

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 16, Number 1 - 2

Winter - Spring, 2015

Only As It Is

Today the lilacs' fragrance has been replaced by the lilies of the valley. I hoped to take some pictures of the lilacs but I fear it's too late for that, as many of the flowers are brown and dry. I'd like them to be otherwise but they are there only as they are.

"It is there only as it is" is a phrase I learned from a Japanese friend. He's doing some translating and I'm helping him with the English. That phrase was part of what we were working on. I'm surprised I haven't heard it before.

I find it a gentle reminder that reality is right here if we only look. Mostly, we don't look. We assume we know, then act on our assumptions. Sometimes that works. Sometimes we can only stand there in astonishment and confusion.

Like the husband of a friend who recently left her marriage. It was the usual story of unraveling of bonds frayed by lack of consideration, of accommodating to someone who didn't return the favor. Who assumed that having things his way was only his due. She went house hunting, found what she wanted. Then she announced that she'd be moving and her lawyer was drafting the divorce papers.

He looked up from his book in stunned silence, his pipe in his hand. "I knew you'd been unhappy . . ." he said in a confused voice. It had been there only as it was and he'd not seen it through the dust of his own effort to make things as he wanted them.

When she first told me the story, I was gleeful. He totally had deserved it for all the trials he'd caused her. As I sit here now in the fading spring light, I am melancholy for him. He loved her deeply and her going left a hole in him. But his concern for self had been too strong to see *it* just as it was when he could do something to take care of it. He still hopes for her return.

This now-former husband is actually a fine person – honest, loyal, responsible, loving. He was devoted to his family. He is intelligent, articulate, witty. You would enjoy him if you met him somewhere. But none of that ensures that we will see clearly. He saw "it" – her unhappiness, and he reinterpreted that reality to serve his own comfort. When what was there only as it was finally hit him in the face with a Muhammad Ali punch, it was a revelation. He'd covered it

so thoroughly with his own ideas that he'd almost forgotten about it.

He is not alone. He has you and me for company. He has taught me to observe carefully lest I look up one day in total confusion. How many times have I done that, anyway? The startled response, followed by, Oh! I didn't realize . .

Life is always here just as it is. We only need open our eyes to see it.

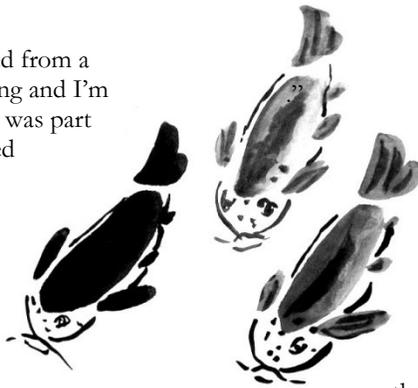
Why can't we do that? How do we do that? We recognize our ideas as just our ideas and let go. Zazen. There are times when I am impatient about going down to zazen. The momentum of the task at hand has caught me and I want to make this call now that I just found the number, finish my thought, look over this next thing – you know the drill, don't you?

The five-minute bell rings. With a sigh I get up and go down the stairs, say hello, and we sit zazen together. Pretty soon, the impatience becomes just another self-referential thought. I remember - the real reason I'm here is to sit with people. Right now I'm doing the most important thing of the day. And they are doing the most important thing of my day – making me sit.

Thoughts come and go and there's leisure to recognize them for what they are. There are no distractions – things to get done, email to answer. Nothing to distract me from noticing that this in front of me right now is just my thought. It, too, is there only as it is. My thought. I can relax and let go of it and see what the next one has to offer. Making that call can wait; that urgency was just me trying to get something out of the way so I could feel good about getting something done. So I could clear the deck and get on to the next thing. Whatever. That was my thought, there only as it is, not reality only as it is. It's interesting that when we recognize our thoughts for what they are, they become transparent and reality shines through. We see *it*, right here, just this, as it is.

The bell rings. We all get up. I say goodbye to the people and amble back up to the stairs. I look at the task in front of me and see that it is there only as it is. It manifests as this, in just this way, no other. I sit down and begin again with more clarity, calm, and wisdom.

- Zuikō Redding



My Story of Surrender

This is a story about surrender. My mother's and mine.

On May 25th this last year, my mother died at the age of 96. She was a woman young for her years, always on the go. She had been referred to as the "Mother Theresa" of Sacred Heart parish in Dubuque. She traveled all through her 80's with her AmeriClub, visiting London, Switzerland, Greece, Italy and more.

Then she turned 90 and it was if she pulled down the shade on the window of life. She withdrew from bridge club and exercise class. I'd hear her say, "Now that I'm 90, I guess I'm just going to fall apart." When asked why she slept so much she'd say, "I guess I'm just lazy."

Frustrated, hurt, bewildered, I spent the next six years trying to figure her out. Visits were very frustrating. I didn't want her to be like this. Anti-depressants made no difference.

Then one day in May as I drove to Dubuque to visit her I prayed, "Please God, help me to know what to say to her, how to be with her." Then it struck me. If she is sleeping and won't wake up, I'll sit with her and meditate. I'll just be with her and not expect anything from her. I let go.

I walked into her room that day with no expectations. She was in bed as usual. "Hi Mom," and then she said, "I have something to tell you!" Her voice was happy, excited. I couldn't believe it. I pulled up a chair close to her bed. "What Mom?" "I'm pregnant!" I didn't know if she was serious. Something in me said go with it. She went on to say she could quit her job now. She named all these people who were coming to see her. They were all dead. She was so happy, so excited. She and I talked for over an hour. She said, "I'll be going home soon." When I had to leave she hugged me, told me how much she loved me, kissed me. She never did that. She was like a new person. She was pregnant with new life. She was transformed. That was on May fifth, and on May twenty-fifth, she died.

It was as if once I surrendered and let go of trying to fix her, she surrendered. She gave me the most beautiful gift she could have. My mother had a lesson to teach me.

At the same time I was reading *The Grace in Dying* by Kathleen Dowling Singh. She says:

The suffering of the mental ego prior to entering the dying process is enormous. It is the suffering of the dismantling of the structure, the identity, the beliefs, and the hopes, the dreams, the cherished memories, the fancied "proofs" of the self. Once the mental ego is dismantled, the blessed, peaceful transformations of the Nearing Death Experience can occur, but the dismantling is painful to be sure.

I highly recommend *The Grace in Dying*. Kathleen Dowling

July Sesshin



July 17 - 19

Friday - 7:00 p.m.
to Sunday - 5:30 p.m.

Join us for all or part of the weekend.

Please sign up by July 10 to assure a place.

Out-of-town participants are welcome
to stay at Zen Center.

Cost: \$25/day or \$15 for a half-day.

Everyone is welcome at 9:00 zazen
and dharma talk

To register or get more details, contact us

phone: (319) 247-5986
email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org
web: cedarrapidszencenter.org

Singh gave me new eyes with which to view death, a beautiful view into the transformations of dying. I was blessed to share these transformations with my mother, as she and I surrendered together.

- Kathleen Schumacher

Joy in Zen

I recently read an excellent book, *Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges*, by Pat Enkyo O'Hara. The chapter that captured my attention the most is titled "Joy: Moment to Moment Possibility". Zen priests and teachers often write or talk about contentment, peace, and happiness. These three ideas possess a calmness of thoughts and

emotions that signify Zen. Joy, however, is seldom mentioned. Joy seems the opposite of our understanding of Zen: effusive, ebullient, extravagant, the height of excitement.

O'Hara Roshi believes, however, that Zen practitioners can, do, and should experience joy. Joy simply manifests itself in a quieter and subtler way. She writes, "Once we are willing to be directly intimate with our life as it arises, joy emerges out of the simplest of life experiences. Something happens—a mourning dove coos, the eyes of another person meet ours, a cat stretches, we notice the sensation of breeze on our cheek—and at once we are intimate with our life. This quality of joy hangs around the edges, allowing you to open yourself to being awake and new with each experience you encounter. Joy wells up when we leave room in our conscious for it to come."

Joy also manifests itself through intimacy. Intimacy with others through kindness, love, and compassion; intimacy with ourselves through self love and meditation; and ultimately, intimacy with the moment. Intimacy with the moment is doing and being right here, right now, without judgment, grasping, or greed. Intimacy with the moment is awareness and acceptance of the present moment. Intimacy with the moment is awakening to the present moment. And often, given the moment, intimacy with the present moment is joy.

While I was reading O'Hara's book I was also rereading Shunryu Suzuki's *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Because I had been thinking about joy in Zen, these sentences from the chapter "Naturalness", a rare reference to joy in a classic American Zen text, greeted me in fresh, new way: "When you have [smooth, natural] mind, you have the joy of life. ...This naturalness is very difficult to explain. But if you can just sit and experience the actuality of nothingness in your practice, there is no need to explain. If it comes out of nothingness, whatever you do is natural, and that is the true activity. You have the true joy of practice, the true joy of life in it ... Moment after moment we have true joy of life."

Suzuki-roshi is specifically speaking about zazen, the foundation of Zen. In this and through this meditation we find, as Suzuki-roshi explains, "The true purpose of Zen: to see things as they are, to observe things as they are, and to let everything go as it goes." When we do this, we create the spacious and open mind and heart that offer us the moment to moment possibility of joy. This interior illumination captures the essence of joy in Zen. O'Hara-roshi echoes Suzuki-roshi's naturalness when she writes, "True joy with its sense of wonder and reverence, comes of itself and neither depends on nor arises out of our personal ego attachments, our projections, or our needs. True joy comes of itself, rather like the ancient Taoist notion of *tz'u chan*—that which naturally emerges from what is present in this moment, this situation. Often this is the simplest of moments."

As we know, Zen is about paying attention to the moment, all the moments, big and small, joyous and sorrowful, wanted and unwanted. By paying attention we can slowly understand and accept all moments. By accepting we can eventually appreciate. Through appreciation, we experience joy. The joy we experience in meditation stays with us as we move from the meditation cushion into our activities throughout the day, and similarly, the joy we experience in our everyday ordinary and extraordinary moments comes with us as we stop, sit, and meditate.

- James Eich

Sitting Groups

Here are some sitting and sangha opportunities that might be closer than Cedar Rapids.

Bloomington-Normal, Illinois meets at 7:00 p.m. on Friday evenings at Main Street Yoga in downtown Bloomington. For more information, visit <http://bnzengroup.wordpress.com> or contact them at bnzengroup@gmail.com.

Cedar Falls meets Saturday mornings at 7:20 a.m. and Tuesday evenings at 7:20 p.m. in St. Luke's Episcopal Church at 2410 Melrose Drive. For more information, email them at cfzensitting@cfu.net.

Dubuque meets on the second Sunday of each month in the Conlon Building at 1100 Rockdale Road. For more information, visit <http://dubuquezencommunity.org> or email them at dbqzen@gmail.com

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course - 2015

June 2, 9, 16, 23
September 1, 8, 15, 22

Dharma School

2015

April	5
May	3
June	7
September	6
October	4
November	1
December	13 (second Sunday)

Daily Schedule

MORNING ZAZEN

Sunday Morning

9:00 – 9:40 am	zazen
9:45 – 10:30	dharma talk
10:30 – 11:15	work
11:15 – 11:45	tea

NOON ZAZEN

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday

12:15 – 12:55 pm zazen

EVENING ZAZEN

Tuesday – 20-minute zazen periods
(kids are welcome)

6:30 – 6:50 pm	zazen
6:50 – 7:00	kinhin
7:00 – 7:20	zazen
7:20 – 7:30	kinhin
7:30 – 8:00	zazen

Wednesday, Thursday

6:30 – 7:10 pm	zazen
7:10 – 7:20	kinhin
7:20 – 8:00	zazen

Third Wednesday each month

7:30 – 9:00 zazen instruction

Sesshins and All-day Sittings

June	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All day sitting (solstice)
July	15	Introduction to zazen
	17 - 19	Sesshin
August	16	All-day sitting
	19	Introduction to zazen
September	16	Introduction to zazen
	20	All-day sitting
October	16 - 18	Sesshin (Daruma)
	21	Introduction to zazen
November	15	All-day sitting
	18	Introduction to zazen
December	4 - 6	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	16	Introduction to zazen
	31	New Year's sitting