

SHINING THE TEMPLE LIGHT

The wholly reverent and awakened Zazen is worthy of all it takes to turn on the light of a temple and create a sacred space dedicated to its practice. The appearance of Ryoko-an is nothing other than the Awakening light in this time and place. Because we sit Zazen, our practice-experience naturally expresses the Dharma which appears before us step by step. What else would we do but provide a temple to turn on the light in deepest gratitude and wonder at the mystery of existence?

It has become the custom in the US in Soto Zen to make good use of existing buildings for the practice of Zazen. In our case, the home we found was inhabited by young men who had created a drug house. The neighborhood people were in fear of their lives as cars drove up and down the street all hours of the day and night coming to purchase illegal drugs. Our offer to buy this house and change the situation became a gift and a light to the surrounding community and to ourselves.

Slowly and consistently we have transformed the landscape and the atmosphere. The Path of the Ancestors deepens with each season, and it encircles our Zendo with the spirit of our teachers. It is a natural unfolding of the light of practice. In walking the path, we confirm and authenticate the vow to realize practice in this time and place and to root it here for those who come afterward.

Dogen Zenji writes: There was a time when Ummon entered the Dharma Hall and addressed his assembly, saying, "All human beings, without exception, have the Light within themselves. But when they look for It, they do not see It, for It is shrouded in the darkness of ignorance. Just what is this Light that everyone has within themselves?" There was no one in his assembly who gave a reply. Putting himself in their place, he said, "The Monks' Hall, the Buddha Hall, the Temple Kitchen, and the Gate to the Mountain."

Dogen Zenji is saying that The Monks' Hall is where we sit Zazen, the Buddha Hall is where we chant the sutras and hear the teachings, the Temple Kitchen is where we fulfill everyday tasks. These are the three gates of practice. Because we are Light itself, we enter the gate. To enter the gate is to be Light itself. Human beings who are pure Light are not other than the temple where we shine this Light on behalf of everyone. Ryoko-an is an expression of this light. This is what humans naturally do when they recognize the Light in themselves and in one another and come together as Sangha.

We take particular care with the rarity of our sacred space. It is like a shining jewel in the middle of the rain forest. When we practice in this way, we learn to take particular care with everything because it is none other than Buddha Nature. So here we are! The Gate to the Mountain is entered. What do you have to say? Don't waste your life!! What's here and now?