

## Building a Temple

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A visiting monk talked about his having to reject a request to offer meditation in a nearby prison explaining this by saying, "I'm building a temple," which is literally what he and the monks there are doing. He had his priorities very clear—right now he was building a temple. Another monk commented once how "You can't have it all," when he too recognized that his call was to develop a retreat center, not to develop a city priory. We can't do everything and we can't have everything—coming to terms with this realistically with the intelligent eye of training can be an important reminder about what is essential and truly meaningful for us to be and do in this life both with its long-term goals and minute by minute choices.

Each one of us also is building a temple whether we're in a monastery or not. Sometimes this body is referred to as a temple, the Heart being the inner shrine we're protecting, nourishing, and cherishing. The Truth of our being lies beneath the surface phenomena that demand and attract our attention. Getting all caught up in the life drama each of us is playing is the karmic blindness we've inherited that brings suffering and unsatisfactoriness. We take the outer show for the whole thing, worrying about and preoccupied with the many circumstances, inner as well external ones, which have such impact as we move through one event and then the next. Until we learn how to slow down and step back, we're at the mercy of the karmic swing from the pleasant and unpleasant experiences that occur in abundance as they impact this body-mind which we implicitly have taken as 'me,' my 'self.' Those of us who are dedicated to a spiritual solution to the end of life's unsatisfactoriness come to know more and more the folly of living simply on life's surface whether it is momentarily pleasant or not, good or not, satisfying or not.

Then we know we must tenderly look to the inner Source beneath the play. What is it? Where is it? The longing for meaning, for security, for unconditional love is our response to Its call. We begin to see with greater and greater clarity how turning to That allows us to make more wholesome, more 'educated' choices. The clarity then throws quiet light on the consequences of our actions, and we see so directly that creating suffering for self and others by how we think, speak, and act has sad ripple effects that relentlessly follow and can truly haunt us. This is the realm of humility and repentance for the harm we've done. It is the beginning and development of wisdom. The Heart glows with a fierce light and then a gentle softness, helping the molding of Its outer expression. Our temple is not made from bricks and wood and concrete. It is made from the careful yet carefree choices that freely give to others and refuse to be limited by mere convention and fear. That Love that holds us all in a dear embrace is far bigger than we know and yet it is the closest, most intimate friend that never lets us down. Our privilege this life is to increasingly recognize It and live by It.

How do we build the temple of our heart? It's so simple: we keep going, dedicated and sincere in our willingness to train this body-mind, moving from the conditioned known to the vast Unknown which gives to each of us the inner light of pure awareness. "As you walk on, distinctions between near and far are lost; and if you lost become, there will arise obstructing mountains and great rivers. This I offer to the seeker of Great Truth; do not waste time" is the great reminder that Sekito Kisen in his enlightenment poem offers to all of us. Never give up, he's saying, just keep going. It's all good; it's all good. Mistakes aren't a problem. Confusion

isn't a problem. With honesty and integrity and the intelligence of this birth, we too can gradually, little by little, create an impregnable temple of the Heart that becomes a shelter also for all those we touch.

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