

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 17, Number 4

Fall 2016

Bees and Flowers

Summer is winding down. The cicadas are singing, the weather is getting cooler, and the apples are ripening. Bees hover around the late summer flowers.

The other day as I was getting some altar flowers, a low buzz came from beneath the stem I'd reached for. I let go quickly. A bumble bee with big fuzzy shoulders flew out from under it. "Wait a minute - let me get out of here before you do anything" he seemed to say. He moved away from the black-eyed susans over to the milkweed.

I thought of a passage in *Dhammapada*

A monk [or nun] should dwell and act in the village,
Like a bee extracting honey from the flower
But leaving the color and fragrance intact.¹

Good idea for all of us, but how do we do that?

Let's consider that bee under the flower – how is he living his life? He goes out each day and gets nectar to bring back to his community or store for himself if he's a solitary bee. He accepts what's offered and uses it. He doesn't try to change the flower to make gathering more convenient or pleasant. He leaves it the way he found it.

The flower makes nectar for the bee, and it attracts the bee and his friends and relatives with appealing colors and scents. This flower goes to the trouble of feeding bees because bees gather pollen, then leave it on other flowers. Because of bees the flowers continue. The bee, in gathering nectar, produces food for next year's bees.

We usually think of bee and flower as two things, but it's all one thing, isn't it? Without bees, no flowers. Without flowers, no bees. When the flower blooms, the bee is there. Each supports the other's life. We might say that each *is* the other's life.

Bee and flower exist naturally together. With no agenda – no mind, we might say – the bee comes to the flower. With no agenda, the flower has produced nectar. Flowers don't decide to be a more fun color or make nectar they like more. Bees don't look for bigger and better flowers or get tired of visiting the same kinds all the time. They both just do what they do. Each is there when the other needs it, with no sense of specialness or desire for appreciation.

We human beings are a different matter. Our ability to distinguish between self and other and get caught up in our distinctions gives us agendas and impulses that bees and flowers don't have. If we didn't have this self-awareness, we would naturally follow our needs for food, shelter, and such and stop when we had enough. We would not harm our world trying to make ourselves more comfortable. We would just take what is there and not destroy the rest in the process.

We easily forget this, though. We plow the prairie to make our own ecology. We plant soybeans and build housing developments, destroying the food sources that were here before us because they aren't familiar. Insects come but the flowers are wrong and they can't survive.

Systems are resilient, though. When we begin to work with reality, it will thrive again. For a number of years, our milkweed didn't make seeds. We planted more native plants. This year, there are green pods. The butterflies came. If you want some seeds, come over in early November.

When we make our surroundings conform to our wishes they become sterile like our milkweed was. They may be more convenient or attractive, but they aren't a functioning part of the system. We think we're making things better, but we aren't. This is true for the rest of our lives, too. Trying to order our lives according to our wants, we make them barren and desolate.

It's difficult to see this. Things look fine for a while before they go south - actions take time to ripen into consequences. Our carefully constructed lives look wonderful at first, but they do not support us in the long run. Life begins to feel as dry and wilted as our non-native flowers when the rain stops.

How do we see how to function naturally in our world? We let go of our agendas and notions and just watch for a while. This lets us notice how the situation is developing, what others are doing. Then our part becomes clear.

We can function like a bee on a flower when we remember that there is no me and it – that we're all just one thing. We turn our attention toward what is best for the situation. Since we are part of the situation, we will be fine if it is fine. We may not like what needs to be done right now, but we will appreciate the results later. Life will be fresh and vital for all beings and for us.

¹ Maitreya, Ananda, tr., *Dhammapada* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1995), p. 14.

What I Did On My Summer Vacation

Having tried (and failed) to complete two three-day sesshins, in a fit of wild dedication to the cessation of suffering I signed up for a seven-day sesshin. And I completed it. Let me tell you about that.

First, there was a bit over five hours of zazen each day - eight forty-minute periods of sitting still, letting go of thoughts, and being present in that moment. I spent a lot of time sitting there with only my own thoughts for company.

Zazen on the first evening was really good. It was comfortable, relaxing, and the stick to beat my mind monkey into submission was not needed. By 9:00 everyone was in bed in their tents, quietly, mindfully.

Hokyoji, the site of the sesshin, sits in the far southeast corner of Minnesota on a hundred acres of land surrounded by a forest preserve - and coyotes. At midnight their calls echoed through the hills - eerie and wonderful. There they were - wild, with nothing between us and them save the thin fabric of our tents. I thought of the Buddha stopping a charging elephant. Would his methods work for hungry coyotes?

Wake-up was at 4:30 a.m. Twenty minutes later, two hits on the han (a wooden sounding board, struck with a mallet) called us to the zendo for zazen. The air was moist, the newly-mown grass wet, sticking to our feet. The first morning we tracked it into the zendo and onto our zabutons. The next morning we all brushed our feet off with a bit more mindfulness.

The teacher entered, did three bows at the founders' altar and main altar, then circled the zendo in gassho, greeting participants. We put our hands in gassho to return the greeting as the teacher passed behind us. This was a moment for full presence because we sit facing the wall and can't see the teacher pass. The hands raised in gassho seemed like a Zen wave as I raised my hands while the person on my right lowered theirs, then I lowered them while the person on my left raised theirs. A good way to start the day.

The beginning of kinhin was signaled by two hits on the zazen bell. On the second hit, everyone bowed in gassho. As the week progressed, these bows became deeper, not from devotion, but as a good stretch after sitting still for so long. We got up and brushed off our sitting places, with attention to the wet grass we'd tracked in. Hands pressed to our chests, we turned to our left. When the inkin was struck we took a small step, breathed, took another step. Then I was hit by irritation and impatience. The woman three people ahead of me was walking like a snail! I *know* how to walk kinhin, and *she* obviously does not! She is totally clueless and doesn't see us piling up behind her even when she turns the corner! I really need to talk with her - she needs to speed up out of respect for the rest of us. I recognize my irritation, my impatience, my urge to "help" and hold them quietly for a moment. They are me, part of me, but not the reality of me. She is not making me feel these, she is just doing kinhin.

My reactions to her actions became my practice. I pictured blowing on my hands, blowing away the irritation, the impatience, and ego, like dandelion fluff. When sesshin ended, I thanked her for her teaching. I also thanked the teacher, who reminded us all to be mindful and not walk too fast or too slow. When I heard this, I noticed my feeling of "Well I hope *she* listens."

Then it was time for service. Different people led service each day, giving my ego another chance to arise. One's voice was pleasing to me, another's was not - an opportunity to accept this as just the way things are, like life itself - not always as we want it to be, but always just as it is. Watching the doan, feeling the chant, the rhythm, the voices together, this was the Buddha's practice.

After service, there was breakfast and a break. Then we returned all too quickly to zazen - simply sitting, dealing with what comes up in our minds. We sit, seeing who we really are, not how we want ourselves to be, nor how we think others see us, or how we'd like others to see us. We allow our original face - who we are just as we are - to manifest itself. At least, that's what we try to do.

Meals were eaten using oryoki bowls. There is much not to like about eating with oryoki - the prescribed placement of cloths, bowls, spoon, chopsticks. Then there's when to eat, bow, make gassho, stop eating. We chant

We reflect on the effort that brought us this food and consider how it comes to us. We reflect on our virtue and practice and whether we are worthy of this offering. We regard greed as the obstacle to freedom of mind. We regard this meal as medicine to sustain our life. For the sake of enlightenment, we now receive this meal.

At the final meal, it was no longer ritual, it was just a meal. In oryoki, as in life, we receive what's given and do our best with it, recognizing the effort of all that created this moment. On the fourth day, my body rebelled. Ankles, knees, back - everything demanded release from this single-minded

sitting. It was time for finding the middle way of balancing immovable sitting with attention to physical needs.

I retreated to my tent and lay on the floor, fully stretched out. After a while my muscles relaxed into this less stressful position. Deep emotions welled up and I was glad I could let them free in solitude. I lay like this for perhaps three hours. Shortly before the drum sounded to start work period, I felt a great weight lift off me. I sat in a chair for the rest of sesshin. The pain shifted from the lower legs to the lower back, but I could deal with that. When my posture became too painful, I could quietly shift and move the pain from one place to another.

Then it was over. For a week we had lived life regulated by a schedule dictated by traditions passed down through generations. It was an interval of stopping, of having time to hear wind in pine trees and coyote calls, to see the shimmer of a single water drop on a leaf reflecting the sun. And to watch that drop of water disappear to be followed by another as we walked kinhin outside in the morning light.

“We reflect on the effort that brought us here, and consider how it comes to us. We reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering.” For a week I was removed from the world, and I returned different from when I left.

- Brian Reynolds

Thank You

Tim Merfeld for the box of tomatoes. It has become sauce that will be used for sesshins and all-day sitting lunches, as well as soups for Zuiko.

Kelly Kruse for the new porch runners. They’re much safer and more attractive than the previous ones. The old ones are now in the basement.

Susan Elliot-Bryan, Eric Higgins-Freese, Linda Graves, Gus Gustafson, and Gina Kendall for taking care of zazen, baika, and other activities when Zuiko has been gone

Denny Novak for the pizzas from Zoey’s that make our work day lunches really good.

Eric Higgins-Freese, Gina Kendall, Kelly Kruse, and Annora McDougall for your work at work days this summer and early fall.

Tim Macejak for his work with church and community groups. Tim’s “nothing special” style conveys our spirit.

Tenpyozan

Katagiri Roshi and Maezumi Roshi envisioned a monastery in the United States where new clergy could be trained. It would also be a place where the Soto Zen tradition could flourish, deepened by its interaction with Western culture.

This is now happening. Led by Rev. Gengo Akiba, Tenpyozan is rising on land about two hours north of San Francisco. The sodo (monks’ hall) should be finished by 2017. Hopefully there will be informal practice there soon. Volunteers are needed to clear brush for fire mitigation and to do various other tasks. If you’re interested, contact Juntoku McCoy at juntoku.mccoy@gmail.com.

For more information, go to <http://tenpyozan.org>

Credits

Artwork	Eugenia Kendall
Writing	Brian Reynolds Zuikō Redding
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October Sesshin

with Shoryu Bradley



October 14 – 16

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

Join us for all or part of
the weekend

Please sign up by October 10 to reserve 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 a.m. zazen and dharma talk

To register or get more details, contact us

phone: (319) 247-5986

email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org

web: www.cedarrapidszencenter.org

Announcements

Zuiko will be in Japan from October 24 through November 1. If you can lead one of our zazen times then, let Zuikō know. Instruction on how to do this is available and it’s a good way to get more involved in practice.

Our web site has links to dharma talks, newsletters, other temples, and lots of other stuff.

CRZC Currents, the monthly e-newsletter with a dharma article and announcements of coming events is also on our web site. You can read back issues there and also sign up to receive it monthly.

Our Facebook page has a weekly bit of dharma, along with announcements of events, news, and pictures.

Published by

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course

January 3, 10, 17, 24

March 7, 14, 21, 28

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
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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
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Sesshins and All-day Sittings

October 14 – 16	Sesshin (Daruma)
19	Introduction to zazen

November 15	Introduction to zazen
20	All-day sitting

December 2 - 4	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
21	Introduction to zazen
31	New Year's sitting

2017

January 1	New Year's open house
15	All-day sitting
18	Introduction to zazen

February 15	Introduction to zazen
19	All-day sitting

March 15	Introduction to zazen
17 – 19	Sesshin (Ohigan)

April 9	Buddha's Birthday
19	Introduction to zazen
23	Annual Meeting