Preface

To My Friends in the West

During January 1969 I participated in a seminar on Buddhist meditation at Oberlin College to help students in their understanding of Zen Buddhist practice. Later, in 1970 and 1971, I spent ten weeks at Carleton College, giving one course on the history of Zen Buddhism, and another providing instruction in zazen. Through these courses, and many discussions with students of several colleges and institutes in the United States, I have come to realize that people in the West are increasingly turning their attention from mere intellectual or theoretical interest in Zen Buddhism toward its actual practice. In my meetings with a great number and variety of Zen meditation groups all over the country, I have been made aware, by their sincerity in practicing Zen meditation, that Zen Buddhism no longer remains an exclusively Oriental treasure.

It was marvelously fortunate, in this sense, that I brought with me on this tour ninety-seven paintings of Rinzai Zen monastic life. They were drawn by the late Zen priest the Reverend Giei Satō, who died on November 30, 1967, at the age of forty-seven. He was not a Zen Master, but an ordinary Rinzai Zen temple priest who loved to draw pictures for the children of his neighborhood, as a way of illustrating for them the teachings of Buddhism. What comforted him most during his last years was his memories of his youthful days at a Zen monastery. He expressed these recollections in pictures, so that his Zen spirit might live on after his passing. I am sure these pictures were drawn for no one besides himself. The reader may be astonished to see humor expressed here, considering that they were sketched by a man facing death. There are no feelings of sorrow, however, only brightness and joy in both figures and color.

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Zen monastic life has not been revealed in this fashion to the public before, as monks dislike being disturbed by visitors whose interest may be only superficial. While some photographs of Zen monastic life exist, they do not catch its flavor, nor its total regimen and rhythm of life. Notice the faces of these monks. Can such expressions be captured in a photograph?

In the middle of February 1969 I visited Pendle Hill, the Society of Friends' center for religious study and practice near Philadelphia, where I had spent a year during 1960 and 1961, and was asked by friends there to show slides of these pictures. I was then urged to have these pictures published for people throughout the English-speaking world. The Institute for Zen Studies (located at Hanzōro College, a Rinzai Zen institution in Kyōto) where I am a member of the faculty, accepted this offer with great pleasure and permitted me to write a commentary based on my own personal experience for each picture. The originals of these pictures are kept at the Institute.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to three persons: Barry Jackman of Carleton College for his editorial assistance and his preparation of the Glossary of Japanese terms; Bardwell Smith, also of Carleton College, for his editing of the manuscript, his helpful Introduction, and his making possible the publication of this volume; and Zenkei Shibayama, Abbot of Nanzenji, for his Preface in this instance — but above all, for his example as a Zen Master.

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