

Ancient Dragon Zen Gate 2017 Camping Sesshin
Reflections One Week Later offered by Gyoshin Laurel Ross

“In the Western Hemisphere we have only the tiniest number of buildings that can be called temples... The temples of our hemisphere will be some of the planet’s remaining wilderness areas...” Gary Snyder in *Practice of the Wild*

“No eternal reward will forgive us now for wasting the dawn...” Jim Morrison

Sesshin is always a very special opportunity. Usually we sit in a quiet zendo, facing a white wall and facing ourselves. Camping sesshin takes place in a different kind of temple. We sit in one of our region’s most beautiful and well-cared for natural areas. We also walk as an important part of our sesshin experience.

“The wilderness pilgrim’s step-by-step, breath-by-breath walk up a trail...is so ancient a set of gestures as to bring a profound sense of body-mind joy...The point is to make intimate contact with the real world, real self.” *Practice of the Wild*

Eight bodhisattvas sat and walked in Illinois Beach State Park in early August 2017 and made intimate contact with the real world: the magnificent Lake Michigan, the plants and animals of the sandy dunes, the evening bonfire, the colossal wind, and the unfailing daily sunrise, all of them parts of our real self.

In Zen we ground our understanding in direct experience. We strive to learn from the ancient teachings about interconnectedness and dependent co-arising and suchness. Yet our awakening comes not only from studying, but from paying attention to our senses and investigating our own true nature. Camping sesshin was an opportunity to look more directly at the interconnectedness of all beings, in both time and space.

In Zen we learn from our many teachers and by spending time outdoors we may find that nature is an important teacher.

“Look deep, deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.”
Albert Einstein

In Zen we strive to bring our experience on the cushion into other parts of our lives.

“*Sacred* refers to that which helps take us...out of our little selves into the whole mountains and rivers mandala universe...The wilderness as temple is only the beginning. One should not dwell in the specialness of the extraordinary experience...The best purpose of such studies and hikes is to be able to...see all the land about us, agricultural, suburban, urban, as part of the same territory—never totally ruined, never completely unnatural.” *Practice of the Wild*

Snyder tells us that beautiful, wild places are special, extraordinary. We should cherish the remnants of wild nature that remain and become intimate with them. And he is also telling us that everywhere is special, though perhaps more ordinary in some ways. What we experience in nature is something we can take home with us and adds richness beyond the immediate experience.

“Attentiveness alone can rival the most powerful magnifying lens.”
Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Gathering Moss*.

We camping zen students began to know the spirit of our special place by taking the time to pay attention to plants and birds and bugs and soil and by trying to see them as living beings supporting the fabric of life on earth.

Our gratitude is boundless.

“Enlightenment is intimacy with all things.” Dogen