

A Solitary Hermitage

In art and in the history of Zen, the image of the hut has served as a symbol of solitude, a place where a monk may go to celebrate the moon, to commune with nature, to reflect on life, to have respite from busy temple life, or to be at peace away from the madding world. Bodhidharma went to his cave, Hakuyu to a mountain lean-to, Basho to a retreat, Han Shan to his hut. Ryokan went to Gogo-an. Many temples in China and Japan have mountain huts hidden from view where monks and nuns may enjoy a time of solitary life. Such practice brings balance to the daily routine, and in the American Zen climate, the laity also have opportunities to share in a time of solitude. As a matter of fact, it may be that given the noise, bluster, and insistence of today's technological world, times of solitude are essential to inner balance and spiritual health.

The small hut named Gogo-an is a distinctive example of old Japanese mountain architecture consisting of tongue and groove fittings and two essential uprights attaching to joists that reach out from the top of the frame to hold an extraordinarily heavy thatched roof. Situated deep on Mt. Kugami in Niigata Prefecture, the hut has become a pilgrimage site to modern seekers of the solitary experience, because Ryokan lived there during the central part of his priestly life in the late Edo Period. Ryokan's life and Gogo-an together have emerged as teachings that reveal the development of spiritual maturity as a necessary factor in fully addressing the demands of the solitary way.

For many of us, the moment we recognize our teacher, such as Ryokan's recognizing Kokusen Roshi, we feel a sense of urgency to forsake our material lives and enter practice. For some, we do not take this step because we cling to our possessions and become frightened and unable to let go. We think of all the possibilities that can cause failure and dissatisfaction rather than the power of our own embrace of the Dharma. Others feel this call but recognize that it is a greater work in the present moment to meet responsibilities until such time as we can choose another life. However and whenever we meet our teacher, we carry within us a seed of the solitary mind and the development of what it means to keep one's own counsel. The Buddha told us to find out the truth for ourselves and surely this journey develops as we face ourselves in the mirror of the teacher.

The immediacy of Ryokan's decision to enter a deeper level of practice and to follow Kokusen Roshi shows his spiritual maturity at a very young age. At that point, Ryokan had already stood up to his father and ordered his life toward the freedom to take action and choose the Dharma. Nothing stood in his way the moment he sensed the call to act. His character is revealed early on in this determination, courage, and simplicity of going forward with complete commitment. In this, he did not look back.

Ryokan trained at Entsuji temple for thirteen years until Kokusen Roshi died. Ryokan was Kokusen Roshi's favored student, but when it came time for Ryokan to assume leadership at Entsuji, he left the temple for short periods of time and wandered off alone, until one day, he simply didn't return. Ryokan had been devoted to Kokusen Roshi, but this didn't stem his suffering from deep loneliness during his time at Entsuji: he missed his family and friends. His mother died while he was there and he was unable to return home to grieve with his brothers and sisters. Kokusen Roshi's death in 1791 must have exacerbated the pain of loneliness and grief, and it pushed Ryokan into deep life-questioning and exploration. He

knew he did not have the inclination to be a temple leader and deal with the institutional requirements and restrictions of the Soto hierarchy; nevertheless, he had all the capacity and determination to accept responsibility for his priestly vows, to live a life of begging, and to wear the robe through an expression that more closely resembled his own understanding of the Buddha Dharma. For him, this would naturally tend to take the form of the solitary way.

After five years of anonymity, somehow Ryokan received word of his father's death by suicide in the Katsuura River in Kyoto in 1795. Ryokan arrived in time for a memorial service seventy-seven days later, and then in 1796 at age 42, determined to return to his hometown of Izumozaki. He walked back the 400 or so miles and arrived without notice or fanfare. His family was perhaps embarrassed by his disheveled state and some townsfolk didn't recognize him. After all, he had been gone for twenty years and had been living in the out of doors for a long time. His robe was torn and tattered, his begging bowl seasoned and weathered. He found an old shack to live in close to the Sea of Japan and about eight or so miles from his hometown. When his family learned of his presence, they wanted to take him in, but he refused and said that he had enough food and clothing. Of course they were worried about him, and he was an odd ball no doubt, but gradually he became accepted and people began to watch out for him.

The years on the road had influenced Ryokan to settle down. Living through begging had been hard on his health. He was 43 years old, and it was another eight years before one of his friends in the town obtained permission from Kokujoji Shingon temple for Ryokan to live permanently at Gogo-an, although before that he had been living there intermittently. The hut had been built by Kokujoji temple for the guest priest Mangen. The name Gogo-an refers to the five servings of rice that Mangen was served each day. "Go" means five, and "Gohan" means rice. "An" means hermitage. It would be too awkward to say Gogohan-an so it was shortened to Gogo-an. Gogo-an can sound as if you are saying "Five Bowls of Rice" but the kanji actually mean "Five Bowls of Rice Hermitage." Gogo-an was already one hundred years old by the time Ryokan came to live in it. Field mice had eaten small holes through the thatch, and insects from the woods had bored into the floor planks. Wooden doors that lifted out of their tracks had become warped so that they could no longer completely block the extreme wind, rain, and snow that swept along the Bunsui Plain and onto the shelf of the mountain where Gogo-an stood.

Despite the condition of the hut, Ryokan was ecstatic to think that he would have a place all his own, where he could live simply and peacefully in familiar terrain and close enough to people he knew. His vow to live as a Soto Zen priest was unbroken. He firmly believed in the simplicity of begging. We can only imagine how lonely he had been along the road, and how hungry he was to be in company again with friends. He was soft spoken but quite gregarious and fond of good company. He was well read and literate and appreciated good conversation that explored philosophical ideas and language. His happiness at arriving at his own home was boundless and the poetry he wrote in those first years is filled with the joy and ecstasy of settling into a stable situation. It is at this point that Ryokan and the sense of place become integral. Wherever it was that Ryokan had wandered, it could not have been easy. He speaks of his life on the road in several poems and we sense his difficulties. He had to deal with extreme heat and cold, occasional severe storms, monsoons, hunger, and the uncertainty of a next meal. Years of homelessness take their toll on the body. The idea of having a reliable space and a roof to be under must have seemed sublime. Others could find

him at Gogo-an and he could receive letters and enjoy visits from friends.

Gogo-an was under the ownership of Kokujoji temple not so far along the path, and so the space was already recognized as a priest's place of retirement. It was appropriate for Ryokan and it must have given him some stature with the people in the town. It was a respectful arrangement, for unquestionably it was difficult for the townsfolk to watch Ryokan struggle without a place to live. All the town's people knew him and were aware of the situation; there is talk and gossip in a small town. Something had to be done. When he finally had a place to live, everyone could feel taken care of and could be relieved of their angst about his homelessness.

It is important to understand that in order for a hermit to be a hermit, it is necessary for the society to accept this lifestyle. The surrounding community completely supports the hermit by respecting his or her privacy, by honoring the intention of his or her life, by keeping a look out for his health and welfare, and, in Ryokan's case, by making sacrifices to maintain his life. Aside from food, Ryokan received clothing, bedding, paper, and ink, and any other articles he might have requested from friends. In a world where the hermit life is accepted and honored, the community makes a tacit agreement to observe and care for the life of the hermit without the hermit feeling watched or beholden to the community. In return, the hermit lives the life that others cannot and balances the community by creating the full spectrum of the self in existence. This arrangement requires trust between the two. The community has to trust that the hermit is balanced and sincere in intention and not misusing the community for selfish ends. The hermit has to trust that the community is aware of him and that they remain truthful in their acceptance of his position and function in society.

In Western terms, Gogo-an is 12 feet by 12 feet and opens with sliding wood doors on two sides. The back wall houses an altar at the center and on the right is a tokunoma, a small alcove for the display of artwork, which usually consists of a hanging scroll with a flower arrangement placed on the floor in front of it. Another alcove is to the left. In the back of the wall is a small door that opens to the outside. This door could be used during the winter for passing things through without having to open the large heavy doors, or as extra ventilation for cooking.

There is a small walkway porch around two sides. Outside, attached to the right part of the hut is an outhouse, just large enough for someone to fit inside without turning around. The floor of the hut is wood and in its present form there is a ceiling so that the rafters that hold up the massive weight of the thatch are not visible. This was likely not the case in Ryokan's day. The under-thatch would have been visible. Several large trees tower over the hut, and bamboo grows among the large pines, as almost everywhere in Japan. Bamboo prevents erosion, purifies the soil, provides food by way of bamboo root, and is used to make simple tools and household items. Every part of the bamboo plant is beneficial. After living in the hut a while, Ryokan would encounter the problem of bamboo growing through the floorboards and ultimately through the thatch. I have climbed numerous times to Gogo-an in summer and winter. For true alpine people, Mt. Kugami seems more like a hill, a volcanic, unconnected mound that forms an obvious hump on the landscape. Mt. Kugami itself is about a thousand feet high and Gogo-an is about halfway to the top. The distance involved may not seem like much but the extremes of the weather in the area make this a difficult place to get one's feet down and engage in daily life. Summer foliage closes off the view of

the Bunsui Plain, which is a large open stretch of fertile land that tucks in behind the coastal hills which protect agriculture from the sandy winds of the Japan Sea. Small rivers wind through the plain and provide irrigation. The land stretches to the south and west from the City of Niigata and is dotted by villages, towns, and hamlets with occasional small temples here and there. In winter, winds sweep up the mountain as if aiming straight for the hut.

The view is extraordinary and peaceful, but the bitter cold is unrelenting. Given these conditions, Gogo-an takes on an archetype of place that speaks of fortitude and courage against the extremes of life's challenges. I imagined myself living there and climbing the mountain day after day, begging in town, and visiting with friends. In summer, the mosquitoes make a high-pitched whine in the ears while the blistering heat and humidity leave your clothes perpetually wet and sweat trickling along your back. In winter the winds hum low dirges into the bones. This is Snow Country and snow piles upon snow; climbing through the drifts is exhausting and dangerous on hilly terrain, and there are no plows or other travelers to establish tracks. I wondered how long I would last in such a life without heat and adequate clothing, even in the nineteenth century when I wouldn't have known of our modern comforts. How easy it might have been to opt for a room in town, to forsake the robe, and to live with the family, to be in a place where food was available and one could huddle together with other humans for understanding and warmth.

In spite of these considerations, Gogo-an became Ryokan's temple of freedom, his sacred place of solace and practice to truly live his priestly vows, not in terms of the institutional religion, but in the radical way he felt was most complete and free. Life became simpler for Ryokan. He climbed the mountain as he wished, did his begging rounds, played with children, visited with friends, partied and drank sake, played *Go* with the men from town, expressed a luxurious freedom to live naturally, and at times in his quiet, secluded Gogo-an he wrote poetry. He stored his extra food in a jar and took care to move the insects out of the way before eating or offering food to visitors. On the walls on the closed side of Gogo-an he hung his calligraphic work to dry.

Many of his poems tell of life at the hermitage and what Gogo-an meant to him. The hut symbolized his true temple, his spiritual home in the mountains where Buddha Nature was completely expressed through him. Ryokan identified with the Chinese poet Han Shan and his hermitic life on Cold Mountain. For Han Shan, Cold Mountain became the archetype of the spiritual place where he could express Buddhist and Taoist philosophy and understanding through poetry. Like Han Shan, who may have suffered from a deformity that made him unable to serve in the army, Ryokan identified with the inability to serve in public life.

Gogo-an became a place of protection from the outside world, the world of bureaucracy that Ryokan eschewed. It was a place outside of time and untouched by the demands of organization and temple policy, a hermitage above the clouds, too high on the mountain for anyone in the outside world to be bothered with. After a day of begging, Ryokan could climb to his refuge, write and read poetry, write essays (an art that is promoted in Japanese culture), study various Buddhist texts, receive occasional visitors, and be faithful to his solitude. Still, it would be naïve to suppose that this was all idyllic. The best of the hermit priests and artists have acknowledged the challenges that confront solitary life. Such a life calls for the spiritual and emotional maturity that understands how the hut functions as one's true interior.

Dogen Zenji reminds us that the visible world is the manifestation of the spiritual, Buddha Nature. The hut then is that which appears as Ryokan's interior home made visible in the world. The spiritual interior is the beginning of that which we see before us. Sometimes we have to build a temple to express what we envision; sometimes an existing building completes us. Either way, because we have developed a spiritual interior, we have the eye to see what is possible and our intention becomes manifest. With all this it remains a challenge to stand wholly on spiritual ground when one is hungry, lonely, and cold. A period of tremendous training and self-development would be necessary.

Perhaps we could say that one of the functions of the Sangha is to help us polish ourselves. Those who live the solitary way are those who have matured and have advanced far in their polishing. They no longer need the daily activity of the Sangha to help them understand their tendencies. Perhaps they have released themselves from arrogance and pettiness in their interactions with others. There is a danger that we won't see our own weaknesses if we practice meditation alone, especially in the beginning. Without others around, we fail to interact and see ourselves in performance. There is the tendency to develop ego and this becomes intractable if we have not accepted the "other" in the Sangha as our teacher.

Living in solitary practice suggests that we have come to know ourselves and that we understand the difference between solitude and loneliness. For this, we will have come to a stable intimacy with ourselves and our spiritual practice will be well developed so that we can maintain spiritual life day after day when no one else is looking. We will have learned to practice listening at a deep level, and we will have learned to understand fear. The community trusts that we can do that. We have to become ruthlessly honest about our own condition before we can maintain balance in solitary life and before solitary life can truly generate beneficial spiritual development.

For many practitioners today, our lives are bound by the workplace and by our dependence on technology. We have less and less time for meditation, introspection, and simple pleasures. Solitary practice can seem like a faraway dream and yet for some of us, it may be the most spiritually restorative form of retreat we can take.

The hut symbolizes that spiritual place where we can release ourselves into silence and survey our lives from a different vantage point. It represents a space outside of our usual demands, a place where we will not face continual intrusion and interruption, a place of hope in which we can actually hear the sounds of natural life as well as our own small inner voice calling out for help. It is the protection we manifest in order to release the wounds and snares that cling to us. Isn't this what we hope for in ourselves through practice: that we mature spiritually and truly enjoy life that we live and love well in the activities of daily life? Moreover, it is true that we don't have to wait to be fully mature before we step into an experience of solitude. As a matter of fact, a solitary retreat may be the very thing to throw us into deep listening, an experience that teaches us about our own loneliness, that helps us see the ways in which we are holding on to our old histories, or that enables us to discern our vocation.

This very recognition of wishing to provide a spiritual place for solitary practice and a place to honor Ryokan led us at Olympia Zen Center to build a close replica of Gogo-an. Niho Roshi acknowledged the value of the project and assented to the idea of the building. I

requested his permission since I did not wish for the project to be an appropriation of the Japanese celebration of the unique Gogo-an which is such a powerful symbol of Ryokan. Winona Ward, now deceased, the mother of Fletcher Ward, came forward with the wish to dedicate the building to her late husband, Hugh Ward. Numerous other fine people came forward to bring additional financial support. Pat Labine put us in touch with a talented builder named Judy Fleming who created the structure from photographs taken by Fletcher and me on a trip to Japan. Bob Fischer took two weeks of his vacation to work with Judy and her assistant on the foundational footings. The first day on the job Bob said to Judy, "Where are the blueprints?" Judy pointed at her head and said, "Don't worry Bob, they're right here." Bob was a bit unsettled by this, but he soon learned to trust Judy's extraordinary building skills, bringing his own abilities to the tasks as she gave directions. Judy is as thin as a rail and stands about five feet five so one would not imagine by just looking at her that she was up to the task. She worked with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth and an open can of Coke resting on the nearest crossbeam. Ryokan would have loved her.

Jikyō C.J. Wolfer and I prepared daily lunches and persuaded the workers to take a break in the middle of the day when we sat around and talked. We had excellent summer weather and every day the work went forward. In deference to the actual Gogo-an and because of how it is situated on our land and the position of the moon, the doors of Gogo-an at Olympia Zen Center open to the front and right side rather than the front and left as in the Japanese original. The original Gogo-an is one of a kind even in Japan, and I wanted to honor that uniqueness by facing our doors in the opposite direction. Since there never were any blueprints, we have nothing to offer people when they ask to have copies so they can copy our copy. Gogo-an should remain unique.

The wood of our Gogo-an is mostly cedar and the interior is rendered in tongue and groove design with no nails. The building stands along our Path of the Ancestors, a trail through the temple grounds that honors the patriarchs and matriarchs from Shakyamuni Buddha to Niho Tetsumei Roshi. It is located at the point where Ryokan is placed historically in the lineage. Outside the hut is a stone circle that honors the truths of the Buddhas and the Moons, and acknowledges our Native peoples who inhabited the land before us. The thirteen Buddhas and the thirteen moons that appear in every year coincide in their truth aspects. In the very center of the circle is a large stone to represent the Buddha and the Moon of Infinite Space. Our hut is available to anyone who feels the call to be in quiet residence and retreat in the experience of the rustic nature of the hut. The standing statue of Ryokan as a young monk in training faces the center door. Here, Ryokan's eyes are wide open, waiting, ready to host and listen to any practitioner in any condition who comes in earnest to restore inward harmony, to pull back from the hard demands of life, to meditate, write, relax, or be refreshed. There are no criteria for retreats. The field is wide open.

Bob Fischer was the first to test his resolve in living at Gogo-an through the entire month of January. In addition to the two weeks of his vacation which he gave to help Judy put in the foundation, he took a whole month of back holiday for this solitary retreat. He believed strongly in the purpose of Gogo-an and chose the coldest month to be in practice to test himself and to find out what he was made of. We started out the month with a ceremony in the Zendo to wish Bob well and to let him know that we were in the background, aware of his retreat and supporting him spiritually and physically with anything he needed. Bob planned out his approach to dealing with the cold by wearing numerous layers of clothing

and sitting Zazen under a blanket which he hunched up tent-like around himself. Whereas Ryokan had been surrounded by mounds of snow and ice, we in Olympia enjoy a more moderate climate of incessant, bone chilling rain with temperatures that can hover close to freezing. Bob used the kitchen to heat hot water and lived on freeze-dried foods for the entire month. For two hours in the afternoon, he walked our long hiking trail to warm up and move and stretch his body. He did not talk to anyone the entire time unless he needed something specific. Slowly, as the month wore on, the light in Bob's eyes became brighter and brighter and his face softened with a beautiful transparency. Bob was simply immersed in quiet solitary practice every day allowing the tensions of life to drop off and his own practice to fill his heart. Most important was the experience of focusing wholeheartedly on Zazen and his own sense that he could survive in the world without all of our technological paraphernalia. There is a certain triumph in knowing that one can actually set out and do this and not fail. Most of us no longer know whether we can survive in the world without all of the devices that eat at our time and energies. At the close of the month, we once again received Bob in the Zendo for a ceremony to complete his retreat. For our part, those who bore witness to Bob's practice felt we had also completed something important that was a gift to the Sangha. For the entire month, our awareness was with Gogo-an and with Bob, feeling the interiority of each day, carrying him in the heart's core, and receiving the gift of the awareness of solitude which is what the practice of solitude is. We were given the gift of Gogo-an within as if the hut had taken up residence in the mind and we could step inside the indwelling Gogo-an and receive the mercies of practice. The reverberation of this practice went everywhere. Ryokan's practice became the image we lived by and this happens whenever anyone stays in our Gogo-an.

Others have come to spend time in residence at Gogo-an to take time to work out personal issues, to fulfill solitary requirements for their training in other traditions, or to have an experience with their children in a sacred space that is a little more luxurious than camping in a tent. The presence of the hut on our temple grounds is a powerful reminder of the meaning of the vow and our interior spiritual practice. Wherever we go, the hut abides quietly at humble attention and continually invites us to enter the interiority of the soul, the daimon, the kernel, the essence we want to touch. This is the central import of its meaning: to call us to remember what is most important in our lives, that we are Buddha Nature. We are completely affirmed in this space and made whole through the presence and atmosphere of Ryokan's profound spiritual practice of acceptance. I have no doubt that the people of Izumozaki, or any people in proximity to Ryokan's Gogo-an, experienced the spiritual residue of his life, as a part of them was continually aware of Gogo-an and Ryokan as a solitary force acting along with their spiritual functioning. We are reminded that we are always in company and are never separate from all of the activities we often think we do independent of others. There is solitary practice, but we are never alone even in that, and we actually have nowhere to hide.

Ryokan, even from an early age, showed signs of spiritual maturity. He exemplified kindness toward everyone, compassion toward those who were suffering, joy for the recovery of others, and equanimity in every relationship without discrimination. Life at Gogo-an allowed him the slow blossoming of Awakening and he could express the Dharma of a great teacher living a natural life. He wandered through the high grassy meadows on the lower plains and sat in the thickets of yellow mustard on the weedy slopes in spring sunshine. Sometimes poems would come to him and he would pull out his small traveling brush and stone and

write some lines on the spot, rolling the paper afterward and tucking it into the loose fold of his robe, although most of his poems were written in the residence. He stood under a tall pine or a cedar tree and let the tree life shower him with energy and wisdom. He bathed in the stream, fetched water to the hut, inhaled the mist of autumn mornings, endured the cold drizzle of early winter. In all seasons, mountain life spoke to him through the voices of wind, fox, deer, rabbits, snow in its quiet falling, rain pelting the roof, insects buzzing at night. All of this life fueled moments of pure joy. Yet sometimes the sounds cast him into loneliness.

Ryokan planted a spring flower garden with “autumn bush-clover, pampas, pansies, golden dandelions, a small silk-tree, plantains, morning glories, hemp agrimonies, asters, dayflowers and forget-me-nots.” I don’t know how he acquired the seeds or the seedlings—perhaps they were gifts from friends or the townsfolk. He hoed a section of earth just on the flat space where the hut sits, and he lovingly planted the garden. Every day he walked down to the stream and filled a bucket with water to bring back to the garden, tending the plants with devoted care. In truth they grew to be the most beautiful flowers he’d ever seen and he was overjoyed to have them near Gogo-an where he could sit on the edge of the porch and lean against the post letting the day go by as he enjoyed the sweet beauty of colorful blossoms so high on the green mountain. But once, to his utter dismay, a terrible rainstorm swept over the area suddenly in late May, a drenching heavy squall with winds that raged and forced the rain to pelt his tender flowers, tearing them to pieces, reducing his garden to a useless mud hole. For days he was grim with a terrible depression but soon pulled out of it when he realized he could not stop the wind and the elements no matter how much he loved his flowers.

Ryokan could not have survived without the supreme toughness that mountain life requires with the unexpected storms and bleak and demanding winters, without a resolve and determination to completely live his vow. At the same time, the solitary life taught him about the nature of loneliness, about not owning goods, about generosity, love, kindness, and impermanence. Without a firm practice and grounding in the basic virtues of Buddhist practice, called the Paramitas, and the grounding of Buddhist texts, Ryokan could not have survived in such a spiritually elegant way. The six most important virtues or Paramitas are Generosity: giving of oneself with open-hearted attentiveness; Morality: understanding and actualizing the deep meaning of the Buddha’s Precepts; Patience: steadfast perseverance and cheerful willingness no matter the circumstances; Enthusiasm: practicing with vigor, diligence, and assiduity; Zazen: with one-pointed attentiveness, opening to the vastness of Being; and Wisdom: lucid insight into the fundamental nature of the Great Matter of life.

The solitary hut in balance with the active life of the Sangha, along with living the Paramitas and the Precepts, helps to mature us in meditative practice. Deciding to practice when no one is looking is an essential interior working that has to come if we are to truly understand the Buddha’s final words to us to “find out for ourselves.” Persistence is a major lesson for us to see in Ryokan’s life—that we persist in our spiritual search, persist in our practice of Zazen, persist in our vow so that Buddha Nature manifests a healthy life of spiritual stamina and grace. It is no wonder that teachers and temples create opportunities for nuns and monks who are monastic, or for long-term lay practitioners to retreat to meditative silence. We all need the self-care that comes with respite within this difficult world. The image of the hut is carried in the deepest recesses of the spiritual heart and serves us as we learn to walk and listen in solitude, to live in simplicity, and to follow the Buddha Way.

Ryokan left Gogo-an after twelve years at age 62 to move to the Otogo shrine, closer to the base of the mountain. Even the Otogo shrine, a Shinto site, was no simple walk. The path to it went up a steep hill and then down a long, sharp dip, ladder-like, into the hollow of the shrine; yet the secluded nature of it was equal to Gogo-an. The decision to move came only after a long period of reconciling himself to the practicality of old age. He could no longer climb up and down Kugami's steep slope in all the weather that the North Country brings. He still had much solitude at the Otogo shrine, but it was not his beloved Gogo-an that was also himself. I want to quote a passage from Dainin Katagiri Roshi's *Returning to Silence* and boldly substitute the word "hermitage" for "room," for it expresses the power of place.

"The hermitage is not something different from us. We are the hermitage, the hermitage is us. Then we and the hermitage communicate with each other in the rhythm of identity-action. We have to take the best care of the hermitage we can, because the hermitage is not a material being apart from us. The hermitage is a great being called Buddha-dharma. Buddha-dharma means the unity of Buddha and us, Buddha and the hermitage." (172)

In his chosen life of poverty Ryokan had expressed love to his fullest capacities. He had lived a life of emptiness and simplicity in a monk's hermitage. He had not disappointed himself in his own capacities to remain faithful to his vows, to his teacher Kokusen Roshi, to Dogen Zenji, to the First Teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. As a solitary, he was elegant in the tenor and mature texture of his spiritual activities. There was a triumph in succeeding on the mountain. But, as he walked down to the shrine with his meager belongings, surely his thin face exhibited an unmistakable sentiment. It was a moment of sadness to leave his hermitage and yet Gogo-an, as the manifestation of his spiritual nature, was still his deepest ally, his cosmic refuge, his wistful home.

My house is buried in the deepest recess of the forest. Every year, ivy vines grow longer than the year before. Undisturbed by the affairs of the world I live at ease, Woodmen's singing rarely reaching me through the trees. While the sun stays in the sky, I mend my torn clothes And, facing the moon, I read holy texts aloud to myself. Let me drop a word of advice for believers of my faith. To enjoy life's immensity, you do not need many things.

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