

Wendy Pirsig's Journal Account of Wendy and Bob's Sesshin with Dainin Katagiri Roshi on September 17-23, 1979, Monday to Sunday

This account is purposely incomplete. I can only minimally characterize the most important aspects of the experience of meditation, either Bob's and my daily practice at home (we're now living in England), or what occurred at Zen Center that week. Katagiri Roshi's lectures may have been taped and that would be a better record of his words than what I could write. Taking no notes, I just made this summary the day after the sesshin had ended.

First two days: Terrible pain, more than I had ever dreamed. It didn't matter if I sat in the full lotus position, half lotus, or any way; it was all terrible. My thoughts dipped in and out of the surface of the pain and I didn't think anything.

There were about 40 of us, about equal numbers of men and women. The majority were in their mid to late 20s. Hour after hour, we sat cross-legged on black *zafu* cushions and *zabuton* mats, always in silence, facing the walls. The 40-minute *zazen* sessions were interspersed throughout the day with special periods such as *kinhin* or walking meditation, a morning lecture by Katagiri, and afternoon chores — all in silence or nearly so, except punctuated with bells and Japanese percussion instruments to denote the starts and ends. A written rule posted downstairs forbade talking, reading, or writing. Katagiri spent the entire meditation and mealtime with us, doing everything we did.

One girl dropped out after one day. One sleepy blond hippie-type boy fell asleep during lecture, and after that he could be seen spooning two or three spoons of instant coffee into his cup during breaks.

Bob and I were outsiders, though he had been a founding Zen Center member. He had left Minnesota three years before. Now back for a visit to his family, we signed up at the last minute for the sesshin as an opportunity for me to experience Zen awakening to emptiness. As visitors we were special students and Bob was my teacher. He sat beside me throughout, and unlike the others, the two of us were allowed to talk quietly between ourselves outside. We did not attend personal conferences with Katagiri, called *dokusan*, as the others did. During the breaks we'd stroll around the lake holding our coffee cups and stretching our aching backs, and dodged joggers and roller skaters and cyclists.

Katagiri's first-day lecture was almost incomprehensible to me, full of statements like, "Buddha nature means all sentient beings," and "All sentient beings means Buddha nature." Bob chuckled and nodded when Katagiri occasionally made a small joke or lighthearted comment. He had recently surprised everyone by asking people not to call him Roshi anymore. "It means Zen master, and I'm not a *Zen master*." He now prefers the term "Hojo," which just means "a six-foot square room." He is known that way in Nebraska, where he goes sometimes to teach. Bob and I laughed when we were told this before the sesshin, because the nickname sounds like that of the Howard Johnson's restaurant chain.

All week in his lectures Katagiri emphasized practice over enlightenment. He alluded to the difference between the Soto approach developed by the medieval Japanese scholar Dogen and that of the Rinzai. He said, when you sit *zazen*, you should do so "without frontal lobes" (or,

as it seemed to come out with his Japanese accent, something like “flontal robes”). During some of our walks later in the week with Bob, I made parallels between being Katagiri’s student vs. being Pirsig’s. Bob didn’t really take to this much. For one thing, he tends to not disengage his “frontal lobes” in his practice. He also strongly takes issue with traditional Zen ceremony, saying it countered the basic Buddhist truth of impermanence that the dynamic silence of zazen revealed.

The tone of the first days was dominated by the bewildering unfamiliarity of Zen ritual, and by resentful vibes that seemed directed at us from young, especially female, members of Zen Center. Perhaps they took sides with Bob’s first wife, Nancy, who is an active Zen Center member not participating in this sesshin, or else they resented his celebrity. Exceptions were Tony Artino (who taught and directed *oryoki* and serving), Erik Storlie (who sat opposite us in the Buddha Hall), and Karen Thorkelson (another of the original zennies who had brought Katagiri to Minneapolis). One woman had flown in from Denver just to attend this sesshin. She later told me that she first started sitting zazen after she happened to attend a big Minneapolis lecture Bob gave after the publication of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.

Right next to me sat a guy named Scott Edelstein, who teaches writing at the University of Minnesota. All through zazen he sat like a perfect soldier and bowed correctly with a formal Japanese bow, or *gassho*, before any exceptional movement, even scratching his nose. At the end of the second night, when the bell rang, he was seemingly in pain and nearly collapsed against the wall. I was afraid that was the end of him, but he was back on Day Three, and so were we.

Tony Artino was constantly “feeding good vibes into everyone,” as Bob put it. Balding with dark hair, he had a broad, chinny smile, and smiled a lot. He began the week beardless but didn’t shave all week. A dedicated Zen practitioner in his late 30s or maybe 40, he had come from California with Roshi in the early 70s, along with Norm Randolph and others, and supported himself in Minnesota through odd jobs. I recalled hearing through Nancy’s letters in recent years that while she was managing the family’s property in St. Paul, she had hired Tony to patch the driveway. As supervisor of *oryoki*, and thus the service of all our meals, Tony had more verbal contact with us than anyone else, and he was wonderful.

Before the sesshin began, while conversation was still permitted, Tony gathered the new students like us, or at least me (Bob remembered some things from his days here years ago) for a workshop called “*oryoki* instruction.” Since sesshins were organized to function just as those of Japanese monks in monasteries, we needed to be shown everything so that the complicated traditional meal would proceed in silence without any questions or distracting gestures. Wearing a navy-blue Japanese-style jacket with matching baggy pants, Tony executed a *gassho* like a baseball pitcher warming up, and went on to demonstrate the serving, eating, and cleaning up with smooth, rhythmical short gestures.

The rule is that you eat everything that is put in your bowl. The food — organic vegetarian dishes, many of them Japanese — would be served in silence at our meditation places as we sat on our cushions. Zazen was facing the walls, but for *oryoki* we’d sit facing the room and each other.

During the practice exercise at *oryoki* instruction we new folks all sat on the basement floor, and a student next to Tony accidentally picked up some dirt on the special napkin that wrapped his *oryoki* set. It was a minute detail, something the boy wasn't sensitive to. Without drawing undue attention — maybe few even noticed — and certainly without arrogance or reproach, Tony, while he was talking about something else, learned toward the boy's *oryoki* and gently and with great kindness brushed the dirt away from the cloth.

Another student asked about what to do if the server is about to dish you too much. Tony hilariously demonstrated a palm-up gesture for “no more,” and then pantomimed wide-eyed gaping and pleading, “No!” in a very, very, very quiet voice. He told us about one sesshin when the students in the kitchen messed up the recipe and the result was so inedible that “only the Roshi and a few of the *more advanced men* could eat it! For the rest of the group it stuck somewhere around here.” (Tony pointed to his throat.)

Sitting opposite us for meals was Erik Storlie, who became my model for *oryoki* all week. Another deeply experienced student, he wore blue jeans and western clothes, and his hair was longish and starting to gray. He moved very slowly and carefully, almost trancelike. There was a glow about him always.

Bob and I never did master all the correct *oryoki* etiquette, especially the proper *gassho* conventions before and after the passing of the *gamazio*, or spices. We'd always screw it up and have to quietly laugh. One meal the *gamazio* came to Bob but he forgot to pass it. The rule is that as the bowl is passed along, the person nearest the altar must handle it first. If the person forgets, he or she can be reminded by a *gassho*, so I gasshoed. But Bob was lost in thought (or soup) and didn't respond; the bowl just sat there in front of him. Now what? There's no way to say out loud, “Please pass the salt.” Finally I just reached over and took it, and Bob, realizing this, laughed.

This was the big event of that day. Beyond that, emptiness. More zazen. Just the wall. Fortunately we didn't get the sleepies too much. There was just too much pain, from not being able to move. Bob has said as a criticism of Zen teaching in America that American students often damage themselves in the unaccustomed posture. His son Chris, then at San Francisco Zen Center, said serious injuries were not uncommon. Positioning myself for meditation I favored a weak left ankle that had once been sprained.

Bob said that the deepest Zen understanding, that cannot be conveyed by words or even thoughts, is the emptiness revealed through the practice of zazen. We were here to experience the concentrated practice afforded by the prolonged silence of sesshin.

Day Three: We sleep every night on zabutons on the floor, with Bob in the Buddha Hall and three other girls and I in the zendo. We start every day 4:45 am and are sitting the first session by 5:00. Morning begins seated in front of the wall in silence. Katagiri enters and walks silently around both rooms behind each of us, his hands in *gassho*. When he comes to his own seat and sits down a light bell is struck three times, and zazen begins.

Less pain now and more thoughts. They center on sex and extreme violence directed either by me or toward me and involving everyone we've seen in the past two weeks. At one

point I have fantasies about hitting Bob with a cast iron frying pan. He is also in a bad mood, giving off bad vibes when we take walks.

A few people had colds at the start of the week, and now they have spread. People cough and blow their noses during the breaks between zazen sessions.

Katagiri's talks lead us through the hours: "When you get up, just get up. When you have breakfast, just have breakfast."

In a lecture he says a Buddhist scholar once pointed out that Dogen changed his opinion on various points throughout his life, and there seemed to be contradictions between statements he made in youth and those of his late years. Which were correct? Katagiri replies that Dogen was correct both times, even though his statements were contradictory.

My favorite part of the day is evening, the last zazen sessions between 6:30 and 9:00. The white stucco wall before me is orange from the dim zendo lamp. From outside come the sounds of crickets and distant trains.

Days Four and Five: Best days. Tranquility is back. During our silent lunch each day the sound of church bells float in to us from some neighborhood parish. When Bob and I walk around Lake Calhoun in the evening, the same chimes play "America the Beautiful." A flock of migrating coots have appeared, to stay and feed for the rest of sesshin. The leaves are starting to turn.

I now can discern some themes in Katagiri's lectures. He speaks of how a feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself comes with most acts, the worry of having not behaved perfectly. He tells us that this pain should be treated just like the pain in zazen. The pain can be "swallowed," until there is no self and no view or objectification of the pain, and no dissatisfaction. The pain is there, but it is like one object obscured by another. This is compassion. It is like a soundless moan, he says.

He gives the analogy of a painter of great masterpieces, who despite fame and fortune hesitates with self-doubts before launching a new work of art. "Just paint," advises Katagiri. I think of writing, and strangely, in his lecture Katagiri sometimes slips and when speaking of this painter says "writing" instead of "painting."

The hostility from other students has started to break down. We feel we are basking in Katagiri's esteem and approval.

There are two Japanese students, guests of the Katagiris in their apartment, upstairs in Zen Center. Mimi lives in Omaha, and it is her first sesshin too. She is very pretty, with long, thick black hair. Muriyama Soki is a young, strong, energetic monk with a warm, impish face. As we talked before the sesshin began, Soki's English was almost nonexistent, frequently mixed with Spanish. Mimi said, "His Japanese isn't too good either!"

One supper I am a server. All our meals are served in utter solemnity and eaten in silence on our *zabutons*, following the prescribed *oryoki* ritual with which I remain none too adept. In the meal I serve, one dish is whole-wheat organic pizza, pre-cut in huge chunks that barely fit in people's little Japanese bowls. I get to serve the Roshi and nearly drop his slice. Then I goof up the serving sequence and meet his bold finger pointing me in the right direction. His expression

is stern.

The next night Bob serves, and so does Soki. Mimi and I giggle because the two of them look so bewildered— but also, of course, so egoless! Bob reports later that part way through the serving, Tony, observing Soki's serving sequence from out in the kitchen, shook his head whispering, "Soki is out there following some strange pattern of his own."

A real ordained priest, Soki wears black robes much like Katagiri's. During one work period, we see him raking the yard energetically with a cloth around his shaved head. He breaks the rules by making conversation and asking to meet with Bob. Because of the language gap they can't discuss very much, but Soki gives Bob a massage. He doesn't relate much to me but Mimi does. We all plan to get together after sesshin.

The last afternoon zazen on Day Five, my neighbor Scott has an experience. He has been sitting directly in front of Roshi in lectures, and on Day Five, Katagiri tells a story about somebody's enlightenment, including the lines, "Enlightenment is when you don't depend on a single thing for the twenty-four hours," and another story in which one abbot feeds meat to his monks, telling them, "Feed this to the dragon in your head." As he says the latter, Katagiri looks straight at Scott and says, "That's a koan for you."

During the next zazen I become aware that something is going on next to me. Scott does not *gassho* before he moves any more, and he moves frequently, rubbing his nose, moving his legs. All week long he has been driving himself, it seemed, through impeccable practice, and as we sit I now recalled Roshi's koan and also the fact that Scott has not taken anything to eat since lunch — the ultimate push, a literal interpretation of Katagiri's lecture. Near the end of zazen Scott leans his head forward against the wall as on the night of Day Two, and fortunately the bell sounds soon after. He gets up for service, walks out, and does not appear for supper. During the break I walk by the lake and realize he will not be back.

During the sesshin two things become clear to me:

First, the self is impermanent, is changed over time. The self I thought of as me doesn't exist. This is a fact that I'd been gradually becoming more aware of through regular Zen practice and through writing.

Second, I was much struck in Katagiri's lectures by his discussion of compassion. He defined it as a combination of friendliness and a word he translated as "moan." We have joked about his "moan" and "groan" talk, because he can't pronounce these words except as "mwahn" and "grahn," and there was some question whether people understood what he was saying. But nonetheless I caught his meaning I think. The "moan" part of compassion is beyond sound and beyond pain. As he described it he leaned forward and to one side and touched his chest, and his eyes gave a look that conveyed what he meant more than words. Compassion is not sadness or sentiment, he said. It is pain that cannot be expressed, like when you crack your shin too hard for words, or when a child falls from a tree on his back and hurts so much he cannot cry.

Day Six: An explosion. During the zazen period after lecture in the late morning, a reporter and photographer tiptoed into the hall (ridiculously imagining, we giggled later, that nobody noticed them in their quietness, though zazen practitioners are in fact hyper-aware).

They were accompanied by Paul Anderson, the *ino* or senior student in charge of the meditation hall. As we all slowly stepped in *kinhin*, the ten minutes of walking meditation that follows *zazen*, the photographer began taking pictures of students in the main *zendo*, the sunny room next to ours. After a few moments it appeared they would remain for an extended photo shoot. And suddenly Bob gave an audible groan and stomped out of Zen Center.

Not the silent moan of compassion! This was disgust and protest at the interruption of the *sesshin*. We didn't know why the journalists were there, but maybe everyone else did, and they must have been authorized by Katagiri. Later Bob said that if the photographers had arrived at the very beginning of the *sesshin* he might not have staged such a big walkout. Not wanting to threaten the "trance" at that important early point, he might instead have asked permission to withdraw quietly. But with just one day to go he now had sent a message.

I continued *kinhin* and then sat during the next *zazen* period, but skipped the ten-minute service before lunch to search for him around the building. Not finding him I returned, and on the way back in bumped into Paul Anderson with the female reporter. Previously she had caught my eye and smiled, but I hadn't smiled back. Now I did, and Paul, for the first time all week, was smiling as well, and broke the *sesshin*'s silence further.

"Bob is pretty mad, isn't he?" he said. Gaunt, wide-jawed, and goateed with wild hair, he struck me as a hard-eyed young Trotsky. He wore a *rakusu*, a traditional Buddhist bib that Bob found pretentious.

"Yes, he is."

"Well, he *always* gets mad, right?" he asked dismissively, and in a chummy way which astounded me because we had never met before. I didn't reply. Apparently, I thought, Anderson didn't get the point Bob wanted to make. So I would do it.

Indicating the reporter I asked, "Is she going to sit?"

"Oh, no," said Anderson, perhaps thinking that would be reassuring. "They're just going to ask a few questions after lunch, and—"

"Well, why *not*?" I said. "All the ceremonial stuff they're going to write up isn't Zen, but just trappings." Paul was still smiling, but nervously now.

"Well, you know," he said, moving his hand in a zigzag. "They always 'miss the mark.'" It was a reference to a Zen story.

Moving my eyes to the reporter, I smiled my biggest smile, said that as a fellow journalist I'd tip her off to the big story here, which was *zazen*. "The rituals you have just seen here are junk!" I declared, and strode off smiling to lunch, surely leaving the reporter bewildered.

And I still wondered where Bob was. The formal *oryoki* lunch then proceeded, punctuated by the *cl-lick! cl-lick!* sounds of the camera, with everyone except Bob in our places and Katagiri sitting solemnly. People seemed a bit shook, and even veteran Erik lost track of the *oryoki* ritual. The chanting was on sour notes, it seemed to me.

After lunch came a break before work duties, and I ran around the neighborhood with still no sign of Bob. I asked Mimi if she had seen him, and she had not realized he had walked out. A look of alarm crossed her face. I explained a little bit, assured her we would be back, then went

out again.

Till then, all week long, there had been silence, meditation even when people walked, ate, or worked. Never idle conversation, not even eye contact, and I had never had chats with any of these people. The photographer's intrusion had moved the group back toward "everyday America," the sesshin's effect breaking down. Yet now it wasn't all as it had been before the sesshin. Because of the long days we'd sat in silence together, I now felt relationships with everyone. It was strangely beautiful. And there still was one more day to go.

Jogging again around the neighborhood I met up with Erik Storlie, who crossed the street to talk like an old friend. Sesshin was ending for him because he needed to leave early due to a commitment. He too was shocked that Katagiri had allowed cameras into the zendo, suddenly, during a sesshin, and without telling everyone. He thought the photographers must have been after celebrity pictures of Bob and was amused that he had stormed out.

At last, a few minutes after leaving Erik, I found Bob, and we left immediately by car. It was about 1:00, and for the next eight hours we drove around Minneapolis, walked through parks and stewed about what had just happened.

"Photographers during a *sesshin*!" he exclaimed. "I'm not the one who broke it up." He was somewhat defensive. It had been obscene, we fumed, having cameras trained on students while we *kinhinned* across the fine bare wood floor looking like what would surely appear on film as a bunch of fanatic religious zombies. Bob blamed Paul Anderson, whom he didn't much like, though Katagiri was of course the authority. Bob recalled that in earlier days Katagiri had opposed photographers in Zen Center, even some publicity photography proposed for when the hall was empty, that Bob had recommended. We were mystified as to why this had taken place today.

He'd felt he had to act, he said. "The photographers were there and there was no thought; I just moved. I knew I had to go through that door right then and not two seconds later. It was the *dharma* thread."

So we roamed all over town reviewing things over and over, denouncing all the things we didn't like, photographers and *rakusus* and too much Japanese ritual. On and on we talked, as we really hadn't all week. We also broke the vegetarian regimen and got barbecue ribs at Bob's favorite place downtown.

Then about 9:00 we tiptoed back into the zendo and went to sleep on our *zabutons*.

Day Seven: Most of the vibes were good on our return. After breakfast Bob got taken aside by Paul Anderson; Roshi had instructed him to tell Bob that at supper the night before, Katagiri had apologized to the group for letting the photographers disturb the silence.

Mimi was excited and friendly. She said that yesterday she had been the first to tell Katagiri that Bob had left, and that he looked "very sad."

"So everything's all right now, then?" I asked Bob on our walk. "It's two people holding the ends of the same staff," a favorite Katagiri expression.

"Yes," said Bob, but it wasn't. He has a cold. The sky had grown overcast the afternoon before, in sharp contrast to a whole bright cloudless week.

More zazen, and then, as we assembled for service in the zendo, there was Scott Edelstein back for the last day. His face was glowing. I was very happy to see him. Meeting him on the stairs I wordlessly shook his hand with joy.

Something about his return and the alarming events with Bob and Katagiri, plus the general nostalgia of the last day, had me in tears during the pre-lecture service and all day afterward.

Katagiri's final lecture for the first time had no jokes. He looked more nervous. Bob sat looking very solemn and also old. That day I sat on a different side of the room where I could watch him and Katagiri at the same time. It seems impossible they are the same age, as Bob seems 70 and Katagiri seems like a young man, sometimes even like a boy, though during zazen and ceremonies his face becomes so severe that he looks older.

Anyway, his lecture began, "This is the last day, so I will return to the subject of the beginning day, which was Buddha nature," and I recalled that first incomprehensible lecture. Then without further transition he told the story of Seppo and the Tenzo sifting rice, also somewhat incomprehensible, but basically like this: One sifts rice, the other asks, "Are you sifting rice or sand?" The first answers, "Both." The second says, "There will not be enough rice to feed the monks." The other abruptly turns the tray over. Then the second says: "Go away from here to another teacher. Your practice is too strong for me."

"We are always sifting, sifting," Katagiri said. He also quoted Dogen on Nan Sen's killing of the cat: Nan Sen was a powerful Zen master, so why was killing the cat necessary? He could have enlightened his students in a more peaceful way.

Katagiri seemed to imply that Bob resembled the guy who dumps the rice tray. Did he mean that Bob's dramatic gesture the day before had been "strong practice" and commendable? Yet Roshi also expounded on the importance of being "soft" in one's practice. Perhaps the message about softness could as well have been directed at those who may have been tempted to criticize Bob's too-strong practice. In any case, Katagiri refrained from either condemning or condoning the dumping over of the rice tray, nor did he mention the photographers, and left all of us students to ponder both sides of the issue. It was as though he meant for the incident to be our *koan*.

Bob's face remained solemn and yet, as it became more evident that Katagiri would not resolve the lecture story (and thus presumably the photographer incident) -- the more Katagiri avoided one-sidedness and stressed the situation as a living koan -- the more Bob's expression became more quizzical and impatient. At one point, Katagiri even jumbled the sequence of events in the story (intentionally or inadvertently we never knew). And the frustrating part was that I never felt sure if my failure to understand was because of his flawed English pronunciation, confusion on his part, or my poor understanding of Zen.

Only on the last two days did Katagiri ask for students' questions after his lectures, and on this last day there was an outpouring. But he answered all with more ambiguity. Could the Zen Center library obtain an English translation of a certain book on the duties of Zen temple officers? someone asked. Katagiri replied that when Suzuki Roshi first came to California there



were no English versions of the seminal Soto Zen work, the *Shobogenzo*. One American female student would take a Japanese volume and turn the pages every day.

“Did she understand it, though?” asked the incredulous student.

“Yes,” said Katagiri. “She could understand.”

“Why did Seppo turn over the rice tray?” a woman then asked. For this answer Katagiri asked for interpretations from the group. Each time one was offered, he’d smile and shrug and ask for another.

The lecture ended with him inviting more questions and at last getting none. Breaking into a smile he heaved a big sigh of relief and everyone laughed.

I felt powerful admiration of and appreciation for him. There was also a strong poignancy, a nostalgia feeling that had me sobbing through the sutras closing the lecture. The beauty of Zen ritual flowered within me and I saw that separating Katagiri from it would be impossible. I recalled him once having said that when bowing to the Buddha statue, “Katagiri is no longer Katagiri.” His “losing of self” is intimately linked with sublimating his ego in forms and ceremonies.

He didn’t look at either of us as he left lecture. After the afternoon zazen and the final service, he went upstairs and didn’t attend the gathering for pie and ice cream.

At the pie party it was strange to hear people’s voices after a week of silence and whispers. I stepped wrong and wrenched my weak ankle and started walking with a limp. But people came around with great joviality. No one talked about the photographers. They asked us questions about our life and travels and recalled funny moments we’d all shared during the sesshin. Some complimented me on how well I had survived. Scott hung around, thanked us for inspiring him or something, and asked Bob for some publishing history he could tell the class he teaches. Tony Artino greeted us, and Bob and he laughed a lot. Bob remarked how healthy and advanced everyone’s Zen practice is, adding “Zen Center hardly even needs a Roshi anymore,” and I winced as Tony shot him a funny look.

Bob had promised Soki a copy his book, so he inscribed a copy we’d bought, and after the pie party we looked for him, but Paul Anderson said he’d gone jogging. So we departed, and Bob told Anderson coolly, “Nice to see you again,” which was sort of ridiculous.

Bob and I spent another three hours or so driving around, enjoying hamburgers for the first time in a week, and talking, talking, talking, reuniting our realities and interpretations of what happened. Finally we got to Bob’s father’s house, and he had a surprising message from a few hours before, during the afternoon. There had been a phone call for Bob, and a woman’s voice had left a message: “Roshi says he’s sorry.”

Months later, in the December issue of Zen Center’s newsletter, a one-paragraph notice reported that photographs had been taken at the September sesshin for a three-page article in the University of Minnesota student newspaper, *Minnesota Daily*.

After the sesshin Bob felt sure it would be our last. We weren’t going to ever live in Minnesota. He felt sad, saying of Zen Center, “I hadn’t realized how much I’ve put into that

place.”

“I never really was his student,” he said of Katagiri, who had become abbot only three years before Bob moved away. Perhaps in part because they were peers in age, they had stopped short of having the kind of formal teacher-student relationship Katagiri had with others. Bob had long supported the teaching of Zen in Minneapolis and inviting Katagiri as the teacher, he had encouraged his family to study there, and participated himself, but he had personally arrived at meditation by another route years before. One time, Katagiri called a meeting for “all students,” and Bob decided not to attend because he really wasn’t one.

He never took *dokusan*, the personal interview with a Zen teacher. The first sesshin Katagiri held in Minneapolis was a one-day sesshin at the house of a founding member, Beverly White. After the group sat zazen much of the day, Katagiri went upstairs and waited for students to join one-on-one talks about their practice. He would ring a little bell to summon each. When it was Bob’s turn, he started up, then hesitated on the stairs. He didn’t want to do it, he realized. Meanwhile, as he told it, “Roshi was waiting up there, going *dingaling, dingaling* on the bell.” Bob ended up going back downstairs and sending up the next guy.

Bob helped finance the purchase of the Zen Center building with some of the proceeds from his book and got his father’s legal advice for the purchase. But he had never really wanted the group to own property at all, and he placed no value on ornaments and ceremonies. “I would rather have been sitting in a basement somewhere,” he said.

“Much of what Katagiri sees as Zen is to Americans just a bunch of exotic Japanese ritual...The Japanese have no idea how humiliating it is for Americans to bow down in *gassho* to a little statue. And what I did by walking out during the sesshin is the worst possible offence.”

Still, he said, “At the Buddha level, there is no disagreement between Katagiri and me.” And he agreed that people at Minnesota Zen Center – certainly including myself those seven days -- were indeed experiencing emptiness through the collective meditation experience led through the discipline of this Japanese teacher.