

NAMU DAI BOSA

A TRANSMISSION
OF ZEN BUDDHISM
TO AMERICA

BY

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with an Introduction by

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THE BHAISAJAGURU SERIES

Chapter II

After I have died, do not notify people—it's not necessary. Only a few intimate friends—and Nakagawa Soen Roshi in Mishima, Ryutaku Ji, Japan—need be informed. . . . I wish to pass away quietly and inconspicuously—like a Zen Buddhist monk. . . . I do not want lots of people following my corpse to the crematorium. Again, just a few. Next day, one or two may come and pick up my ashes. Part of them please send to Nakagawa Soen Roshi. . . . All the manuscripts, both in Japanese and in English, belong to Nakagawa Soen Roshi. . . .

Thus read Nyogen Senzaki's will. In order to make the necessary arrangements for the Zendo in Los Angeles, Soen Roshi flew there in the summer of 1958. I received the following letter from him:

Dear Tai-san,

Thank you very much for your help before my departure and also thank you for your two good letters. As I was deeply involved in two sesshins I was unable to write to anyone. Please excuse me. Regarding the future of Nyogen Senzaki's Zendo: there are various opinions and hopes, but everybody feels that this particular place is not appropriate for the Zendo. Mrs. Tanahashi lives across the street and she took care of Nyogen Senzaki for many years. In a way it was convenient for her and for him. But now, Mrs. Tanahashi feels that she would prefer to have some relaxed time. The future of this Zendo is unknown so far. But La Crescenta (the New Moon Mountain), where three of Senzaki's important students live and where we once had sesshin, may become a new location. The form and feeling of the mountain is very much like that of Dai Bosatsu (in Japan), and I like it there, but I don't know. Through two sesshins in America I now have confidence in Zen's future in America.

I will go back to Japan with three of Senzaki's students. After all, the sesshin is most important, wherever it may be held. A student in Hawaii says he would like to invite you to live there and conduct their Zen group. Think it over. All the parcels which you kindly sent arrived here on August 11. You must have spent a lot of time packing them. Thank you very much.

Right now, with Senzaki's students' help, I am putting his manuscripts in order, and I hope someday these precious English manuscripts will be published. Take very good care of yourself.⁴

Soen

In October, Soen Roshi took a boat back to Japan with a small urn containing Senzaki's ashes and three large cartons of the unpublished

manuscripts. The shock of Senzaki's death, together with the strain of years of overly intense practice, had made me weak; there was something wrong with my heart. That November, I entered a hospital, where I spent a difficult half year. The only good thing about it was that I was able to read *Zen in English Literature* by R. H. Blyth quite thoroughly.

When I was discharged, I went back to Ryutaku Ji. Soen Roshi and I discussed the proposal to go to Hawaii. I had lost my enthusiasm for going to America. There no longer seemed to be any point in doing so. Also, I was too young to be the leader of a Zen group. But Soen Roshi suggested that there were at least two reasons to go: First, some recuperation was needed, and the Hawaiian climate would be very beneficial; second, I could continue my academic education at the University of Hawaii.

Although I was not enthusiastic, Soen Roshi persuaded me; I started making all the preparations. Presenting me with the three cartons of Senzaki's manuscripts, Soen Roshi said, "Read these thoroughly. They may inspire you, and they will help your comprehension of English. Someday, it will be our responsibility to prepare them for publication." By the time of my departure, my strength had returned, as well as my eagerness to go to America.

August, 21, 1960, an unforgettable day. I left Japan on the *Himalaya*, a huge British ship, pure white like the Himalayan snow. A strong typhoon was raging over the Pacific. At Yokohama Harbor, the wind and rain were particularly strong, and the waves were rolling right up to the street level. It was like an omen of the dramatic events of my future American life.

My friend Dr. Bernard Phillips, an influential American Zen scholar, happened to be returning to America on the same boat. Without having made any prior arrangements, we wound up in the same cabin! He had been given a scholarship by The Zen Studies Society, Inc., to do research in Japan for a book, *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism*.

The wind and rain seemed to be getting stronger. Thousands of people had gathered to see friends off. Despite the downpour, everyone stayed. At noon the melody of "Auld Lang Syne" started. The