



MEDITATION — Richard Baker, left, a Zen Buddhist priest, and Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, a Zen master, meditate at Zen Mountain Center at Tassajara

Hot Springs. The center is comparable to a Christian retreat. Less than an hour a day is spent in formal instruction.

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Old Resort Now A Zen Center

By **MAC BOWE**
Mercury Staff Writer

TASSAJARA HOT SPRINGS

— The occasional clink of dish-ware was the only sound from the more than 70 people as they ate silently under the trees at this former resort.

They were students and Zen Buddhist priests undergoing rigorous training at Zenshinji — the Center for Meditation of the Heart and Mind.

Meditation is one of the keystones of Zen training — walking meditation and sitting meditation.

The Zen Mountain Center involves some of the most strenuous mental and physical training known to Western man.

The center is comparable, in a sense, to a Christian retreat — an opportunity for students of Zen to meditate and study the philosophy.

"I don't think many who are insincere make it," Richard Baker, 31, of San Francisco, a Zen priest and director of the center, said.

"We have about 200 applications for our first two month training period. Of those we

accepted 85, either people we knew or those who were selected through interviews to determine their sincerity."

Then came Tangaryo, a three-day session of meditation in a sitting position from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. with breaks for meals only.

"It doesn't sound too hard, but some people start climbing the walls before it's over," Baker said.

Sixty of the hand-picked students made it through Tangaryo.

Life is simple in this hidden valley 50 miles southeast of Monterey. The students and priests alike breakfast on simple food such as cereal and fruit. Lunch and dinner may be soup and vegetables or brown rice.

Alcohol and drugs are prohibited, although smoking at certain periods during the day is permitted.

Men and women's living and bathing quarters, except for married couples, are segregated.

The day starts at 4 a.m. with the sound of the dawn bell, a specially cast bell presented to

the center by a Zen monastery in Japan.

The days are spent in sitting and walking meditation, interspersed with meals and work periods.

The students are repairing and rehabilitating the facilities formerly used by the public when they travelled over the mountain roads to steam in the hot mineral baths.

Less than an hour a day is spent in formal instruction, usually a lecture by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi, the Zen master.

Suzuki Roshi — the Roshi stands for master — gave up a temple of his own in Japan eight years ago to come to the United States to teach Zen. Only about a score of Zen masters in the world have attained his peak of understanding of the philosophy.

Roshi sees a great opportunity for Zen in the Western world.

"You are not filled with age-old conceptions about Buddhism," he said. "You have no prejudices or traditions about one school or another as we have in the Orient."

Most of the students are Caucasian. Most of them will return to outside life after the two or three months of training in the mountains. A few may go on to train for the priesthood.

There is an Oriental flavor about the center, but, according to Baker, there is no attempt to turn it into a transplanted Japan.

"I wear robes because I spend a lot of my time sitting and it's much easier to sit in robes than it is in Western garb."

Many of the students shave their heads and long hair on men is forbidden in all but a few cases. Like the East Indian who appeared at the gates recently and asked to be admitted to training.

Zen, according to Baker, is an attempt to cleanse the mind of all conceptual attitudes.

"Visualize the mind as an absolutely clear pool of water. Nothing disturbs it, nothing distracts it.

"Drop a leaf into the pool. Observe what happens. Then cleanse the mind again. Perhaps the wind ruffles the pool. Observe again what happens."



SILENT MEAL — No talking is permitted at any time during peri-

ods of prolonged meditation at Zen Mountain Center at Tassajara

Hot Springs. Here, students and priests eat silent meal.

Park Board Wants More Authority

GILROY — The Gilroy Park and Recreation Commission wants a greater hand in formulating the city's park and recreation program, City Councilmen have been told.

James Thorpe, a commissioner, complained that the commission has had no real opportunity in the past to formulate plans.

Instead, plans have been formulated by other city officials, put in the budget and then the commission has been asked to approve the items.

The subject came up this

week when the commission sought a clarification of a recent situation in which the commission rejected city participation in a federally-financed day camp program.

The rejection was on the basis that there was not enough time to properly put together a program.

But day camp backers went to council and got an okay on it. The day camp program turned out to be a big success.

Commissioner George Parrish, who said that the plan presented to the commission

differed from the one outlined to councilmen, said that commissioners had never been advised on why they had been overruled. Mayor Norman Goodrich said there had been no intention of overruling anyone.

He noted that it was a crash program and needed immediate attention. So councilmen approved the program with a minimum of city participation.

City Administrator Fred Wood estimated that parks and recreation director Robert Frost puts an hour a week on the day camp program.

Most of the work to attain such a state is done through meditation during which a great deal of attention is spent on breathing.

Sometimes an "illuminating experience" as the gradual or sudden realization occurs.

Rules are flexible. Baker, a vegetarian because of the Buddhist prohibitions against killing, will eat meat if it is served at a friend's home.

"Rules are guides," Suzuki Roshi said. "They must give way when they conflict with reality."

The hot mineral baths have no particular place in the center's training, although they are frequently used by both students and priests.

"We want to keep them open to the public," Baker said. "We don't feel it would be proper to close them to people who have been using them for years in the past."

Operation of the baths, however, is not expected to bring in any profits.

"We'll be quite happy if we break even," he said.

The center itself is far from self-supporting. The \$2 per day charge and \$25 registration fee doesn't begin to cover costs, according to Baker.

Contributions form the major financial support — from the Zen Center in San Francisco, which owns the property, from students or just from interested people.

Baker is enthusiastic about Zenshinji.

"There is only one other like it in the United States," he said.

It's not an easy life, however. Communication with the outside world is kept to an absolute minimum and conversation during meditation is prohibited. Twice a week someone goes into town for groceries, and the telephone, except in emergencies, is manned only for one hour a day.

Suzuki Roshi says he tries to be harder on his Caucasian students than he was on his students in his temple in Japan.

Students involved in Sesshin, the final seven days of silent meditation which is broken only for meals, services and a brief work period, probably would agree.



**WORK CALL — Robert
Gove of San Francisco,**

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summons fellow stu-
dents to work with
drumbeats at the Zen

**Mountain Center at
Tassajara Hot Springs.**

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