

The most important event for us this month was the Shinzanshiki abbot installation ceremony at Hokuozan Sogenji. Many of our sangha members could be present at this outstanding event, and some of our children had the honor to represent the coming generation and therefore were invited to join the procession. Roshi and ShoE were walking down the “Birkenweg”, passing through the new entrance (wonderfully built by Werner) and entering the zendo for the opening ceremony. After reciting some daranis in the zendo a multiple speed reading of the Heart Sutra followed. Hereby the sutra books were used like a continuously opened and closed hand fan and remarkable sounds deep from the hara accompanied this procedure, so that all (possibly may be present) evil ghosts and spirits immediately left the place in a hurry, and made place for the energy of harmony, spiritual commitment, and dharma practice. Monks from Japan and representatives from the other ODZ monasteries gave their blessings. In the second part of the ceremony the Hamburg ODZ sangha had the honor to represent the lay community of practitioners welcoming the opening of the monastery. The following greetings were spoken in German (here the English version is given): Dear Roshi, dear ShoE Zenshi, dear venerable guests and friends, dear Sangha, a place like Hokuozan Sogenji can only survive and flourish if it is well received and supported by its natural and living surroundings. Lay persons are -besides the people living in the neighborhood of a monastery and the local officials and institutions - necessary to support such a place of practice. Hokuozan Sogenji is now a zen monastery and completes with the Japanese mother monastery Sogenji, and her sister monasteries Indozen Sogenji in India and Tahoma Sogenji in the US a beautiful and propitious four leaved clover.

We all have an idea of what a monastery is like - but what is Zen? Roshi has helped us with a very short answer: Zen is the study of our own mind. Definitely - to look into our own mind and be able to calm and understand it better, seems at times like this, with burnout becoming a kind of widespread disease, very, very helpful for us laypersons.

But why do we need a monastery for this? Because our day to day life is far too busy that we could lay down our concerns and worries easily. Quite often we feel like running in a hamster wheel – unable to stop or even get out. A zen monastery is a place where you can concentrate and set things aside looking for a fundamental calmness in the midst of all turmoil. And being in a monastery as a lay guest helps us recognizing an often overlooked fact: The turmoil is not only outside in the world, but already inside us, inside our own mind: Thoughts and emotions, likes and dislikes permanently chasing each other – an endless stream.

In a monastery everything from the wake-up call to the recitation of sutras, the taking in of the meals and the endless hours of sitting and walking meditation is designed to help us crossing this endless stream of inner

turmoil, in order to reach the other shore.

Entering the door of Hokuozan Sogenji as a layperson - you can immediately feel the specific atmosphere of this place challenging your everyday habits of egocentric hecticness.

Sabine ShoE Huskamp Zenshi, the residential assistant abbot, found this place after more than 20 years continuous practice of Zen under the guidance of ShoDo Harada Roshi. In her twenties she embarked on a journey probably not exactly knowing what she was looking for. Meeting her spiritual teacher ShoDo Harada Roshi in Japan she discovered that she was no longer seeking. Roshi and his zen practice manifested in body, speech and mind what she had been looking for since such a long time.

Now - more than twenty five years later she brings back to us in Germany, what she found in Japan, manifesting it in the construction of a place for spiritual practice. Under guidance of Roshi and with the help of her father Werner and tremendous support from sangha members from all over Europe the place was transformed by literally thousands of hours of hard work into what it is now: Hokuozan Sogenji – A monastery blending Japanese, European and German influences and documenting in this way mutual understanding, learning and friendship. Lay people are invited here to practice original Zen-Meditation– a meditation passed down in an unbroken chain of transmission for over 2500 years –from the time of the historic Buddha until today - a rare opportunity in Germany. We lay people receive this unique opportunity and all the work done here in thankfulness – Ho On Sha Toku - as you say in Japanese. Our deep gratitude goes today especially to ShoDo Harada Roshi as future main abbot and living source of the teaching and to ShoE Huskamp Zenshi for her willingness to become a lamp for us lay people and act as an assistant abbot. I would like to conclude with the wish that this place and all its inhabitants and guests may be protected, welcomed, supported and appreciated by their own practice and by each other, the neighbors and friends and the sangha for now and all times to come. Let us express our appreciation for all beings who contributed and will contribute to Hokuozan Sogenji and its flourishing and wellbeing – Thank you very much.

Roshi underlined in his speech that he appreciates very much ShoE Zenshi being installed as assistant abbot of Hokuozan Sogenji. He emphasized that he appointed ShoE Zenshi as abbot on the basis of her spiritual realization of true essence. True essence and its realization are not dependent on being or not being ordained as a nun. He pointed out that he personally will support ShoE Zenshi as abbot of Hokuozan Sogenji by answering possible questions and helping with upcoming problems and the practice at Hokuozan for at least ten years to come.

After more reciting of sutras and the presentation of a poem by Roshi the guests left the zendo and gathered in the big hall.

The mayor of Asendorf gave a speech and welcomed the opening of the monastery serving also as a kind of community center very much. He underlined that ShoE and he himself cooperated from early on developing the former farm into a community center or monastery. He as mayor and police officer supports the founding of such a place like Hokuozan very much, because he feels that the opportunity to lay aside for some time your stressful burdens, to slow down your pace of life, and to really talk to and meet each other, are very precious in today's stress ridden society. As a sign of welcome he handed a plate with the emblem of Asendorf to ShoE with the wish that this should be displayed at Hokuozan to underline the friendly and supporting connection between Asendorf and Hokuozan.

It followed a marvelous concert by a mixed chorus, singing German and international songs. After this the buffet was opened and delicious vegetarian food was available. The Japanese drum group (with Hamburg sangha member Oana) gave their performance and their drum rhythms floated around and let the air (and the bodies of all listeners) vibrate.

The guests received an exquisite book on the ODZ-lineage compiled by ShoE and Jigen. The book is produced with outmost care and in its visual design deeply rooted in our zen spirit. It gives valuable information about our lineage (starting from the original Buddha), about Mumon Roshi and Harada Roshi and the current ODZ groups and monasteries. The poems by Roshi are an inspiring read and tie our wide northern lands and Hokuozan to the teachings of Sogen and the ancient path of the Buddha. Roshi wished in his Offering Poem for All that everyone may take this unending, naturally quiet mind home with them.

We all will deeply remember this special day and are very grateful that the Dharma of the Rinzai lineage of Mumon and ShoDo Harada Roshi is now flourishing also in northern Germany and will be kept alive and be nourished by ShoE Zenshi.