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Ekizen Monograph n.4

# ROHATSU VIGIL

## SHINNYO-JI ZEN TEMPLE



December 8<sup>th</sup> 2011

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## TESTIMONIES

I've come closer to Zen in the past few months.

My will not to falter is great, however, sometimes it happens.

I get disappointed, but then I focus... without any goals of achievement and return to being myself, with myself. I feel fallible, even amongst other sentient beings that can improve. Improve in the relationship with others and in everyday activities, important ones and lesser important ones alike. Practicing together helps us discover our personal character, our attitude and capabilities. Silence is a precious guide.

Gasshō

Valentina



### **A year after my first Rohatsu**

The time has gone by quickly, an entire year has passed since my first Rohatsu vigil, since then, many things have happened, even in my path of practice. Of utmost importance and fundamental ground: I received the vowels to Bodhisattva. I still have that splendid day of joy in the middle of this year fixed in my mind and in a way, represents a great divide. In the end, I never thought about it or never imagined it, but I have change. I even have a new name that refers to my practice: Ben-shin, to discern the truth. After the summer and following difficulties after my ordination, I seem to be more awake and sturdier than a year ago. There are still many clouds yet to dissipate, but my practice is a sturdy support.

At this point, I would like to thank the Teacher and my fellow Sangha, particularly those who I consider more advanced than I, seeing how they began earlier and have more experience. Now that my eyes see better, I understand how much effort they have made, in silence and without having me notice, so that other people and I can find a welcoming environment to practice in, a Zen temple in Florence, something unusual and unexpected.

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Now I'm trying to be more present and to commit myself even more in my practice, both in everyday life and at the Temple, I realized that the path is harder and more tiring than I had thought, even if there are more moments when I feel lighthearted and in symphony with my life. Anyway, seeing how I feel like a rustic mountain goat, I will do my best to use my robust hooves.

Gasshō

Ben-shin



I have been practicing nearly a year at Shinnyo-ji and since then time has gone by as quickly as the wind. Now, I feel as if I have been there for years, and as if I've known the other regulars for years (or longer). The only reasonable thing I can say is "thank you", a thank you from the heart to everyone for your support (and for putting up with my innumerable questions), knowing that there are still lots of things to improve and learn, I realized that I have already learned very much from this experience. I don't know what tomorrow will bring, I've learned that one can't be certain of anything because everything changes quickly and suddenly, but I surely appreciate what I understand today.



Margherita receives the Taking of Refuge in the Three Treasures by Zen Master Shinnyo Roshi

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I would have other things to say, but I realize that I'm not able to translate my thoughts into words and sensations.

I wish everyone a happy Path and that you find it useful.

Margherita



It took me a long time to collect my ideas for this testimony. Once, when I thought I knew a lot about Zen, it was easier for me to write about it. Not much physical time has past since then, rather, lots of “mental” time has. Just a few months ago I decided that I should/would like to become a Zen monk. I still ask myself what would change. Since then, I have sat in Zazen, yes and no, five times. It's not bad for someone who had to do the Shukke Tokudō ceremony.

Life is strange and marvelous at once. Just like sand, you can't hold it in your hand. There are moments when I believe to be much more present with myself, even without “living a Zen life”.

I feel very connected to the Temple, to the other Sangha and to the Teacher, the in a different way, almost detached, and also profoundly attached. I don't know exactly what that means, maybe nothing, but that's how it is.

The hard work that life has assigned to me is absolutely remarkable. I now realize that life hasn't kept anything from me. I lost my mother when I was a child, my father was never home, I had dear friends (of which a close friend) who committed suicide, I lost everything I owned in business deal gone wrong, love always hurt me, my favorite uncle, who I played with as a child, ended up in a psychiatric clinic then died of untreated cancer, I am a father (with all of the weight of responsibility involved in such), I have been diagnosed two times with a terminal illness by mistake, this is just the beginning...

There are times in which I didn't know how to move on.

Today, after having starting all over again from the beginning a year ago, I occupy an important role in a primary agency, I earn excellent wages and am respected by my senior colleagues. Also, I have just published a book for a very important Italian editor with a 20-year editorial contract.

I wonder what's the point of all this. The point of my resilience, in my case of survival, and I must say, success.

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The point is, I think, is the testimony. The ability to say to others in difficulty: be strong, courageous, and don't give up!

This is what I try to do, with all of the difficulties in life that will never be solved, will never be peaceful, but will be.

Gasshō

Shin-kai



**Ei**

Vain yhtä ja samaa  
Olen pyrkinyt ilmaisemaan  
Mutta kieli aiheeni lamaa  
Se ei istu sen maisemaan  
Missä kasvavat opit ja aiheet,  
minkä tunnetaan määrät ja vaiheet.

Ei, olen hukassa jälleen  
Laulu outo on sepittäjälleen  
Ja aihe vain rinnassa hiertää  
Sen ympäri lauluni kiertää  
Eikä tavoita konsanaan,  
jos takerrun "on" sanaan  
ei sitä "ei"-lläkään ilmaista voida  
mutta antaa laulun soida:

Se on kevään tulo kaupunkiin  
Se on leikkivät lapsen työtä.  
Ja kun linnut heittävät laulun niin  
Se on syksyn kaihossa myötä.

Ilmaa vain on hengitys,  
vaan sitä ilman elää voi emme  
ilmaa hennompaa on rakkaus  
mut sitä ilman hoipertelemme.

En voi sanoa: "nyt se on tässä."  
Enkä sanoitta saa sanoja pois.  
Niinpä voisinkin, niinpä niin,  
Tätä jatkaa kai ikuisuuksiin.

Shin-kō



Shin-kō and Lisa during their musical performance



## Rohatsu 2011

Dear Teacher, at the end of our meeting on the day dedicated to training in Zen tradition, you asked me to write a testimony of my experience. Lots of time has passed since then and in the meantime, a request to write something for Rohatsu Vigil has arrived; both of these have brought me to reflect on the many aspects of your teachings and how they have changed my life in these past months.

During the Teisho, you said that someone had affirmed that one comes to the Temple because you are here. Teacher, this is without a doubt true, both for how you express the Transmission of a Linage and for your personality as a Teacher.

As far as I'm concerned, I came to the Temple, not just because there was a Teacher, please allow me to explain further.

I always doubted Teachers, I ever trusted anyone who defined themselves as such; this is simply because I have never before encountered a true one, but this isn't completely true. It's more honest to say that I wasn't ready yet, and by ready I mean that I was too proud, selfish to admit that I needed a Teacher. If you remember, during our first meeting we spoke about Shiatsu, a practice that we, in some ways, share. You invited me to dedicate the treatment as we do in Zazen. I thanked you for your advice, and you said to me, with strength, it wasn't advice, it was a teaching. I wasn't yet ready to accept this term, but something inside me moved, and began my practice anyway.

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Do you remember my doubts on whether or not I was a Buddhist? Or even better, to accept the definition or not? There are still temptations to run away, to not take part, to not recognize myself as subordinate in respect to you. But thanks to you and your teachings, I have moved on, up to taking the vowels of the Bodhisattva.

It was a very important moment for me, as a man, as a Buddhist; it wasn't an arrival point, but a new departure, a challenge to take, a responsibility to serve others. I regret not being able to say the Shigu Seigan Mon during the Ceremony and I am very happy that you invited us to do it at the end of the daily Zazen, because for me, is the most efficient way to remember myself and the importance of the commitment I have made to myself. Something in particular struck me from the last meeting and still remains in my heart: when you told me that someone had moved the zabuton (is that what it's called?) with their foot and this is something not to be done because it was disrespectful towards the nature of the Buddha that is literally in everything! I don't know how to tell you how many times your words have obliged me to question what I understand about the nature of Buddha and how far my understanding is from your way of seeing the world. There's still so much path yet to undertake!

Since then, I try to be as respectful as possible towards everything, even the most filthy and useless things, and not only towards people or objects that are important or sacred by definition, because everything is sacred.

It is a huge excersize on humility, for myself, it is not always easy, by when I hear the voice of my ego returning to speak once again, I put it away, if you like, I will explain how. Other than the practice of Zazen, there is another gesture that I learned the last few months that is now very important to me, that is doing Sanpai.

Kneeling on the ground helps me recuperate the right humility and to redefine my relationship with others; I try to do it every morening, as soon as I get out of bed, I do it, mentally, every time my pride tries to take over.

In all of this, and other things, I can do nothing but thank you, Teacher, your teachings, your continuous presence; I think you for allowing me to take this path with you, under your guide: and most of all, welcoming me into your Lineage.

Kuhai to you, Teacher

Shin-nen

Gasshō



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This year of practice was very intense, full of new experiences and commitment

I found it very difficult to entirely communicate the sense of this experience, and in the end, recognizing my inability to express it correctly, I chose just a few lines that in some way encompass the most important themes that I encountered throughout the past year:

With faith in my Path

Without goals of achievement

We trust our Teacher

Like a clear mirror

That reflects our image

That we slowly welcome

Gasshō

Yū-shin



It is difficult to write this year's testimony after a very tiring Zazenkai. Just as the Teacher sometimes says, "We are heroes!"

Sunday morning (after a week of studying and working): the alarm goes off at 6:30 am, and I rush to take the train, I rush to get to the Temple on time, I rush to finished the work that the Teacher as assigned to us... and in the end, it doesn't ever really go well. The accent is always placed on what doesn't go well.

This is my Zen experience. It is very different from what one would expect: well-being, relaxation and concentration. Yes, but under stress!

Although it is a hard practice, and I hear it being said, "but who makes you do it?" and often it comes to mind that I should quit everything and spend my Sunday shopping or hanging out with friends on Saturday evening... I couldn't, I don't want to, not in the least.

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For my good (because practicing under our Teacher is a life lesson), for the good of those who will come and for the good of every being.

Mushotoku.

Gasshō,

Laura Lō.



### **For whom do I practice?**

Asking myself this question and not responding has happened throughout this year of practice. I think back to the past few months in my mind, from the illuminate peak of the Ordination to the shadowy valleys of the following months.

Thinking back I can reflect upon the steps I have made on my path. A path characterized by passages of elevated crests, kissed by the glorious morning sunlight. A path often found at the bottom of a valley, in the deep darkness and thick vegetation. A downhill path leading to fords of frigid waters with rocky shores. A path that did not ease my breathlessness as I climb the steep hills towards splendid fields of grass and calm skies. These mountainous glimpses, that are a part of my everyday life, are a profound background and metaphor for this year's Practice.

Sitting here writing this testimony, I think of the path taken and I stop to observe it. I realize that it has been awhile since I have seen either peak or valleys, I no longer hear the roar of the wind in crest of the sun, nor the rustle of the brush as I walk, nor do I hear the water flowing upon the cobblestone, I don't move uphill nor downhill, I don't have breath.

There is Silence. The Silence of the heart and of the mind that finally opens the Path. It only took an instant of interior silence to take in the Indication that the Teacher manifests, to trust the Teaching and to arrive on another path, indescribable through words, because my eyes can't see, my ears can't hear, my feet can't walk. I can only cultivate this Quietness to continue with wholeheartedness and welcome the Indication from the Teacher.

Silence was the theme of last year, but it's just now growing in me... It took years of training and discipline, guided by the Teacher everyday, so I could arrive and realize that silent interior moment.

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These words are to testify and express my gratefulness to the Teacher, for recognizing me and transmitting the Precepts, for her continuous aligning of my steps upon the Path.

Yō-shin



I don't know how the graceful walk proceeds in our hearts, I only know that it is an enormous secret and silent mystery.

Taking Refuge through the Teacher gave me an unexpected feeling, this was the beginning. Personal affairs didn't allow me to frequent the Temple often, the Teacher's punctual and discrete attention via email instilled the sensation of a Sangha within me, through time, my heart allowed itself to open and listen closely and profoundly.

These convictions have arisen from daily practice, they help us, the Temple and myself live, fully in the present.

Through reading the emails from the Teacher, and by perceiving her presence, it was consoling to hear the interior purity of her words, capable of seeing everything that real that exists, and that faith is the staring at life, a waiting protector, trusting the silence through a passive activity.

I heard, during the Zazen sessions, the participation of the Sangha, its live community being not one close to the other, but one with the other, living with attention, in thoughtful interest towards the other, the continuous flow of I toward You.

In such a good, fruitful and joyous atmosphere, like that of our Temple, each one of us has the possibility to expand one's conscious, as well as give thanks that we live together with the mystery of being that we encounter along the path and with every Being.

Even from afar, this is how much I feel that I have lived and perceived, trying to be a part of your hearts as you are a part of mine...

Thank you for your patience and attention, greeting to all of you and the Teacher with gratefulness and affection.

Gasshō.

Nilo



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Thank you Teacher Shinnyo for your teachings. Thank you for your untiring effort which allows each one of us to practice Zen. It is a great blessing, I hope that we don't forget it.

Thank you Shinnyo-ji Sangha and every friend for when we support each other, we are one.

I believe that there is one path, one life, one practice, and one heart.

Everything has been said, there is nothing special.

Gasshō,

Shin-kō



### **What I see in my Zazen**

After a few years of meditative practice, I see within and outside of myself, in what way and how much our everyday life and meditation intersect between the two, they mutually influence each other both on a physical and perceptive scale.

Just like peeling a metaphorical onion... one crosses layers of resistance and conflict keeping toward the central idea of one's profound self that always moves a step forward, a mirror game without words or judgment, even in the continual temptation and falling into words and judgment.

An endless Practice.

In order to stay outside of mental patterns of thought and representations about my practice, I prefer... to observe here and now the most insistent and concrete elements that encumber my Zazen and the clarity of my service at the Temple. It seem correct to understand where I am, what I am living and what I can do to improve my connection.

### **Zazen.....**

Thought.... Easy and immediate, let our thoughts flow undetached and innocently during Zazen, even the most apparently bizarre or random.

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I breath.... I retreat, breathing, to a quiet territory of very little mental activity. It was easy in the beginning of my Practice, and is still more or less is.

It is easy for me to climb upon the wagon of respiration while attempting to comb out the tension within my body.

Posture... It is more difficult for me to perceive and focus without concentrating on the body's posture, set aside the imperfections and patiently accept the knots of tension.

Sometimes, in the slowly growing void of Zazen, I don't know how to encourage to the dialogue of my respiration alone with the knots. This is how the latter becomes a barrage, or a disturbance and irritation: a real invitation to distraction, judgment or the invasive arising of dispersive and unresolvable movements.

Components of Restlessness and typical dispersion of my personality.

A *Straight Practice* is missing. Disturbed by perceptions, judgments, choices, interferences or meditations.

I watch... more than any other imperfection, from the very beginning of my practice and up to today, I encounter a recurring difficulty or inconstancy to keep my eyes still and low.

Difficulty to position or rest my gaze in a graceful and determined way within a contained area, and keep it alert in a constant and diligent gaze upon myself.

I elude myself often, sooner or later I'll "slip away". I surprise myself with my mind healthily empty but with my wandering gaze, that wandered, or that is turning to the darkness within rather than to the light outside, and even oblivious of what is happening, and what is the point of escape.

And the wall, suddenly, has become an elusive unheard teacher.

It is a *Straight Vision* that leaves little to desire, and that must be tamed and trained to improve results.

Vigilance... in the end is difficult due to tiredness from work, accumulating sleepiness, to avoid falling into how I feel, like I'm in a "state of blessed trance", more than the *Correct Concentration* for Zazen, "Awakening meditation".

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Vigilanza..... Difficile, infine, a causa della stanchezza per gli impegni di vita e per il sonno carente, evitare di cadere talvolta in ciò che sento come uno “stato di trance beata”, piuttosto che essere la *Corretta Concentrazione* nello Zazen, “meditazione del Risveglio”.

In the matter of mine

### **Practicing with the Sangha**

I continue to surprise myself in a discrete difficulty to keep silence whenever necessary, and to observe the correct purpose of words.

*A Straight Word* often unobserved, possibly with good intentions to help, rather, create confusion.

Without expectations, without judging myself too much and trying my best to be honest in defining at which point I find myself today on the map of my trail, I see the these constant signs of difficulty, spontaneously coming afloat and always clearly recognizable as difficulties in my meditation, are indicating what I’m doing wrong and what I must to in this moment, most of all in my body and in my daily life.

Raising silence, concentration, determinations and vigilance on myself and on my mind, and at the same time encourage the opening and abandonment of my heart.

Reduce dispersion, conditioned reactions and tendencies to refuge in the blessedness of the void (oftentimes yearned for in its rarity), avoiding a dreamlike and rebellious contemplation to the concept of time and limits.

This is exposed to my attention, I accept it, I propose to improve upon it.

Therefore...

Gasshō and thanks to my Teacher Shinnyo Roshi and her intent and Compassionate blessing exerted through my continuous reflections on my image and stillness.

Gasshō and thank you to every Brother and Sister Sangha of Shinnyo-ji, who proceed, fall and get up again, together with me, in the continuous eco in a network of steps without defined personal borders, cellular images of one creature.

Dai-shin Fabio Portera



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Yes! Walking helped me arrive at the Temple on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010, I remember perfectly, and I will never forget the impact the Teacher had on me. I was moved... To break the ice I dared to ask to speak in an informal manner. The answer was a dry “no”!!! Many in my place, I think, wouldn't have had a good impression or wouldn't have returned to the Temple. To me, that response sincerely shook me. As if it were to teach me right away that the Path is not comfortable, it is not welcoming and everyone will suffer! Rather, I felt a great impact. I will always remember the invitation starting from that evening to practice Zazen everyday. From that evening on, I began to visit Shinnyo-ji, I took Refuge and I discovered a beautiful Sangha that supports me throughout my Path. And even today, I have the certainty that the only important thing for me in life is to uncover the present moment, to immerse myself in the instant, first the instant, participate in Oneness and feel one with the Universe.

Grazie Shinnyo-ji.

Gasshō,

Leonardo



Gregorio plays Moppan before Zazen

When I found out that I had to testify on my experience at Shinnyo-ji, a thousand thoughts, sentences and words flooded my mind for weeks. The dismay and indecision took over me, until I realized that the meditative experience that I've been living for more than a year now is a part of my unchangeable essence and something incommunicable. One understands and takes in an experience such as this one

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only through the practice itself, each word, in my opinion, blossoms without ever being picked, it is estimated and imitated in what cannot be narrated but only demonstrated. Needless to say: we are not satisfied with a detailed story of a tasty meal, but only eating it.

Gasshō.

Gregorio G.



Reflecting upon this year of Practice, which is my first, I thought about the first day I came to the Temple, the first meeting with the Teacher and the other practicing people, my expectations and what exactly I found and confronted, and the relationship I had everyday with my Practice and the Temple.

I am thinking more and more about the past few months. First of all, how important it is for me to regularly visit the Temple and the Sangha to continue my Practice. Returning to Shinnyo-ji after a long absence I felt that the Practice was easier and deeper. I understood how important the influence of the other regulars is and the importance of the presence of Teacher during the sessions.

Another thing I was thinking about are the works that the Teacher often repeated this year, that is, to practice with an “open heart”. I reflected upon this many times and for me it has become a daily intention: to live and practice with an open heart. I often times repeat it to myself before leaving the house to remind myself not to get wrapped up in myself and in my thoughts but to be open and welcome what life give me. I seem to live a richer life, immersed and more aware.

Gasshō

Gregorio P.



I am happy to have found the Shinnyo-ji Temple, thanks to our Teacher and her teachings, I learned to go beyond pain and to put my brain in crisis, with this I began to improve day by day and I began to see things from a different angle, uncommon.

Gasshō

Hayko



It's been just over a year since I began my Zen path.

I was strongly influenced to practice by a compelling and necessary spiritual search to understand the secrets to obtain an ideal interior equilibrium both in my daily life and in martial arts.

These were the principle motivations that pushed me to practice.

With time, however, my search still evolves.

The basis remains but the practice and results have slowly changed.

Now I'm trying to sit in Zazen without goals of achievement, sometimes, I feel that I have these goals, and I try, in the most serene way possible, to live my Zazen.

Even the result of my practice, as I said, is changing. Infact, if at first I practiced only and exclusively for myself, now I try to practice to be a better person in relation with others, trying to be compassionate toward other people as a universal entity, even if this, is sometimes very far from consciousness.

Gassho.

Furio.



Dear Teacher Anna Maria,

I thank you for welcoming me with love to your Temple and I wanted to tell you that the hours spent with you the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> were very deep and beautiful .

T♥H♥A♥N♥K♥S with a gesture of great friendship and light, today is the day of Saint Lucy, from your friend and admirer

Lucia



Zazen during Rohatsu Vigil at Shinnyo-ji Temple

## ROHATSU MENÙ



*Basmati Rice with gomashio,*

*Vegetable soup,*

*Vegetable stew,*

*Quiche with vegetables and cheese.*





Group photo during Rohatsu Vigil at Shinnyo-ji Temple

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## HAIKU

1.  
akebono ya  
shirau shiroki  
koto issun.

(Matsuo Bashō 1644-1694)

2.  
hitoha chiri  
totsu hito da chiru  
kaze no ue.

(Ransetsu 1654-1707)

3.  
Obana (eulalia)  
Ari to mite  
tanomu zo kataki  
utsusemi no  
yo o ba nashi to ya  
omoinashitemu

(Anonimo)

4.  
Taibito to wagana yobaren, hatsushigure.

(Matsuo Bashō 1644-1694)

5.  
yuki ore mo  
kikoete kuraki  
yo nara kana.

(Buson 1715-1783)

6.  
hakikeru ga  
tsui ni wa hakazu  
ochiba kana.

(Taigi 1709-1771)

7.  
tada oreba  
oru tote yuki no  
furi ni keri.

(Issa 1762-1826)

8.  
Kimi ga tame  
oshikarazarishi  
inochi sae  
nagaku mogana to  
omoinuru kana.

(Fujiwara no Teika 1162-1241)



Kin-hin under the stars

**KIN-HIN**

Alle nuvole  
e' sospesa la notte;  
ovunque lo Zen.

Thanks again,  
Shin-nen  
Gasshō