

# 曹源一滴水

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From Shodo Harada Roshi, Abbot of Sogenji, Okayama, Japan

## VISIT TO SENDAI APRIL 11, 2011

To all of the One Drop Zendos around the world, to the many people concerned, and to those with whom we have a karmic affiliation, I am writing to you about the recent great earthquake and tsunami tragedy. From their most profound mind, everyone has worried about us and supported the disaster relief. I deeply thank you from the bottom of my heart.

On the eleventh of March at 2:46 in the afternoon, a huge earthquake occurred in Japan, at a magnitude of 9.3. As a result, there are presently 12,787 people known to be dead and 14,991 still missing, making approximately 28,000 who have died. In addition, 95,232 people are living as evacuees.

Almost one month has passed since then. On the 8th of April we celebrated the Buddha's birthday with a flower festival. At that time, a gatha for the day was given :

The gigantic, powerful tsunami overturns the heavens and the earth Twenty eight thousand enter the Buddha's realm Gathered on Buddha's Birthday here and now, we honor his birth, While the brilliant colored cherry blossoms (the souls of the 28,000) blow petals and perfume the pond (receiving the Buddha's light)

The tsunami was over 38 meters high. At 2:46 pm the earthquake shook, and about thirty minutes later, from Ibaragi prefecture all the way down the whole coast – Iwate, Ibaragi, Fukushima, Miyagi, Chiba – all of the lands on that stretch of the Pacific coast

were poured down upon by the tsunami.

It was a huge earthquake, and countless buildings were destroyed immediately. And those weakened by the quake were hit by the tsunami, pushing them under with its huge power.

The area affected is called the Sanriku Coast, and has long been a place where this kind of disaster happens, again and again. In each disaster, without exception, many have died and it is known that this is the natural way of life there.

Twenty eight thousand people. Perhaps many died in the instant of the earthquake, but most were killed by the towering wave that followed. Even now there are still so many missing, pulled into the ocean by the undertow, all tangled up with the garbage and debris. Because even the ocean divers cannot get to the bottom, they have not able to find the missing bodies. Because the diver's lives are at risk diving in this area, it will probably take many years for them to be uncovered,

Today on the Buddha's birthday we celebrate with a flower festival. But for the 28,000 who died, their souls have returned to the Buddha's source, gathered at his knees, gone to the where he is. We must think of them as being welcomed there.

In Sogenji's garden right now, the weeping cherry tree is bright and in full bloom. We can see the 28,000 in each one of the flowers, coming into being in each of the petals, dancing on the wind and drifting down onto the lake with their bright colors

and then fading away.

On the 11th day of March we felt nothing at all in Okayama. We only had the news about the tsunami and the earthquake. We tried and tried to call the temple and the people we know there, but there was no way to contact them. Eerily, this was the same experience we had during the 1995 earthquake in Kobe, although then we could already feel the hugeness of what happened. We tried everything, and finally cell phones and email were possible. Although we could not communicate with them directly, we were able to leave messages. As time passed we heard more and more about the situation from the people themselves, but no one, including those on site knew what was actually happening.

The next day, Saturday the 12th of March, we contacted many companies and businesses in Okayama. Even though it was the first day of Osechin, the whole sangha went to the city to do takuhatsu, gathering funds for earthquake relief. It was only the first day after the earthquake, and so no one – all of the newspapers, all of the systems and relief organizations – had their windows open for receiving donations yet. We took the money we raised immediately to the Red Cross who was ready to receive donations. Soon, the news of the horrendous depth of the disaster started to become known.

On the television, we saw cities burning and people reaching for heavenly help. On the internet, the reality of the tsunami became clear as more and more photographs were posted. All of this could be found on the screen and in the newspapers.

In Sendai there is a priest and a temple with which we have strong karmic affiliation. He has always sent samugi, rice, and straw sandals used for takuhatsu to the people training at Sogenji. Many, many times he has sent these things for the people at Sogenji.

In some way, in any way possible, I wanted to go there and support him. The

Shinkansen (high speed train) was not yet running up there, the local trains were irregular and frequently nonexistent, and all the roads had been destroyed and were still impassable. Anywhere near the site of the disaster it was impossible to enter, except for the national guard and other emergency groups in their special vehicles. Regular vehicles could not get there.

On the 27th day of March, the roads finally were opened and it was by chance that it was the end of the month so this was the opportunity I had, using every possible means we were able to go to Sendai and to the Fukushima area. Luckily, there was an all night highway bus going all the way there after changing from a train to Kyoto, and we were able to get seats.

But there was already radiation leaking from the damaged power plants, it was known to be a very risky situation. Considering the one chance out of a thousand in which something could go wrong, it was decided to not take younger people training at Sogenji there, so Ekei Zenji and Domyo Koji were taken to represent the sangha. We entered by going to Kyoto and then getting on the all night bus that would go straight there. This was the chance we were given and so we took all kinds of food supplies, and dishes to eat at meals. They had told us on the phone that they could only make cooked rice for us, and that they had nothing to eat with it. “We have no supplies or fuel, and so please bring your own food,” they told us. “we want to go visiting here and there, so for the children and the various evacuees, please, as much as possible, please bring sweets and simple foods that they can eat without any need for preparation.”

People at Sogenji worked as hard as they could to get the breadbaking done and get as many loaves as bread made as possible before our departure. It was very insufficient, only a little something in a time of big need but our time had been limited. People gathered candy to bring as well. Since there

is very little water available and they cannot brush their teeth, they also asked for a gum that cleans your teeth when you chew it. We also brought many hot packs since it was still very cold. As we didn't know what we would encounter, we went in boots, warm clothes, and samugi.

In the morning we arrived in Sendai, a large city in the area of Tohoku . There were many buildings which were still standing erect and appeared to have no damage which gave us a strange, weird feeling. After our bus came into Sendai station, the priest who was supposed to pick us up arrived and we put our packages into his car. As we drove, the priest, told us that although the buildings look so normal, inside all the offices were completely turned upside down and a mess. Not one single place that can still be used inside the buildings. He told us this.

As we drove out of the center of town, there were cars in huge traffic jams with endless lines. The priest told us that they were lines of people waiting to buy gas, they were all waiting in lines of one or two kilos length. There was no gasoline and everyone was waiting for the tank lorry to come but the tank lorry did not have enough gas to bring gas to every gas station and so it was putting a little at each place and in a very short while the few cars that received the gas were given gas and it was gone.

In this situation people could only leave their cars and go home until the next day, but people being so desperate to get gas would leave it there and walk home and come back the next day, everywhere, at every gas station there was a huge line waiting. Finally, we began seeing rows of destroyed homes. Everywhere that the Shinkansen tracks usually passed through was full of bent and broken poles, and it was clear that it was still very far from being able to be back in use.

Zennoji Temple was located about twenty minutes from the station. Zennoji san's temple also had been seriously damaged. There were 1600 graves in the cemetery and

every last gravestone had toppled over. It was a hideous scene. The hondo was just barely being covered by its roof. There was continually a small earthquake every thirty minutes or so. He said that they could not even use the hondo yet. In the great stone lanterns there were big cracks and all of the rocks were moving around, having been loosened by the disasters.

Even so, the buildings were somehow still standing and had been protected even in such a severe disaster and that was already a great good fortune, he said. They already had their life lines of electricity and water reconnected a few days before but they were still without gas. They apologized for not being able to make a bath for us

His wife came out and greeted us saying she had wanted to get our bellies filled and had prepared some rice balls. Eating them with instant miso soup, we had breakfast. That day when we arrived we were first to go around and look at the area, and take around the things we had brought and then the next day from the morning we would work on the cleaning up of the Zennoji temple and house. This was the plan.

According to plan we went around in Zennoji's car with his son driving. We drove and went around the city, to near the area of the dunes and the coast . Zennoji's temple is near the mountains so it has a little less damage because of its elevated location. Right in front of us where the coastal area was it was so extreme, you could see where a ten meter tsunami had washed away everything, cars were jammed together at our feet, and houses were destroyed and upside down, and everything in the houses had been washed away by the water, and so inconceivably a car was hanging from a telephone line! How could this have happened? It was just so unfathomable, the enormous power of the way of Nature left us in greatest awe.

The cars that were all pushed together were bumped and ruined and full of cracks

and scratches, they were upside down, and sideways and there was not a single car that was in its usual condition. all of those cars had also crashed into houses and crushed the houses in their collisions. It was truly full of violently ruined houses, broken down and fallen apart in a hideous way, unimaginable...the roofs of these houses down in front of our eyes.

First we went to the temple of Furinji, a temple related to Zennoji's wife. The temple of Furinji was in the very middle of the worst hit part of the earthquake and tsunami. but the temple itself is just a bit higher in elevation. Although it is in the worst-hit area it mysteriously did not suffer any damage whatsoever. The water of the tsunami washed up right to the main gate of the temple, and just because of its being built on slightly higher ground it was not touched by the wave. All of the houses up to main gate were completely and totally destroyed.

The temple priest had welcomed 200 people to live there, and every day was making their food. At a time like this the extensive size of a temple grounds was well put to use, the temple was able to welcome everyone in the area, to serve them and to protect them within the temple grounds. It had become a very important and precious place. In this area and in these areas and seeing all the various conditions, we continued to drive around in the car.

We had seen many photos of the earthquake's damage but it was no longer like in a photo where it is just like scenery, when you see the actuality in front of your very eyes, it is actually possible to feel the incomprehensible power of the water that came over everything, and to taste the terror that the rapidly approaching huge water brought. Here there had been propane tanks which had exploded and caught fire, one after the next. It was said that the propane had burned there for three days and three nights continually. There were cars wrapped around poles, convenience stores completely

destroyed, and many hospitals and clinics, all wrecked beyond use.

There had been a huge and very old moat here, a beautiful moat, built by the Feudal Lord Date Masamune, it was circling all around this city of Sendai and used as a canal as well, a canal that was used for transporting goods in the olden days. This beautiful canal had been the pride of the people of Sendai, and was now filled to the top with all kinds of broken debris and heaps of rubble, it was impossible to tell if it was a river or a garbage dump.

Zennoji san said, with a sigh, that for him this Teizan Canal, this Teizan Garden Park, had been his favorite and he had always been so proud to show it to visitors, now it made him so sad.

Going past Teizan Park, this park that was built to commemorate the feudal lord Masamune Date, we came out on the other side of the hills at a place called Shirahama, at the mouth of the Matsushima Bay. There are seven small islands there, because this Matsushima Bay area is a place famous for its great beauty, each and every small island has a temple, seven of them all together, and one of them was the temple of a friend of Zennoji, the Doshoji Temple. We went there to visit next. This is the furthest small island and the water that had swept over it had destroyed its entire small town of 3000 people, all in the one instant that the wave had poured over them.

The head priest of that temple ran a kindergarten at the temple. Taking the children of the kindergarten they had run up to the top of the mountain and been saved. But everything else just up to the top of that mountain had been swallowed up and covered in the tsunami's waters, buried. No matter how hard he had looked for a path down from the top he had not been able to find one. Everything had been destroyed, and strewn everywhere. They had all eventually been rescued from the top of



the mountain by a helicopter of the national guard. The helicopter lifted all of them out, one after another they had been lifted up and rescued by the helicopter and this had been played again and again on televisions all over Japan. And it had been this temple where that had happened.

At this same temple they had just finished rebuilding their hondo into a new and different hondo, this huge work had all just recently been completed and now having entered this new year, they were planning the opening ceremony for this new hondo on the 16th of March. They had just been making the preparations for the celebration day. This brand new hondo which had never been used once was now completely buried in mud. It was truly a miserable scene of sadness after all of the huge efforts which had been made--then having them come to this result.

This temple's young successor to be is currently in the training monastery of the famous Daitokuji Temple in Kyoto. He has been given time to come back to his parent's temple and was there digging the mud out from under the porches around the new hondo. He was ripping off the new floors to get in beneath the building, we watched as he was doing this. We made an offering there to the temple's founder, and departed. The water had not receded from that area yet, and the water level had gone up 75 centimeters since the water that had risen there was not receding. Even after several weeks the salt water remained, just as it had risen there.

In front of our faces we could see how that the whole town that was left there was nothing but a field of mud. Passing hill after hill of debris we continued past the seven islands, went over the mountain and came out at Shiogama, the next town.

Here in Shiogama there were homes that had no one had yet entered into so they had not been searched yet for missing people. The

national guard had not reached there yet. This town of Shiogama when looked down upon from the hill above, looked perfectly regular and as if there had been no damage nor disaster there. But when we entered the town we could see what a huge amount of damage there had actually been there.

Here there had not been a huge powerful tidal wave thrust instead little by little the whole shopping street had filled up with water and everything ruined, all of the things for sale there were now unusable garbage, the houses had all been soaked through with salt water and would have to be completely rebuilt. They were useless.

On a slightly raised area there stood the temple of Toeiji san. We called on them next. There had been a lot of damage at their temple due to the earthquake. In front of our eyes the line between Sendai and the neighboring town's houses was clear, the JR railroad had passed through there but the whole area had been destroyed. The Seashore Line had run there and the hotels along the seacoast had been serviced from there, with Zuiganji as such a famous landmark, it had been a huge tourist area. Because of that, there were many hotels for the visitors, and since there was a large damlike structure for protection, it appeared at first glance that there had been little damage.

However, now there was no one coming to call at all. The hot springs hotels had opened their baths to all of the evacuees and other victims of the disaster. All of the people in the area were very thankful and so glad to have a place to bathe. Passing by the typical shopping street area we approached Matsushima's Zuiganji temple. The Zuiganji Roshi was not there, but we had brought Ekei Zenji on this trip especially because he had a karmic affiliation with the Zuiganji temple. Zuiganji's former Roshi, Master Hirano Sojo, was the good friend of Ekei's earlier teacher in Mexico, Eijo Takata, and Ekei had come to Sogenji in the first place

because of that karmic affiliation. For this reason he wanted to go to the grave of Master Sojo Hirano to pray and since the Hondo was currently under construction we chanted sutras in the Shoin instead. Here they gave us hot udon noodles which they had prepared and Zennoji san who works at Zuiganji as one of the top administrators, so it is like his own place, was very kind and hospitable to us. Here at Zuiganji, ever since the earthquake happened, 385 people were being given a place to live, there were 16 monks who cooked and took care of them.

At Zuiganji, the area of Matsushima was a most beautiful place, furthest in the harbor, with many small islands which were visible from there and they had each absorbed the power of the tidal wave and had therefore saved Zuiganji from the strongest thrust of the tidal wave. There had been no touch of a wave there, there was only a slight damage to some buildings but in spite of it having been facing the ocean it had not been touched by a drop of water.

Of course the area in front of the main gate had been sunk into deep water and there was much damage there, nevertheless the people of the area all called this the oasis of the area.

We then went again in the car to the place where the damage was greatest of all, the Nobiru area, on the other side of Ichigahama. The area of Ichigahama was also terribly damaged, and on its other side, is Nobiru. At the very entrance of Matsushima port. Going there we were simply astonished at the intense severity of the damage. There were no railroad tracks left anywhere. The train was probably stopped here, we could not be certain how that was, but every last thing was pushed completely up against the mountain there, all fallen over in every direction. The station master's building was pushed against what must have been the platform and on top of the roof there was a car. This was done by the vigorous pushing power of the tsunami. The very

beautiful ancient pine tree boulevard there, its hundreds of huge pine trees had been uprooted by the sheer pressure of the tsunami and were all laid root side up, side by side in the same direction. It was as if they had each been thrown down and been placed there upside down in rows. Seeing this we could feel the awesome and terrifying huge power of Great Nature.

The evacuation place where many people had run to after the earthquake, the school's gymnasium, had been completely pushed along and flowed away in the tidal waves' wake. There was a Soto Sect temple there which is now nothing but rubble. There are the ruins but the temple's hondo's roof is two hundred meters away in a river, where it still remains. All of the gravestones of the temple's graveyard are buried in rubble and debris.

If you compare this to the lack of damage to the temple of Zuiganji of Matsushima, here there was a great swirling whirlpooling affect that sandwiched things into its path and destroyed them completely. So many people and things simply disappeared here and are gone. The degree of damage and injury to things is so great it still has not even been touched by anyone. It is from now that the various support groups and crews will begin to enter this area.

Shorinji is a temple nearby here, the abbot was not there when we came. This is where the National Guard is staying while it works in this area. This is the last temple that we visited. There were still bodies floating in the sea and priests from as far as Nanzenji Temple in Kyoto were helping with the many bodies that were in the water. that were being brought ashore. The crematories having been damaged, there was no where to cremate the bodies, and so they had to make the open land into graves by digging into the vacant lots and burying many bodies there. To perform the ceremonies for these burials the priests were all going here and there doing group funerals.

We chanted and placed our offerings at the place of the founder, at this temple there were still one hundred evacuees living. They were eating living and sleeping there and we gave them all of our bread and other supplies that we had brought along. There had been three hundred evacuees but as the public support came in, it became possible to move them.

So many bodies were floating in the ocean still, they were raising them out and doing whatever they could, but even if they wanted to cremate them, it was not possible without any fuel for the fire or any electricity available, it's truly a very pitiful end for a life. At present more than 12,000 people have been verified as dead, and there are 16,000 people still not accounted for, for these 28,000 people every possible effort is being made. There are so many damaged cars, houses and businesses, and still no lumber available for rebuilding. In Ibaraki prefecture alone 14600 cars were lost. Of large and medium ships, 2,000 of them are missing and the smaller boats missing are countless.

Sendai airport was also flooded by the tsunami and fifty airplanes lost. The National Guard Base was also hit by the tsunami and everything there is gone. To just look around and see all of it makes one so miserable. From the most profound place within, feeling exhausted, I returned to Zennoji. That night another earthquake of magnitude 6.5 came, and every day again and again, many times a day, the aftershocks come continuously. People have become numb to them, in their mind the endless disruption bringing a lack of feeling, unsettled in every way – this is in every person's state of mind at this time.

We came to see how any resolution of this will be far from now.

And not just these myriad challenges, but that which is most feared by people all over the planet, in the neighboring prefecture of Fukushima is the damage done to the

nuclear power plant.

In the whole area around the plant, radiation has been leaking, in the air, in the plants growing there, the vegetables raised there, all of the things nearby are being found to have high levels of radiation. In this area of Fukushima, broccoli, spinach, and other vegetables, grown close to and usually sent to Tokyo these are the livelihood of the people of this area and now they are forbidden to be eaten.

Now is the usual time for planting the next rice crop, instead it is being forbidden by the government. The tap water is contaminated so not just any water can be freely drunk. Of course even if the water which is below the safe radiation standard is drunk, there may be results that will not happen all at once, but, no one really knows what kind of bad affects could be lingering. As long as there is a standard measure above which one should not partake of these foods, there will most likely be impurities that will remain in our body, and for this reason the tap water, the harvested vegetables, the seaweeds, all of these need to be checked thoroughly. When we see this we have to ask, why was there a nuclear reactor built here?

It is impossible not to wonder about this.

This is how it makes you feel. If you look closely at the past history of the area, in this area of the Sanriku Coast there have always been earthquakes, there are records from many eras, in the Meiji era, in 1896 there was the Great Sanriku Earthquake, on June 15th, and of course before then there were also earthquakes. In the Chile Great Earthquake a tidal wave of 5.5 meters struck here as well. And at that time there was also a great amount of damage.

And not only in the Meiji but in the Showa era as well, in 1933, on the 3rd of March, there was also a Great Sanriku Earthquake. In Iwate prefecture and Miyagi Prefecture and Fukushima prefecture, there was great damage. At that time a tidal wave of more

than 30 meters also came, but while even having had so much experience with this up until now, the experience of the past was not given life to, was not listened to – this has to be said.

There was a famous earthquake in Tokyo, the Great Earthquake of Kanto, this great earthquake was really beyond anything usual in its casualties, it happened in 1923, on September first, and when it happened 15,000 died in Tokyo and 33,000 in the neighboring prefecture. This was a huge and isolated case but in this current area there had already been so many big earthquakes. From the history of the year 869 on the ninth of July there was also recorded a huge earthquake but there were not so many people then so the casualties were many fewer, while 28,000 lives were taken in this recent earthquake. In this area there are always tsunami shelters, an ongoing awareness of this possibility is constant, and people are always marking poles with a line to where the last tidal wave had risen, so many stories of past tidal waves and there were thirty minutes from earthquake to tidal wave, so why did not more people escape from it?

During that time between the earthquake and the tidal wave, a 24 year old woman announcer said on air over and over again “a tsunami is coming, run to somewhere higher, a tsunami is coming, run to somewhere higher” she said it continuously for everyone to hear, and she was then also swallowed by the tsunami. Those who heard this and ran to a higher ground were huge in number. They knew just where to go, and what to do, but the person who gave the announcement died in the tsunami for doing that. The police and firemen were all helped thanks to her doing that, but many others who simply wanted to guard their food, possessions and places did not heed her warning and 28,000 lives were lost. Isn't there some indulgent point there that needs looking at carefully, This and the nuclear

power plant being built in such a location, a plant which is still pouring radiation into the Pacific Ocean, there are so many points that must be seriously returned to and reviewed carefully here.

There are 19 of these nuclear power plants in Japan all together. 19 of them now and above and beyond those already built that there are many more planned to be built on already acquired land but it is because of this accident that no one in the country wants these plants to happen now, and this nuclear power plant in Fukushima will no longer continue to function.

Today all over the whole world, the biggest problem is this, while the earthquake and tsunami's challenges will be taken care of, the results of this nuclear power plant will not just go away. This is why it is such a greatly terrifying matter for many, because it's outcome is unknown. Of course those at the site are working as hard as they can and doing everything possible, and the Navy and specialists on nuclear power plants are coming in from Japan and even from France and elsewhere trying to help and support them, desperately and steadily.

Japan is a long narrow country so from Fukushima to Okayama and Western Japan it appears to be a far distance but the winds change and China and Korea and Russia all have great doubts, fears and concerns. This is a matter of course.

The high level of radiation polluted water that cannot be prevented being dumped in the ocean is not only here, near Japan, but going on the currents to pollute who knows where and who knows how much?

Today nuclear power plants are the number one producers of energy and all countries want to have them, but today everyone has felt that these should not exist on the surface of this earth.

In this time of a huge disaster, one aspect that brings happiness is people from all over the world extending their hands in kindness



and generosity. This disaster, while being truly a ferocious, terrible thing, still brought all of the people together and their offerings and kind words came from more than one hundred countries. I read these messages slowly and carefully. They were from America, South America, Africa, Europe; all of its many countries, India, all the various countries of Asia, people from all over the world worried and were concerned and felt so deeply, wanting to know how they could somehow help those who suffered in the earthquake and tsunami. This is a very important thing. I felt it directly and experience it deeply.

If you look at the Japanese economy from the time of Kobe earthquake to now there is a big difference. And in ten years from now the economy will be back to normal – that is without mistake.

But to cool the high temperatures of the nuclear power plant with its aging reactors numbered 1,2,3,4, which can never be used again and must instead be decommissioned, this may take fifty years. They will have polluted land and buildings throughout that area – so many things in that region that cannot be used anymore. Some parts must now become forbidden land to even enter. This is saying clearly that while nuclear power has a potential for providing energy for human kind, its power is also a terrifying evil which destroys.

The scientists have called it a circumstance beyond anything that could have been imagined or estimated, it is this kind of an unlucky situation and these circumstances will never happen again. But it has happened now and this must not ever happen again. We must not have these. Now many voices against nuclear power plants have risen, and this is also for Japan a great responsibility which has to be understood.

Along with that many countries support and donations have been given, those who suffered together and helped together, all of this gathered together, I want to use this

opportunity to say thank you.

The people who train here at Sogenji, every single one of them is working totally and intensely wholeheartedly and to cultivate them is my life work for the rest of the life left to me so that even one of them will be able to open the truly seeing eye, this is my deep vow.

We cannot be deceived. We cannot be deceived by what we see and the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In each and every era, we have to see from our truly opened eye, which is seeing the truth, and not deceive ourselves. This is zen and this is the harvest of our training and what our life is.

Thank you very much

Shodo Harada

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### SENDAI REPORT :

March 28 – April 1, 2011

On the evening of March 28, Roshi, Domyo and Ekei took the Shinkanzen to Kyoto and then embarked on a night bus towards the city of Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture, one of the severely damaged prefectures by the earthquake and tsunami flood wave of March 11. Bread has been baked before at Sogenji by Raine and others and during the day Mazakosan, Kumitomisn and Chisan prepared and packed food, water and other supplies for us and the people in the damaged area in our backpacks. In Kyoto, while waiting for the bus, the Yamaguchis joined us and gave us a big box full of hot packs and some sushi vento for our trip. We had nine pieces of luggage for three persons and twelve hours of bus ride before us till Sendai. The bus arrived next morning quiet in the center of the city amidst high elegant office buildings, clean quiet roads, the morning sun was shining from a clear sky and nothing could be seen here of any disaster.

While we were waiting for the priest of Zenoji

temple, a young man approached, asking were we wanted to go while pointing to a minibus with the logo of the local University which was offering volunteer service. Roshi thanked the student and told him that we would be picked up. Soon after Zenojisan and his son arrived, we packed everything in the van and drove out of downtown. Roshi mentioned that there was no damage from the earthquake to be seen on the big buildings we passed by; the priest just said: "well, who knows how they look inside". There was gasoline shortage and we could see on our way long waiting lines of cars before the gas stations, most of them not even pumping. Also there was no propane for cooking and heating in the houses and the temple where we would be lodging for the next two days and nights, but we were told that they had meanwhile learned to cook good rice on the kerosene stove.

We saw the first real earthquake damage when we approached a bridge of the Shinkanzen line, where the poles carrying the power line were tumbled and it would take quite a time under given conditions till it would be repaired, we heard. Leaving the Shinkanzen line behind, we drove through an area of the city, which was reached by the tsunami wave. The big road was already cleared, but the side way was full of destroyed and toppled cars, some hanging hood pointing to the sky in fences, big shipping containers and trucks washed off the road, a devastated gasoline station; the wave destroyed most first floors of the houses and we could see through and wherever we looked, there was all kind of debris scattered around, from fridges, sofas, vending machines, clothes in the trees to a lonesome teddy bear, someone had set up straight in a gesture. On the front side of a closed store we could see the line, the water level had left; it was not much more than one and a half meter above floor, but the impact of the wave was strong enough to cause all this mess. Nevertheless this was still kind of mild compared with what

we should see later on this day. The whole area felt evidently depressed and was more or less abandoned. Even so it was between eight and nine o'clock in the morning, there was little traffic. Some military vehicles passed by as we drove on. We saw some convenience stores on the way, they were closed, but with some side door open, where people were lined up, most probably for water or some food.

Short after, we reached a residential quarter of the city with some higher location and untouched by the tsunami, but damage by the earthquake was still evident. Many of the houses had wrapped blue vinyl tarps on the roof, strapped with strings and stabilized with sandbags as first prevention of the damage.

Arriving at Zenoji temple, we first went to the hondo to chant a sutra and offer our reverence and prostrations together with the priests, then unpacked and presented the supplies we had brought and finally had breakfast together. There was rice balls wrapped in nori seaweed and instant miso soup. Since there were no vegetables available in town, we gladly shared some of the vegetable dishes we had brought from Sogenji. Our hosts told us that the rice we ate was already cooked on electricity, which had returned two days ago.

After breakfast, without losing much time, the hot packs, bread, sweets and other food we brought with us were distributed in several bags and we started out to visit a row of Rinzai Zen temples scattered in the city area. Most of them, except one, had not suffered mayor damage, but some were lodging still some homeless people and gratefully received our supplies. Roshi also offered some donation of money at every place.

At some point on our way we drove straight into the most affected zone, closer by the seaside. Since some of the roads were already cleared out, we could partially enter this area and what we saw was just total

devastation of what was formerly some residential area. Over hundreds of meters, as far as we could look, most houses were just washed away, leaving only the bare basements surrounded and covered with debris; again many cars crashed and scattered like wrinkled paper or hanging on halfway toppled electricity poles; some of them were broken on the top and lay with the cables mixed up among other garbage. Some structures of houses were as a whole carried away and laying on places they were never built, in the midst of what was formerly a pond, on the board of a channel, or stuck in a group of trees. Further on we drove by a structure of what was formerly a railway station. The cars of the train were pushed hundreds meters from the railway into some houses and the front of the station was blocked with several stems of big coastal pine trees, which were just plucked out with the greater stems of the roots still on them.

Driving through all this and with the kind help of a clean up worker, we finally found our way to the one temple in the area which had suffered some damage. Luckily, between the site of the temple and the seashore there was a group of hills , which took away most of the impact, but even so the flood reached the brand new building and destroyed nearly completely the first floor. Repair work was already going on and the young monk who received us told us that he was still training at Daitokuji sodo in Kyoto and had received permission from the monastery to come and help out with the work.

Looking through the entrance into the first floor, again there was a line on the wall, about two meters above the floor, marking the level the flood water had reached. In the tokonoma niche there was still hanging a big scroll with the calligraphy “Mu” by Mumon Roshi and the line went straight through the upper part of the calligraphy – the message however was clearly there. After offering our

support and a while of talk we climbed again in our vehicle to continue on our way.

The road we followed turned around the hills and brought us again in one of the most affected areas, partially still covered with water and mud and as good as nearly completely flattened. On the slope of a small hill we could see some remnants of a destroyed temple of another sect. The big heavy tile roof of the hondo had been swept as a whole over the hill and lay several hundred meters away in a channel. Soldiers were patrolling and still sounding the grounds. Sadly we heard that the priest of the site had died together with so many others in the incident.

Slowly we drove our way out of the area, still passing by some kind of surrealistic scenes, an empty structure of a house by the shore side of the road with a fishing boat on top of it. The further we drove out of the region, the lesser the damage that surrounded us.

Our next goal on this morning was Zuiganji temple in nearby Matsushima. Zuiganji is quiet close to the shore side, but the many islands in the bay formed an efficient protection, so that only some flood waters came up to the front gardens and damaged some of the tourist shops at the entrance.

13 years ago, late Hirano Roshi, then abbot of Zuiganji allowed me to sit for a while in the zendo and then signaled my way to Sogenji. Today I was grateful for the chance of coming back and together with Roshi, Domyosan and Zenojisan we offered prayers and homage at his altar.

We had lunch at Zuiganji and on our way back, we visited one more last temple. It had lodged up to five hundred people during the first days of calamity and actually there were still ninety persons living there. Children were chasing and joyfully playing around, we gave them the sweets we brought for them and they were just happy, a little boy all smiles showing his gift in his hand. Fresh life, innocent and without concern. On every

place we went, people were very grateful for our visit and some supply

Back at Zenoji we got some time for rest. There was a light earthquake in the afternoon scaled at around three points and then a stronger one in the evening of 6.5 points. Zenojisan brought us the evening newspaper and it said that in the prefecture of Miyagi hundred and forty six thousand cars had been destroyed, eleven thousand six hundred people had died and another ten thousand were missing, probably drawn into the ocean when the wave pulled back and never to be found. The tsunami had a height of twenty meters, at some places even thirty meters and had reached up to 4km into the land. After what we had seen during the day, this sounded credible. On the front page of the newspaper there was a big picture of a brand new family house, not even yet in use, on its way of being pushed down the slope of a hill by the earthquake and completely unusable. Amidst the tremendous human suffering and loss, brand new houses completely destroyed and years of paying mortgage ahead, was a common drama among some of the surviving damaged people, we heard.

During the afternoon we had some time to look around the grounds of Zenoji temple, which had a big graveyard along the hillside. Many of the grave stones were toppled, stone lanterns brought down and some damage in the hondo wall, all in all not so unfortunate a situation. In front of the hondo at a side stand the big bell and Zenojisan told us that during the earthquake it was ringing by itself. In the second floor of a building, there was a room where the traditional memorial tablets (Ihai), each with the name of a deceased person, were kept. In all there were thirteen hundred of them, arranged in order and kept in vitrines along the walls and all were toppled over and laying stray one upon the other.

Next morning, March 30, we got up early, had choka including a sutra for the victims

which we have been chanting since the first day of the disaster in Sogenji, did the daily cleaning of our quarters, the hondo and some of the gardens and after breakfast started to work on the toppled memory tablets. They had to be taken out carefully one by one, dusted and then rearranged in the vitrines according to the established order. Two helpers from the community had arrived and working all day among six persons we had put in order nearly half of them at the end of the day.

Next day, 31, we took the bus back in the early rainy morning till Tokyo, where Shogen was waiting for us. We had a short meeting, Roshi took the Shinkansen to Okayama to be in time for Shukushin and Domyo and I waited for the night bus. In Tokyo all shops closed at 6pm because of the electricity shortage. Next morning we were back at Sogenji, where the cherry blossoms by the pond were just in full bloom.

Written by Ekei Zenji, Sogenji, April 3, 2011

## §

Sendai

When Kunitomi san asked me if I was willing to go to a temple in Sendai with Roshi and Ekei, I said yes, of course! And I think that anybody else at Sogen-ji in this circumstance would have said yes without hesitation. Roshi told us about the connection between Yamada Munon Roshi and Zennojisan, the priest of the temple we were traveling to. The priest had donated to Sogenji throughout the years, sending us samugi and rice amongst other things. In light of the disaster, we would be going to help this temple and the people connected with it. But at the meeting with Roshi and Chisan right before our departure, nobody knew exactly what kind of help we would provide once there. I was a little worried about that. I was trained at Enso House, the hospice for terminal care. Helping people in dying is one thing; helping people who survived the earthquake and tsunami to live



is something else!

We knew there would be no fresh food in Sendai so Masako san, Roshi's sister, helped by neighbors cooked our meals for the trip and the two full days we would be staying there. In addition, we took food with us for the people of Sendai. When we finished packing, between the three of us, there were eight full bags, mostly food.

We left Sogen-ji early evening of March 28th, taking the shinkansen to Kyoto station. There we met Yamaguchi san and his wife. They gave a full box of hand warmers for the people in need in Sendai and for us sushi for the trip. From Kyoto, we took the night bus to Sendai.

Each of us at Sogen-ji received from his family, relatives, or friends warnings and worry about this disaster in Japan, especially the threat of radiation from the damaged nuclear plant in Fukushima. The media portrayal of the disaster greatly added to the sense of fear and worry. With such a background it was strange to arrive at Sendai on the morning of the 29th and see nothing which would indicate that the people there went through a terrible earthquake and tsunami. The bus station was far away from the ocean, but as our stay continued, the effects of the disaster would become clear.

Zenno-ji san and his son Shin Mei san welcomed us warmly with smiles. They came by car. They were lucky to still have gasoline. On the way to the temple we saw kilometers of cars waiting at gas station. We also passed broken electric poles alongside the rail track.

Arriving at Zenno-ji temple we were offered breakfast. Roshi and Zennojisan made the plans for the day. We left later in the morning to deliver the food and supplies we had brought with us to different places in need around Sendai. Getting closer to the ocean, we saw and realized how bad the tsunami was. I will not describe the chaos we saw. To see a picture or video clip is one

thing, but to see it with my own eyes: to feel and experience the fact that the people here had to start from zero. Our trip took place two weeks after the tsunami. There was no doubt that the affected people were choked up by the disaster, but they looked more than anything busy cleaning up and rebuilding what was left.

The car made way through trash heaps, the remains of houses. We arrived at what looked like a brand new temple damaged by the disaster. There was a young monk there who was still in training at Daitoku-ji. He received special permission to leave the monastery to clean the temple, which was broken and covered with mud. On one of the temple walls we saw a calligraphy by Mumon Roshi. It was cut in the middle by a watermark from the tsunami flood. We gave him a bag of supplies which he received with deep appreciation.

We visited a temple where the army had set up a supply distribution center. At this temple hundreds of children made homeless by the tsunami were staying. Some were playing in their new surroundings. They were happy to receive some apple pie from Ekei.

We had lunch at Zuigan-ji monastery, where Ekei had stayed before arriving at Sogen-ji to do training. The cooked vegetables we brought were very appreciated since they had no fresh vegetables. They only had noodles, instant soup, dry food and rice. They cooked on fuel stoves because there was no propane. The monastery had a museum so during a break after lunch Zenno-ji san and Shin Mei san gave us a tour.

After visiting a few more sites, we returned to Zennoji temple for supper and rest. Roshi worked at his computer, documenting the events of the day. Later that evening, there was an earthquake, it was not the only one during our stay, but it was the longest one, shaking everything around. Shin Mei san came to check if we were okay. He had a big smile on his face and we learn from him that

these shakes are routine. They are used to it.

The next day on the 30th we woke up at 5:30 am. Roshi, Ekei and I did choka, not in the hondo because it was too dangerous, but in another room of the temple. We also did Nitten soji. Roshi participated to all of this activities: cleaning the hondo with a vacuum cleaner, sweeping out front and in the graveyard. After breakfast, we helped the “danka” people to clean the tablets “ihai” which had fallen from their shelves making a big mess. About 1300 tablets had fallen. It took five of us all day to do only half of the work. Later that day the propane line was functional so there was hot water again. In the evening, Zenno-ji san offered us to take a bath, which pleased the three of us.

We left Zennoji temple early morning on a rainy April 1st. After a traditional farewell picture, Zennoji san and Shin Mei san gave us a ride back to the bus station. We took a bus to Tokyo.

In Tokyo, it was not easy to find the bus stop for the Okayama bound bus. Roshi had to ask the way many times. We were sweating carrying our luggage. We met Shogen at the bus station. She pulled from her bag three hot wet towels she had prepared for us to our great relief. I was so surprised by her thoughtfulness. I looked at the Roshi with big wide eyes. He just laughed and said, “Here it is.....Japan”.

Roshi separated from Ekei and I, returning to Okayama earlier to attend a special morning service at Sogenji. Ekei and I left five hours later on an all night bus. Though the traveling was exhausting, it was nothing compared to what the people affected by the earthquake and tsunami had to endure.

After leaving Sendai, there was the feeling that we had done so little compared to what was left to do for the people of Sendai to recover from the disaster. Reflecting deeper, it is not the amount of what we do which is important but to act according to our karmic connection. When we have a connection with

people we must regard it as most precious.

2011/04/05 Domyo

## §

[The following reports are from the parents of Leah Fischer, who came to visit Leah, a disciple of Harada Roshi. In spite of the recent earthquake and tsunami disaster they decided to still come to visit Leah.]

My wife and I are just finishing up a long planned trip to Japan to visit our daughter who lives here. On our travels, the only evidence we saw of the quake were people collecting relief funds and a few toppled stone lanterns in a Tokyo garden.

While I had not seen much media coverage of the quake and tsunami, the Roshi here at Sogenji gave us a good first hand account of their affects. The people we interacted with in Japan were all far from the affected areas. Our decision to carry out the trip rather than cancel was supported by the people we stayed with and we were treated with respect and courtesy. People seemed concerned about, and compassionate toward the people directly affected but also seemed to feel that going on with the daily activities of life was important. We appreciate the hospitality we have been shown and wish the people in Japan the best as they recover from this disaster, rebuild and move on to the next chapter of their lives.

John Fischer

Eugene, Oregon USA April 4, 2011

Bread shelves in Tokyo and Hakone were empty. The bread had all been sent to the area affected by the earthquake and tsunami. Groups of people chanted outside train stations, collecting donations for earthquake victims. pictures of the devastation appeared on TV. Innkeepers told us most other travelers had cancelled their

reservations. Otherwise, travelling through the more southern part of Japan, life seemed to be going on as normal.

There was no sense of fear of radiation in the air. Local people enjoyed blooming cherry trees, laughed and celebrated weddings.

Harada Roshi's account of bringing food to Sendai brought home the juxtaposition of our lives continuing as usual outside the area of impact versus the ongoing continuous suffering of people in Sendai. His description of multiple cars stuck in the wires above telephone poles and people's gratitude for the food he brought amidst extreme destruction and grief was almost incomprehensible in relation to the meal we are eating today or the bed we are sleeping in tonight.

Laurie Fischer April 4, 2011

When I called the Kabuki Theatre in Tokyo and a woman there said she was sorry that the show had cancelled, I told her I didn't mind and was sorry about the tsunami. She seemed surprised I wasn't angry. We just exchanged a few sentences, but you could really hear the sadness from the tragedy in her voice. When she answered the phone at first she sounded so cheery and normal, so I knew even though people all seemed to be acting normal, that that didn't show everything.

It was kind of weird because a lot of ryokan owners were surprised at so many cancellations. They didn't experience the direct severity of the earthquake/tsunami so it wasn't real for them. I felt like that too because I just heard stories. I didn't know how to help. I kept picturing a twelve year old girl playing in her room, suddenly swept into the ocean, and what that would be like, so I guess my imagination was the closest I could get to understanding the tsunami.

Leah Fischer

## **Harada Roshi's 2011 Sesshin Schedule**

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