

WINTER/SPRING PRACTICE PERIOD  
AT ZEN MOUNTAIN CENTER, 1969



*Tassajara Creek by the steam rooms, approaching high water, February 1969.*

As a result of a series of record rains in Monterey County, Tassajara was isolated from the outside world for most of the three-month 1969 winter/spring practice period. The 14-mile dirt road to Tassajara which crosses Chew's Ridge at 5,000 feet was already nearly impassable by the beginning of the training period, and continuing heavy rains closed the road completely by cutting a gully a hundred feet long and three to six feet deep. The evening after the County repair crew filled the gully it snowed heavily on Chew's Ridge and the Tassajara truck, which had left for supplies immediately after the repair crew had finished, was stranded in Monterey for the winter. Two weeks later, a rain-caused rock-slide took out part of the road and left behind a 300-ton sandstone boulder. The five feet of snow on Chew's Ridge prevented the County from coming in and the road remained closed. The telephone was also out and the only communication between Tassajara and the outside was through couriers who either hiked on snowshoes over the mountain, or forded the swollen creek five miles downstream to use the telephone at the Arroyo Seco Ranger Station.

One day a student hiked to Church Creek Ranch to see how the nearest (and in the winter, the only) neighbors of Tassajara were doing and found that caretakers Larry and Jules Law had only a few days' provisions left. Word of this was brought over the mountain to the Lambert Ranch in Jamesburg and immediate supplies were brought from Tassajara. The Lamberts tried packing in to Church Creek on horseback but had to turn back because the crusted snow was cutting the chests of the horses. So the Church family in Salinas had provisions ferried in by helicopter, including the mail for Tassajara and a few carrots and some salt.



*The new kitchen at Tassajara, being built entirely by the students with stone from the creek. The second phase of the project will join the kitchen with the existing zendo, not shown here.*

*Rafter detail, Tassajara kitchen. The large beams of Coulter Pine were taken from Chew's Ridge, six miles from Zen Mountain Center, the smaller horizontal braces from a felled sycamore in Tassajara Canyon. The wood has been assembled through a system of complex joints, doweled and pegged.*





*Boulders on the Tassajara Road. The smaller one was about the size of a Volkswagen.*

For a seemingly interminable period, the rains came nearly every day. The students dug an extensive series of run-off ditches and draped long sheets of plastic over their roofs to cover the leaks. Sitting in the zendo during the heavy rains, one could hear the low thuds of rocks rolling underwater in Tassajara Creek and feel their vibrations through the zafus. Usually the creek was so high that the steam rooms at the hot baths were awash, and in one storm the water rose above the level of the hot plunges, 15 feet above creek level. The next morning the bridge was gone and Bill Shurtleff and Niels Holm strung a rope bridge between the beams of the baths and a sycamore on the opposite bank.

Much of the planned work was suspended because of the rain and lack of construction supplies, but alternate projects were found and completed. The downhill field between the cabins and the pool was sifted and composted and then graded into four terraces, thereby doubling the garden space. The pine beams for the new kitchen had been lifted into place on the stone walls in December and during the winter the roof was put on. The ceiling over the plunges, which came down early in the rains, was rehung and plastered and the leaky second story of the bath house was torn down. With the reusable redwood from the bath house, the former sewing room in the first barn was converted into a dormitory for women. The relocated seamstresses made curtains for the guest cabins, denim aprons for the cooks, and robes, skirts, pants and shirts to order until everyone had Tassajara-made zendo wear.



*Bulldozer operator Eldin Pura widened Tassajara Creek to divert and slow down its flow.*

If it didn't rain for four or five days supplies could be packed upstream from Arroyo Seco, about forty pounds to a hiker, but this was seldom done and the students made do with essentials after luxuries like margarine and wheat flour ran out. There were wheat berries on hand but not enough propane to run the generator to mill them into flour, so the berries were boiled whole with white rice. Eventually the diet was made up mostly of brown rice and lentils with bean and seed sprouts and foraged wild greens like Miner's Lettuce and Water-dock for vegetables.

Then one day it was quite clearly spring and the snow began to melt on the ridge and a week later Katagiri Sensei hiked in from Arroyo Seco for seven days with the students. The County road crew came in and after a few days decided to blast the sandstone. In all it took them two weeks to open the road but all kinds of supplies were carried around the boulder, including a winter's worth of parcel post.

Afterwards, most students said they felt pretty good about the practice period, although Suzuki Roshi had had to remain in San Francisco, convalescing from a lingering illness during the entire winter. Being at Tassajara without a Master for the first time during a practice period had made the students uneasy at first, but they ended up with some trust in Tassajara itself.

*(As of February 8th the weather hasn't been nearly so spectacular. There is no snow on the ridge, and the road has only been out for a few days. The creek, though it rose suddenly one day after a storm, taking the new bath bridge with it, dropped again just as suddenly and has been, in general, well behaved.)*

*There are fifty-five students at Tassajara this training period and five priests. Acting Abbot, Tatsugami Sotan Roshi, has made many changes in the practice, and his dynamic presence, like a "strong wind", is felt in every phase of life there.)*

#### 1969 GUEST SEASON AT TASSAJARA

During the practice periods the common focus of students at Tassajara is seemingly simple—getting to the zendo on time, eating the repetitive zendo diet, working mindfully, continually trying to make "right effort" to follow the schedule and the few basic rules. During guest season, though, when Tassajara is a resort hotel as well as a Buddhist training center and is a favorite stopping place for hikers in the National Forest and for local sight-seers, the students' practice suddenly becomes both more complex and more public. It is an entirely new situation. On the one hand, discipline is relaxed. There are trips to town, and a variety of "exotic" foods are available—coffee, pastries, meat cooked for the guests. Students are asked to join the guests in a glass of wine or beer, there is music, and the camp often buzzes with activity late into the night. The usual rule of maintaining silence before breakfast and after evening zazen must be abandoned, and students are on widely varying schedules depending on what specific duties they are performing. On the other hand, the students' presence, both in and out of the zendo, is representative to many of what the teachings of Buddhism mean, or can mean, to Americans.



*Willow Creek, near Tassajara, in June.*

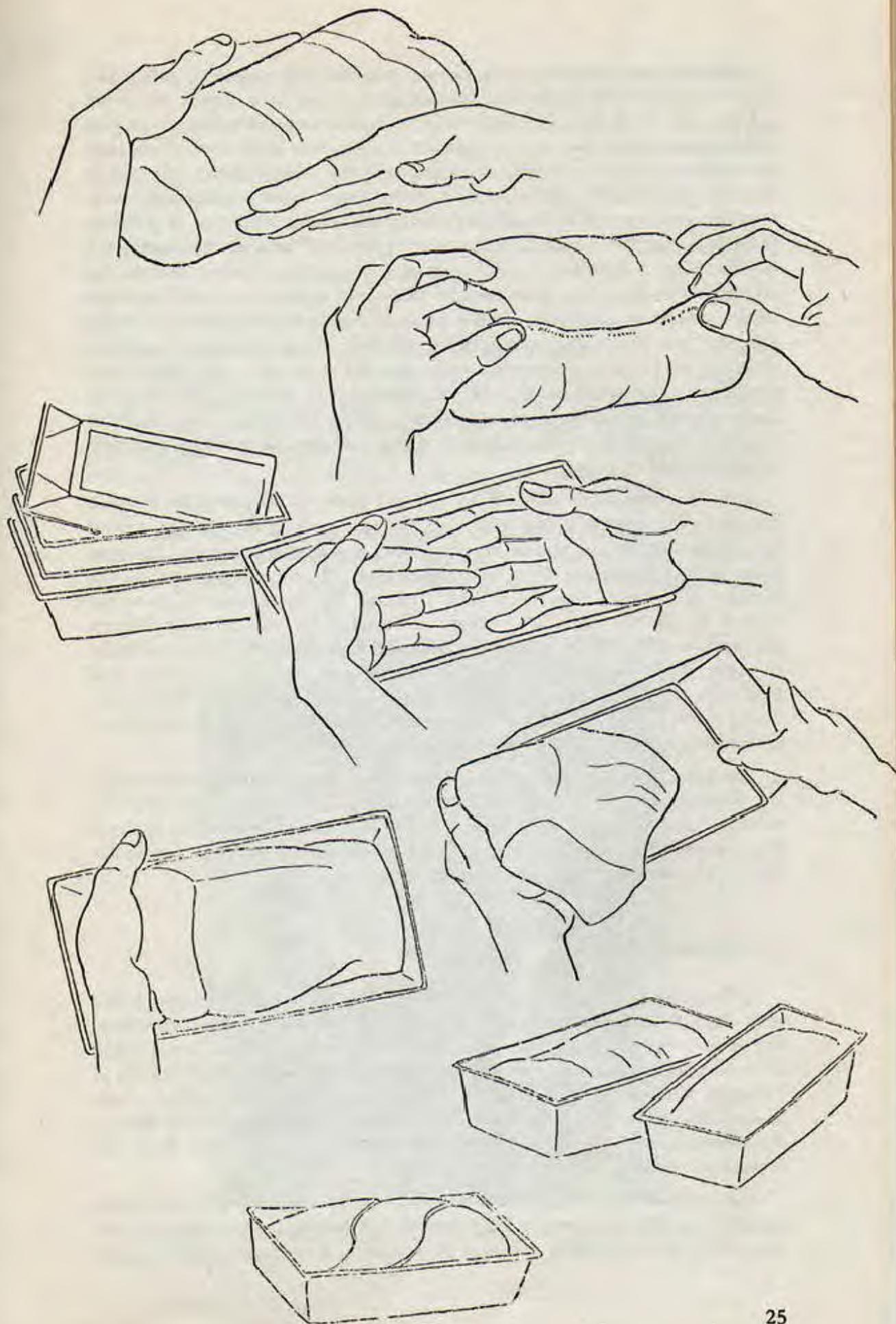
At first many of the older students who had been at Tassajara during training periods found it difficult to share their community with the daily influx of new and varied faces. The relaxation of discipline and the holiday atmosphere were felt as intrusions. For most students, however, the sense of intrusion gradually changed to one of satisfaction at being able to share the practice, and the friendliness and interest of the guests was met with an effort to serve them and to answer their many questions. Zazen instruction was given twice daily for anyone who wished to sit in the zendo, and students eating in the guest dining room engaged in informal discussions of Zen practice and Buddhist philosophy, answering innumerable, often demanding questions: "Why do you shave your heads?" "Do you believe in Our Lord Jesus Christ?" "How can I find God?" "Why did you come to Tassajara?"

*"We need more cooks, not more cookbooks" (Charles Brooks).*

*Bread makes itself, by your kindness, with your help, with imagination running through you, with dough under hand, you are breadmaking itself, which is why breadmaking is so fulfilling and rewarding.*

*A recipe doesn't belong to anyone. Given to me, I give it to you. Only a guide, only a skeletal framework. You must fill in the flesh according to your nature and desire. Your life, your love will bring these words into full creation. This cannot be taught. You already know. So please cook, love, feel, create.*

*The above is from the introduction to The Tassajara Bread and Goodie Cookbook, written by head cook E. Espe Brown and edited by Alan Marlowe. At right is one of the illustrations by Francis Thompson. The cookbook is still in the testing stage, and formal plans for publication have not yet been made.*



As in the year before a number of psychiatrists, psychologists, philosophy teachers and writers came to share the practice and to experience the Zen teachings at work. One man came to do research on a book he was writing on prisons, mental institutions and monasteries. He came back a few weeks later and stayed for over a month as a guest-student, taking part in the student schedule and sitting in the zendo. In general there was a marked increase in interest in zazen and in Buddhism among the guests compared to previous guest seasons. There seemed to be more guests at Tassajara who had come to share the atmosphere of the practicing community, either directly, by taking part in the zendo schedule and often joining the students in the day's work as well, or indirectly, simply by spending their time quietly, walking, enjoying the hot baths, and relating sincerely to the students and their practice. Many guests attended zazen for the first time, and then came regularly to the zendo to sit and participate in the services. Lecture nights always found the aisles filled with guests, almost all sitting on the floor as comfortably as they could, making an effort to follow the students' example of stillness and attentiveness.

Still, the attractions which have brought guests to Tassajara for the past hundred years remain strong. One man has been coming to take the sulphur baths since 1919, and recalls the days when a stagecoach traveled the road from Salinas bi-weekly, bringing visitors from all over the country to the famous spa. Others have long been attracted by the chance to leave the coastal fog for the warm dry sunlight of Tassajara Canyon; to walk through the green woods and appreciate the beautiful views from the mountain trails; to enjoy the deep swimming hole at the Narrows and the bamboo-hedged pool near the cabins; and to partake of the unusual and simple food in the dining room. Over a thousand loaves of Tassajara breads have been sold to hikers and guests, many to be taken home as gifts to friends.

The guest season ended with a special dinner served in the dining room to the students and the few remaining guests. Dr. Wenner from Monterey—the volunteer family doctor of Tassajara and a good friend of the Zen students there—supplied a taped rock concert, and people danced in the garden by the light of kerosene lamps and the autumn stars.

## TASSAJARA SCHOOL

Is Tassajara a monastery, and if so, how can we practice a monastic life with children underfoot? Or, is Tassajara an intentional practice community, and if so, why can't we have marriages and children here? We had decided early on that, as a community, there should be room for married couples at Tassajara. Children seemed another problem entirely, complicated by a lack of facilities—schools or nurseries—and by the worry that they would disrupt the monastic atmosphere and distract their mothers and fathers from the communal practice.

The children came themselves and showed us what to do: feed them regularly on the porch behind the zendo, but balance the brown rice and miso soup with pancakes and eggs occasionally. Encourage them to come

inside for services and zazen and lectures if they wanted to, and between times, let them run around and play and generally figure out how to take care of themselves in this new and wild mountain canyon world. This worked out well. Their ages were spread enough so that there were always older children to catch the younger ones when they were on the verge of directly investigating the true nature of rattle-snakes and high cliffs; enough younger children to keep the older ones from becoming overbearing, enough time in between zendo and work schedules for parents to be with their children; and more than enough resilience among the single Zen students to absorb the children into the community. In fact, almost everyone seemed pleased with this new aspect of life at Tassajara.

When it was felt that some structure was needed, one of the mothers began holding an informal and voluntary outdoor class for an hour or so every morning. All the children chose to come to hear stories of Buddha's life, to ask questions about the zendo and what we did there, and to be generally, gently introduced to Buddhism. Sometimes they studied lady-bugs and garter snakes. As the summer wore on, they seemed to come more and more often to the zendo.

Summer ended, and the paying guests left. Students began asking why, since the experiment had gone so well in the summer, there couldn't be children at Tassajara during the training periods. But training periods are



*Monica Linde, Eliot and Lethe Walters, and Jane Westberg outside of the Tassajara school-house.*



more intense. Parents don't have so much time to spend taking care of their children. And it rains often so they can't just run around outside all day. We established a school in one of the cabins. Jane Westberg, who had made her living as a teacher, was chosen as the head teacher. Two couples said that they wanted to bring their children to Tassajara for training period—three children in all, two girls and one boy, six, seven and eight years old.

No one wanted an ordinary school. Through discussions between Jane and several other people concerned with and knowledgeable about education, the school's "structure" and "courses" were decided on: the main emphasis was to be on natural history, studying the immediate Tassajara environment. (For instance, Jane read a book about honey bees to her mildly interested class one day, and the next took them out to the hives on Grasshopper Flat where the beekeeper revealed the mysteries to be found in an opened hive to the now very excited children). The class also did a lot of art work, learned the names of all the trees and read and studied arithmetic. The children continued investigating Buddhist practice. Outside of classes they chanted at their own impromptu services, and all knew the regular student chants by heart. They appointed the only boy to be "Roshi".

The situation was conducive to finding where each child's interest lay, and to letting him follow it with the energy and concentration which a child brings to those things that are important to him. At Tassajara, the children seemed able to develop more responsibility for themselves and for their lives in school than they had before. But the school was a fairly radical change for all of the children and they were a little uncertain, in the absence of blackboards and grades, whether they were "learning" anything or not. Only time will show what got learned in school, but it is already obvious that young children can, and probably always will, be an integral part of the practice life at Tassajara, and in the new city building as well.

Here are some poems that the three children wrote:

*the rocks are big  
the world is big  
I am sitting  
on the rocks*

*one day I went to  
the seven dwarfs.  
they looked like little men  
maybe we looked like giants*

*the trees are yellow  
the sun is yellow  
and gold is yellow too*

*I wish I was skating  
on the ice  
in the bucket!*

*there were lots of rock-cakes  
by the caves*

And some questions they had for Roshi:

*How come you gave us all those tangerines and candy and cough drops?  
Why do you smack people with a stick?  
Why are you the most important person here?  
Why do you think that we are the good students?*

## TRAVELERS

### TATSUGAMI ROSHI AT TASSAJARA

During the winter/spring practice period the training at Tassajara is being directed by Tatsugami Sotan Ryosen Roshi. He has come from Japan at the invitation of Suzuki Roshi, who will remain in San Francisco this winter at the new Zen Center building. Katagiri Sensei, Chino Sensei and Yoshimura Sensei are alternating in assisting Tatsugami Roshi.

At Eiheiji Monastery, where he served for twelve years as head training Master (*Ino Roshi*), Tatsugami Roshi revealed what has been called his "international mind", a great facility in working with non-Japanese Zen students. Several Zen Center students met and studied with him at Eiheiji. Although he speaks no English and rarely makes use of a translator he has, says Yoshimura Sensei, who has known him since childhood, a powerful intuition which allows for a high degree of non-verbal communication and teaching.

Tatsugami Roshi originally was a painter. While he was studying for the entrance examinations to the National Art School however, he had an experience which led to his becoming a Soto Zen priest. As a monk, his early training was with a very strict Master, and Tatsugami Roshi's way is tough and strict as well. Physically imposing and a man of apparently boundless energy, he became the sumo wrestling champion of Eiheiji during his training

there, and sometimes went out to try his skill against professional wrestlers—successfully. But Yoshimura Sensei is quick to emphasize the Roshi's kind heart and his deep empathy with, and concern for, young students.

Tatsugami Roshi retired from his official position at Eiheiiji last year and since then has been living at his temple, about two hours away from Eiheiiji, his concerns shifting more and more to Zen Buddhism outside of Japan. At present he plans to return to his temple in April, at the end of the Tassajara practice period. We welcome Tatsugami Roshi to America, and wish to express our gratitude for his interest in us.

#### YOSHIMURA SENSEI

Yoshimura Ryogen Sensei came to San Francisco from Japan in March of 1969 to help Suzuki Roshi in teaching students at Zen Center and Zen Mountain Center. Speaking English well, he began lecturing in San Francisco soon after his arrival, and has also been visiting the affiliate zendos to lead zazen and to lecture.

He lives in San Francisco with his wife, Choko-san, and their young son, Gengo.

#### RICHARD BAKER

This fall Richard Baker returned from Japan with his wife Virginia and their daughter Sally for a three month visit in the United States. Dick was the founding director of Zen Mountain Center and, next to Suzuki Roshi, is the

*New faces at Zen Center: Karako Shojo, Tatsugami Sotan Roshi, and Yoshimura Ryogen Sensei. (Shojo-san stayed one month at Tassajara before leaving to become monk-in-residence with the Northampton, Massachusetts, Zen group. Araki Tesshu Sensei, a young priest from Wakayame Prefecture who has come to spend the practice period at Zen Mountain Center, is not shown here.)*

