

AN ACCOUNT OF THE MANILA SESSHIN (Eliazo Hall, Ateneo, January 2-7, 1978)

by: Mrs. Kazue Yamada (Okusama)

Kubota San and Oda San and Miyazaki San and Mr. & Mrs. Adachi and many others were in the group that came to see us off at Hanada Airport early in the New Year, on January 2 at 10:00 AM. Then about 4 hours later, in the light and warmth of a brightly shining summer sun, we arrived in Manila. This was the second time for both of us at the Manila International Airport. At first it seemed small and crowded and it seemed to take us a long time to get through customs and have our luggage and handbags inspected at customs....with all the gifts for Sister Elaine we had only one suitcase between us for our clothes. Among the people who came to see us, looking very fit was the person we had missed greatly, Sister Elaine, and also Father Habito. When we saw them truly our hearts were filled with peace and gratitude.

It seemed as though we were still moving along in Hayashi San's car who saw us off at Tokyo, only this time with a cooler (instead of heater) and within an hour we arrived at Ateneo University where the sesshin was going to be held. This is a Jesuit University, the same place where the first Manila Sesshin was held last year. It brought to mind the Jesuit University of Jochi (Tokyo) and beside it is the Alma Mater of Fr. Habito. It has a large quiet campus, well removed from the city, and altogether splendid. One couldn't wish for a better place for a sesshin.

The sesshin started at 7:00 in the evening of the day we arrived. There were 29 participants: 22 Filipinos, 1 Indian, 3 Americans, 1 Canadian, and 2 Japanese, about the same number that participated last year. There were almost all Catholics.

That evening, the Roshi gave an opening greeting and some cautions concerning sesshin. After that there was sitting until 9 o'clock. From the second day on, we got up at 5 o'clock, did zazen had teisho and dokusan, and generally followed the same schedule as at San-un Zendo except that at 11:30 A.M. there was Mass. And in the afternoon free period there was "shower time" which you can imagine is necessary in a Manila sesshin. Almost all the participants were beginners and right off Sister Elaine and Fr. Habito and I took turns at being jikijitsu.

On the first day, the Roshi's teisho was "Joshu's Muji"; the next day he read the account of his own kensho experience; and the third day he read the letters of the deceased Iwasaki Yaeko's experience. The Roshi also gave a talk in English to help beginners in zazen and the participants seemed to be deeply impressed. (Fr. Habito translated the complicated parts.)

The meals were catered from a canteen in another building of the University and the participants helped to carry the food in turns. For breakfast we had champorado (a chocolate cereal served with milk) because sugar is put into it, has a flavor like our azuki beans. This was served alternately with oatmeal. Our lunch and supper were also plain simple appropriate food, Manila rice and fried vegetables and soup which we ate gratefully.

On the morning of the fifth day of the sesshin, it was announced the four women had their kensho confirmed (three are sisters and the other is a lady teacher at Maryknoll College). Afterwards the ceremony for expression of gratitude took place. Then all the people who had

sat together for five days listened to the talks of the four who had attained kensho and there was much happiness and grateful tears. They gave hope to the other practitioners who will surely proceed with confidence from now on.

(It was a good sesshin) sometimes even without rest. The Roshi guided all his being, and corrected difficulties. That plus the zeal of the good people (which was so ardent) that the effect of the sesshin was greater than we had ever thought possible. This indeed (is) something to be grateful for.

Sister Elaine, who used to sit at San-un Zendo (Kamakura), has planted a seed in the Philippines and it is now rooted firmly and it will bud and grow bigger day by day. Probably from here on, the interchange between the Filipino practitioners and San-un Zendo will gradually become bigger and deeper, and after the bud has matured will bloom beautifully.

Besides this, through the kindness of a Filipino businessman, Mr. Sixto Roxas (his wife participated in sesshin) we met the former ambassador to Japan the Honorable Jose S. Laurel III, (President of the Philippine-Japan Friendship Foundation Incorporated). Mr. Laurel invited the Roshi and Sister and I to lunch. He lived here in Japan many years and speaks the language fluently. Mr. Laurel expressed gratitude that the Roshi is going to the Philippines for zazen and presented us with an honorarium. This unexpected gesture gave a great lift to the Zendo members and we are most grateful.

I believe that the way of true friendship between Japan and the Philippines is the Zen Way. I have resolved to devote myself to the Way of Zen even more zealously now.

(Approximate translation of Sister Elaine)