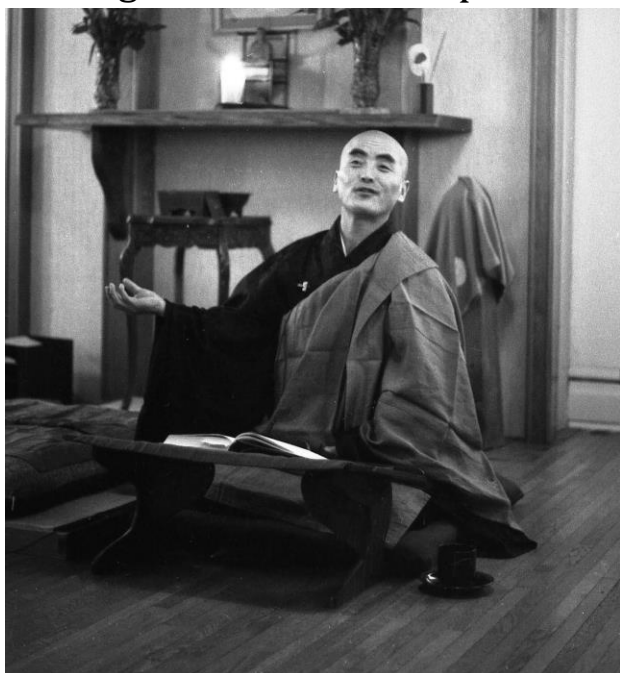


The Year of Katagiri Roshi

By Rev. Teijo Munnich, April 2021

At Great Tree, the year 2021 might be called “The Year of Katagiri Roshi.” Here is how it came about.

A few years, Chimyo mentioned that I rarely spoke about Katagiri Roshi. This surprised me because Roshi’s teaching is



always in my thoughts. Then I realized that if I didn’t talk much about him, it was because his teaching was not so much in words as in his presence and his actions. I became aware of that at Tassajara Monastery, after practicing with Roshi for about seven years. While there I noticed how often I considered how he might respond to various situations—not in what he

said, but what I had observed in him. And now I still look for his spirit in my heart

I clearly felt his voice in the fourth book of Roshi’s teachings, *The Light That Shines Through Infinity*, sensing the spirit behind the words almost as if he were in the room. His embodiment of the dharma awakened a deep aspiration in me to pursue this practice even when faced with obstacles presented by life and my own weaknesses.

Speaking about his years as a young monk, Roshi painted a picture of a stubborn and impatient fellow, yet one of the first things I noticed about him was how patient he was. His dharma name, Dainin (given to him by his teacher), means “Great

Patience.” I rarely saw him show frustration with his students, despite our strong-willed, stubborn ways. Instead, he noticed our strengths and encouraged us, viewing our stubbornness as determination and dedication, which kept us striving in the midst of our arguing and fussing. His overcoming his tendency toward impatience allowed me to trust that great effort in this practice really works.

Another quality that inspired me was his not speaking poorly of people who irritated him. Sometimes I could see his irritation, but I also saw his restraint. I aim for such restraint in myself, thinking of him often as I feel the urge to criticize others, and I really appreciate what an effort it takes.

But what I admired most was his acknowledging his own weaknesses. He was able to admit his mistakes and even laugh at himself. At times when I questioned his actions, I would see him pause, giving himself time to reach clarity. He might recognize a certain error in his own attitude, or if the issue was mine, he would say so. Either way, this was very important for me, since a major benefit of spiritual practice is to recognize our deluded ways and work to become free of them.

As Roshi faced his illness and death, I often witnessed this pause. With each new challenge, he closed his eyes and seemed to touch the place inside himself that helped him see a larger perspective. When he opened his eyes, I sensed that his clarity had returned.

Each time I saw his faith, his patience, and his ability to be clear even in the face of death—in the words of Dogen Zenji, to “take the backward step that shines inward to illuminate the self”—I was inspired to re-commit myself to zazen practice. In that way, his spirit continues to shine in my life.

Reading *The Light That Shines Through Infinity* brought Katagiri Roshi to life for me again in a vivid way. This book, plus the opportunity Zoom presents to invite speakers from afar, led me to invite several people who studied with Katagiri

Roshi to speak at our Saturday programs throughout this year. That is why I call 2021 “The Year of Katagiri Roshi.” I hope everyone can join us on Saturdays, or listen to the talks on the Great Tree YouTube channel.