi Zenji wrote 'The Twenty Four Hours Dharma Talk' which was presented to the Lord of Kikuchi, Takeshige who was the founder of Shogoji. In the beginning of the 'Talk', there is a famous phrase, "The right transmission from the founder of Buddhism is just sitting." That is to say, it was Zazen which was transmitted from Shaku-san through to successive patriarchs, and that is the Right Transmission.

'To be right' in Japanese (in *Kanji* or in Chinese characters) is written as 'stopping at one'. \* 'Being right' is supposed to be only one, but these days there are many parties who argue with each other claiming that they are the right one. The majority are not always 'the right ones', are they?

Actually Zazen is right. Without Zazen it cannot be decided if it is right or not.

*Talk given in 1986.*

*Translated by Isshin Taylor. Edited by Hannah Forsyth.*

*Translator's note:*

'To be right' in *Kanji* (Chinese characters): '正'

The stroke order of '正' is: '一' and '止'

'一' means 'one' and '止' means 'stop'.

Seido Suzuki Roshi

Dharma Talk

# I CANNOT STEP ON THEIR SHADOW



Seido Suzuki Roshi at Bendoho Retreat #55, enjoying a cup of tea with Jikishoan members who had studied with him at Toshoji. Photograph: Katherine Yeo

**T**hank you for inviting me. Ekai Osho-sama has asked me to talk about his teacher and my teacher Ikko Narasaki Roshi.

Ekai Osho-sama is building a new zendo at his home. It is wonderful. Dogen Zenji first had a zendo and started Ango in 1236, he was 37 years old. That time he said “Don’t worry about small sangha, don’t worry about beginner’s mind. What is big dojo? What is small dojo?” Even Master Muyo had only six or seven monks, Master Yaku-san had under ten monks.

I practiced with Ikko Roshi’s Dharma brother Komatani Roshi. It was a very small monastery. When I was there, seven monks were there. The zendo – maybe 12 people can sit – small. Dogen Zenji said, “It’s not small number of people, what is important is who has Way of Mind – Bodhi Mind then this sangha is very big sangha”. Not small build-

ing, not big building, who is practicing there – that is important.

When I went to Komatani Roshi I was 15 years old, so more than 40 years ago. I didn’t know Komatani Roshi was dharma brother of Ikko Roshi, I didn’t know Ikko Roshi at that time. I was a high school student – I went to Soto sect high school – and summer vacation, spring vacation, that’s when I went to practice with Komatani Roshi. Every day we went to takuhatsu – begging. Walked to town. At that time most of the people donate rice, cup of rice from every house. So when I come back to temple – big rice! I can’t walk like this!

It was very important for me. When you do takuhatsu you can see many, many things about others. Some people very kind, sometimes dog coming towards you. Many, many people desired many things, you can see and you understand yourself also – myself. Our self as big desire; we want something but how to use that desire, how do you use desire? For what? That is important.

After graduating from high school I went to college and I continued to go to practice. *(A loud hail storm begins, Roshi pauses and we sit in silence listening ‘til it stops...)* Ah, ice ... Teaching of Dharma, better than my talk!

Ikko Roshi is wonderful teacher, best teacher of Japan. He was very strong, sometimes he was cross but I had a very good time with Ikko Roshi.

I used to go to memorial services for the members; many, many times I went, so he taught me so many things. After Zuioji practice he came to Unsenji. I built a zendo, in the countryside, in a temple called Unsenji. Ikko Roshi came to the opening ceremony for the zendo and every year we had Shobogenzo *genzo-e*—we call *genzo-e*, lecture about Shobogenzo. He was sick already, and after five years he was in hospital. I went to the hospital every day. The last time he spoke to me about Ekai Osho; he was very con-

明珠

“He just show you how to practice; show himself, his body and mind.”

cerned about him because at that time he didn't have a temple. Before he passed away he told me "Please support him". But Ekai Osho does wonderful things – he came to Australia teaching Zen. Ikko Roshi is now very happy, no more concerned about him.

One of the Edo period monks, Somo Zenji, when he walked with other monks, he never stepped over their shadow. One monk asked him - why? He said "All the monks are Bodhisattva, I cannot step on their shadow". Ikko Roshi was like that - he never show kimono, always put on the kimono covered by koromo. Everything like that. So we are very lucky to study with Ikko Roshi. He live his life in the monastery. Always with Dharma. What is Dharma? What is Buddha? What is yourself? You answer to me. I don't have any vocabulary of English, I am sorry. Please take care of your Dharma with Ekai Osho. I wish to come back to the 20th anniversary. Thank you very much.

*Student:* Did Ikko Narasaki Roshi talk about his teachers?

*Seido Roshi:* He's not much talk, he just show you how to practice; show himself, his body and mind. He didn't much lecture, he just practice in front of you always, lead with body. Of course he does lecture. He came to Unsenji and everyday talk about Shobogenzo, but ordinary, every day practice. Usually not much talk. Always, when I go to zen-do he is sitting.

*Student:* Roshi, you said you were going to talk about what you talked about this afternoon, 'Water is water and mountain is mountain' - you were going to give us more explanation.

*Seido Roshi:* Mountain is mountain, water is water.

*Student:* Seido Roshi, could you please tell us something about Toshoji?

*Seido Roshi:* Toshoji... you can visit me. Any time you are welcome. Toshoji is a very, very old temple, 1300 years old. It was a Hosso monastery. In Hosso Sect everything is from mind. In Buddhism; Hosso Sect, Keigon Sect, Zen, Shingon, Shin Shu, many of them, but in Hosso everything is from the mind, your mind. Then 605 years ago it became a Soto Zen Temple. Our building is 320 years old, very, very old.

When I became Abbot of Toshoji – for twenty years there was nobody living there, so every building is leaking, you

can see sun, really. And I sit with bats, so many bats on the roof, three months I sit with them, after three months they left – I just sat Ango with them.

It was a surprise. Tatami had holes from the rain, very, very damaged, for 20 years nobody living there, but important is you can sit anywhere, even rain come down you can just move. That is better. If you have perfect condition maybe you cannot practice well. First time we don't have any heater in the winter so it was sometimes minus four, minus three degrees, no heater, so cold. Wind coming from the outside, snow coming from the roof, but that time was most strong practice we did. Too much heater, no good. Now we have everything – better to have nothing.

*Student:* Ekai Osho has spoken about Ikko Narasaki Roshi's presence. When he came into the room everyone would sit up straight. And he has also mentioned his Oryoki practice, how beautiful it was. Could you talk a bit about his presence and his Oryoki practice.

*Seido Roshi:* He very much follows Buddha and Ancestor, what they did. All his life he practised like Ancestor and Buddha. Nothing special, but his way of practising is Buddha and Ancestor. So it was nothing special – like water is water.

*Student:* Seido Roshi, when you were about to begin your own teaching career, were you given any advice how to go about that?

*Seido Roshi:* From Ikko Roshi? No, I just follow him. Of course many, many things he teach me. When I walk I made a mistake to walk left foot, right foot – Roshi said , "You wrong". Many, many things like that. Yes, of course. Very, very kindness teaching, he was very kind.

*Student:* At our Footscray Zendo we have a photograph of Ikko Narasaki with his hands in gassho and it is a very, very beautiful photograph. I just wanted to understand what impression his bowing made upon you?

*Seido Roshi:* Yes. Very difficult to say but everything, every movement was wonderful. The last time he came to Unsenji he came in begging style, *Takuhatsu* style. I should come *Takuhatsu* style. That is Ikko Roshi.

*Talk at Sunday Sanzenkai, Australian Shiatsu College 27/08/2017. Transcribed and edited by Marg Lynch.*

## Feature article

# Remembering Narasaki Roshi

BY NONIN CHOWANEY

I first met Ikko Narasaki Roshi in 1985 at Hokyōji monastery in Minnesota. He had come to lead a retreat at the request of my teacher, Dainin Katagiri Roshi. Katagiri Roshi greatly respected Ikko Narasaki Roshi and considered him the foremost Zen teacher in Japan, so he was thrilled when Narasaki Roshi agreed to come to America. Katagiri Roshi had worked very hard to convince him to come and to cultivate the relationship that later led to establishing Shogoji as an international Zen monastery, where I eventually practiced for two and a half years.

When I first met Narasaki Roshi in Minnesota, I was deeply impressed with his strong presence and his wholehearted commitment to Zen practice. Two years later, while I was practicing at Tassajara monastery, Katagiri Roshi asked me to go to Japan to practice at Zuioji and then to become the first Westerner to train at Shogoji. During my stay, I came to share my teacher's respect and admiration for Narasaki Roshi.

Ikko Narasaki Roshi's life was marked by effort, accomplishment, and integrity. He exhibited these qualities early on. When he was a boy, he showed great promise as a calligrapher and was entered in a nation-wide calligraphy contest to be judged by the emperor. He was much younger than the other participants, so the organizers gave him a sheet of paper with a faint pencil outline of the character to be written so he wouldn't embarrass anyone by making a mistake. The boy was deeply offended by this, so he tore up the paper and used a fresh one! He then went on to win the contest. Later, he became one of the foremost priest-calligraphers in Japan.

Narasaki Roshi's father was also a Zen priest and was his predecessor as abbot of Zuioji. After World War II, he retired and Narasaki Roshi succeeded him. At that time, there were few monks at the monastery, and it had fallen into disrepair. The practice had also been neglected. During these difficult times, Narasaki Roshi raised the necessary money and rebuilt the buildings. He then asked Hashimoto Roshi, a famous teacher who specialized in Zen Master Dogen's style of monastic living, to come and rebuild the practice. Hashimoto Roshi had recently overseen the construction of the only Zen training monastery in Japan built to Zen Master Dogen's specifications and was not willing to leave. He told Narasaki Roshi that he couldn't come because there wasn't a suitable facility at Zuioji. So, believing that "if you build it, he will come," Narasaki Roshi raised the

money and built one. Hashimoto Roshi could no longer refuse, so he came and rebuilt the practice at Zuioji.

Over the next 25 years, many other famous teachers also came, and under Narasaki Roshi's leadership, Zuioji became one of the foremost Soto Zen monastic centres in Japan. Narasaki Roshi and also his younger brother, Tsugen, both became renowned Zen teachers.

As young monks, Tsugen Narasaki and Dainin Katagiri had practiced together at Eiheiji monastery. Later, they studied together at Komazawa University. After Katagiri Roshi came to teach in America, he would return periodically to Japan and would visit his old friend Tsugen Narasaki at Zuioji. During one of these visits, he asked Ikko Narasaki Roshi if he would help provide a place in Japan for Westerners to practice according to the ancient way.

Narasaki Roshi was in his sixties at the time and was extremely busy with many other projects, but he agreed to consider the request. After his visit to America in 1985, he began giving it more serious consideration, because he was impressed not only with Katagiri Roshi's effort in Minnesota but also impressed with American Zen students and their commitment to zazen practice. So, he took the project on, and shortly after his return to Japan, began developing Shogoji, a small mountain temple of which he was also abbot, by sending two monks from Zuioji to live there.

In 1987, I was sent to Japan to practice as the first Westerner at this budding International Monastery. Over the next five years, Narasaki Roshi raised the money to build a fully-fledged monastic complex according to Zen Master Dogen's specifications, the third in Japan. It was the second he was responsible for building, and the first to accommodate Westerners. In 1994, the first priest I ordained, Rev. Kyōki Roberts, began practicing at Shogoji and eventually trained as head monk there. International Training Periods are now held every year at Shogoji and are attended by priests from all over the world.

I'll always be grateful to Narasaki Roshi for providing a place for us to train in the ancient Way. It was not easy for him, even with his considerable talent and energy. He was the ultimate Japanese traditionalist, and yet he took on a project that meant he'd be dealing with some of the most non-traditional people in the world. He was a monk; he lived communally and was totally committed to group practice. Yet

*continues pg. 14*

*continued from pg. 11*

he worked with people whose culture celebrates individualism and whose presence caused many problems in his monasteries. He was raised in a culture that assigns women a secondary role and lived for sixty years in a monastic system that virtually excludes women, yet he provided a place for ordained Western women to practice as equals with men. And he did all of this in spite of the strong objections of some of his staunchest lay supporters and of powerful priests within the Japanese Soto Zen hierarchy. He was able to overcome their objections and do what he did because of his strength of character and his reputation. He was known as a totally committed follower of the Way and a person of the utmost integrity, whose only aim was to practice the Way and to help others do the same.

Narasaki Roshi was regarded as a strict traditionalist, and he was. But I also knew him as a kind and generous man who would do anything in his power to support Zen practice anywhere there was a need. He helped me immeasurably when I was in Japan, and he continued his support and kindness after I returned to America. He knew that Zen teachers have a tough time of it financially in America and he worked to have me qualified within the Japanese system so I could receive some financial support for my work in Omaha from the Soto Zen organization in Japan. He helped build connections for me with many people who have helped and supported me. And he did these things without my knowledge, out of the kindness of his heart.

I have many fond memories of my time with Narasaki Roshi. Once, I helped mix ink when he did calligraphy at Shogoji. People were always asking him for calligraphy, so he had a lot to do, and he worked all afternoon. There were only four of us there: he and I and two of his older disciples. It was a great opportunity to watch a master at work, and I soaked up all I could. Late in the day, I worked up the courage to ask him to do one for the sangha back in America, and he did; he wrote two characters: shugyo - practice. Then, I asked him to do one for me and he wrote the same two characters: shugyo - practice. In case I missed the point!

At another time, I was his attendant on the day of a big ceremony for lay supporters at Shogoji. There were hundreds of people there, and after the ceremony, many of them wanted to see Narasaki Roshi privately. I was ushering people in and out all day. He had travelled all the previous day to get there, was up late the night before arranging and planning, had missed lunch, and was obviously tired. I tried to get him to stop to eat, but he refused, so I fixed a tray and brought it to his room. He set it aside and asked me to bring the next person in. "People are waiting," he said.

Late in the afternoon, I said to him, "You're very tired, aren't you?" "Yes, I am" he replied. "Why don't you take a rest?" I said, "People will wait." "Not until I've seen everyone," he replied. I found out later that it was this way everywhere he went. He put himself out for people like no one I've ever known.

Once, he, another monk, and I were on a train from Zuiioji

to Shogoji. I had wanted to talk to him about something and reminded the other monk that I needed to do so. Narasaki Roshi had just settled into his seat with a book. We were coming from another whirlwind of activity at a big ceremony at Zuiioji, and I really didn't want to disturb him. But the other monk immediately said that I wanted to talk to him, and it was too late. I saw on his face that he didn't want to leave the comfort and solitude he was enjoying, but he closed the book, and the momentary annoyance immediately left his face. He turned to me with complete presence and attention. I can't remember having seen anything done more completely. I understood then what Suzuki-Roshi meant by "burning yourself completely at every moment."

Narasaki Roshi and I had many differences - different cultures, different generations, different values - and we clashed a lot. We were both strong personalities and both very stubborn. So things were not always smooth between us. It was somewhat like father and son. But he never carried any hard feelings from one interaction to the next. And whenever I gave him a hard time, he returned it with kindness. He taught me, or tried to teach me, for sometimes I didn't learn too well, some very important lessons.

The day I formally left my monastic training period in Japan to return for good to America, I met with Narasaki Roshi and exchanged the ritualistic formal goodbyes between monk and abbot, and we had yet another argument. The details are not important and most are long forgotten anyway; it was yet another unpleasant clash. I stalked out of the meeting after accusing him once more of not listening to me and returned to my room to get my bags and leave.

I sat at my desk steaming and decided to open the gift envelopes I'd received from teachers and fellow monks and put the money in my wallet. It's traditional to give travelling money when someone leaves the monastery to help them get back home. Monks don't have much money, so everyone gives about ten or fifteen dollars, teachers a little more. I opened Narasaki Roshi's envelope and found nearly five hundred dollars. He knew that I had no money. Katagiri Roshi had died a couple of months before, and Narasaki Roshi knew things would be hard for me back in the States, so he wanted me to go back with a few dollars in my pocket. I thought to myself, he did it again! I had gotten mad at him and given him a hard time and I got nothing but kindness and generosity in return!

Ikko Narasaki Roshi died in 1996. He was ordained a Zen priest at nine years of age and practiced as a monk for 65 years. At the time of his death, he was not only Abbot of both Zuiioji and Shogoji monasteries but also Vice-abbot of Eiheiji monastery, which is one of two head temples of Soto Zen in Japan. Narasaki Roshi provided a place for me to learn how to practice the Way and took care of me when I came to a strange country to do it. I'll always remember his kindness. He gave a lot, and I still miss him sometimes.

*Nonin Chowany was a student of Ikko Narasaki Roshi and is the retired Abbot of Nebraska Zen Centre. This article first appeared in Sweeping Zen, February 27th, 2011.*