



*Precepts ceremony, Frankfurt*

wonderful privilege.

It was inspiring to experience the independent spiritual struggles of our new members in the Saint Petersburg region (with whom I spent several weeks) without the benefit—which perhaps sometimes can become a hindrance—of teachers, beautiful dharma rooms, books, moktaks, rules or schedules. In practicing with them—beating substitute moktaks (I finally settled on a jar and wooden spoon), chanting, sitting and talking in the Russian forest by the strange late light of the White Nights (the time of the summer solstice when there is only a slight darkening from about midnight to 1 a.m.)—I was able both to put down and to appreciate form in a new way. I was reminded that wearing a robe and sitting on a cushion does not necessarily mean that I am truly practicing the 100% effort to be present. On the other hand, I gained a renewed appreciation of how form and together action help me do what my small “I” cannot always do by itself. I felt a very deep bond and common direction with my new friends in Russia, who helped me to see many things about myself, and most importantly, beyond myself. To them, too, I am very grateful.

In Russia I was often questioned about practice and the dharma. As much as I may consider myself an obtuse beginner at home, I realized that I did have some experience to share. There was no place for the self-indulgence of “I am the worst Zen student in the world” mind. In Moscow, I stayed with a member of the sangha, along with the abbot from another Soviet Zen center. On the twenty-sixth floor balcony of the towering apartment block, we were discussing whether there was anything that connects us all, that makes us all one. One fellow who was not interested in Zen believed it was “the good life” that joins us all—“good food, good drink, women!” Through the difficulties of the Russian language, time changes, and of course unclear mind—well, I stopped. I asked myself this question, looked around me—over the river towards Moscow, and at my three companions waiting for my response—I asked myself as hard as I could, and only said “don’t know.”

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## *Dharma Rap*

*a poem by Robert Augustine,  
“Dharma Bob”*

*Clear mind like space,  
is my basic rap.  
Know / Don't know,  
is my dharma attack.*

*Nam Cheon's cat,  
Hyang Eom's tree,  
Un Mun's stick (ugh!)  
they're all like me.*

*I come from the East,  
where the Buddhas grow,  
from the clear pure land  
of the ice & snow.*

*Now what is this?  
Cat food again?  
Go wash your bowl!  
Try another Kong-an.*

*My original face  
cannot be seen.  
When it starts to rain  
my skin turns green.*

*Dae Soen Sa Nim  
was here today.  
Joju's dog  
just ran away.*

*Mu! Mu!  
Tell me what I said!  
My mind's so clear,  
I have no head.*

*A cigarette man  
drops ashes on me.  
He runs around  
with a stone monkey.*

*I have no face  
where a beard could grow.  
Bodhidharma  
told me so.*

*Moktak, moktak,  
clack! clack! clack!  
You hit him,  
he'll hit you back.*

*(Holding up stick!)  
Tell me what you see!  
You have no lips,  
now go drink tea.*

*Step, step,  
to this rhymin' line.  
Sun, moon & stars  
will fall behind.*

*My tongue is tied.  
It sounds absurd;  
but, you haven't heard,  
my last word.*

*Grass is green!  
Sky is blue!  
You understand one;  
but you don't know two.*

*Your katz did this  
and your katz did that;  
Killed 500 Buddhas  
in a single splat.*

*The plane flies south;  
the car goes by;  
pup chasing bone;  
now who am I?*

*My KATZ! is a sound  
that can't be heard.  
Don't know, don't know!  
Don't say one word!*

*Now you've heard  
my DHARMA RAP.  
Put it all down,  
Leave it where it's at!*