

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

Volume 5, Number 2

Spring, 2004

Creating Conditions

Daylight saving time has arrived and it's good to sit in the early morning as night becomes day. Please join me sometime for early morning sitting and service. During service and on Sunday mornings after the dharma talk we chant the Four Vows.

Beings are numberless; I vow to free them.
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.
Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.
The Buddha Way is unsurpassable, I vow to attain it.

It's natural to wonder what it means to free all beings in this vast universe. This looks huge – an infinite, never-ending task. One might worry, “How did I go about saving an unending number of beings?” “Should I maybe find a religion that's a bit more manageable?”

If we remain Buddhist, we have to ask what it means to free a being. The Japanese word that's translated as “free” means “to cross over.” This makes things complicated because I can cross over a mountain or stream, but I can't cross you over. I can carry you over, but you have to cross over on your own. Since all beings have to cross over on their own – free themselves – doing it for them is really impossible. By now you're probably thinking, “Maybe I can just give up and go take a nap.” Wait. There's more.

In Buddhist thought, “to cross over” refers to crossing from the shore of delusion to the shore of realization. To cross to the shore of realization means to give up our judgments and egoistic preferences and wholeheartedly be right here with the world just as it is. To free beings is to create conditions where clinging to ideas and judgments can stop. We make it possible for others just to be present with their lives, being comfortable with themselves and acting in their lives and their circumstances with wisdom and compassion. How to do this?

When Shakyamuni Buddha attained realization he said: “I and all beings together simultaneously attain realization.” Putting aside our egoistic thoughts and ideas, we free all beings by freeing ourselves. This is zazen. Our zazen expresses the Buddha's wisdom, and it permeates our whole lives. We begin to feel awareness and peace wherever we go and whatever happens. When we find peace others find peace also, just like the Buddha said.

Through our own peace we create conditions for others to cross over. For instance, from our own peace, we can resolve to be kind and respectful to others no matter what happens to us. At first, our resolution is mostly intellectual and mechanical. We have to remember on each occasion and often when we are hurried or overwhelmed we forget. We answer another person's question curtly, sending the message, “Don't bother me with such trivia.” Then we remember and feel sad at our failure. Gradually, as we gain experience we remember before we speak or act and the strength of our vow guides us.

When we do this, others naturally feel peace, too. They can relax, if even for a moment, and give up their ideas and judgments. They have crossed over. We haven't told them about the Buddha, they aren't Buddhist, but our peace created the circumstances for their peace.

We can create these conditions even when our words or actions might sting. Perhaps it's necessary to tell a family member that her or his actions are hurtful, or perhaps we have to tell a friend of a choice we've made that will disappoint him or her. When we act from our own calm center, we can do it graciously. Though the other person may feel embarrassment or anger, it dissipates quickly. She or he naturally sees our warm heart and can hear and consider our words with greater wisdom and openness. Dropping off pride and denial, they cross over.

These four vows are called the Bodhisattva Vows - vows to see that all other beings have crossed over before we ourselves cross over. To be a bodhisattva is to cultivate our practice not as a self-help project but because it benefits all beings. It is being aware in our lives without worrying about realization. Realization is, after all, just another of our infinite ideas. Best not to cling to ideas. Just doing the next thing simply because it's the next thing to do with no thought of crossing over creates the conditions for all beings, including ourselves, to cross over simultaneously.

- Zuiko Redding

Karma Goes to Sleep

Last night as my wife Barbara was putting our three-year-old daughter Karma to bed I was reading a stack of emails that had piled up in my inbox. My computer is just on the other side of the wall from my daughter's room. I could hear the frustration in my wife's voice building and the anguish in my daughter's voice increasing as the one, knowing her daughter was exhausted, and the other, knowing sleep was not coming, battled in one of the oldest conflicts known to humankind.

I rolled my eyes as I left the computer and go help out. I entered the fray as a neutral observer and soon found myself comforting an upset Karma as Barbara set about the tasks that were demanding her time at the same time as our child was also demanding her attention.

After Karma's breathless explanation that she was just not tired and could not go to sleep we began to exchange various ideas about such wonderful things as princesses and handsome princes, monsters and evil stepmothers and such things as three-year-old girls build obsessions around. She began to calm down. Soon our exchanges became quieter until they faded into a silent reverie. Hers, I am sure, was of fairy godmothers and fancy balls . . . mine was of the wonders of a-three-year old mind.

Then I felt it . . . the death grip on the lapel of my samue jacket. The desperate grip of a three-year-old on a storm-tossed bed. Denied the usual comfort of her mother, here was the other familiar thing, the other rock, she could hold onto and hold on she did. I sat there - who knows how long? - until her breathing smoothed and her fingers could be gently peeled off. I moved off the pile of sharp-edged toys I'd not noticed were under me.

As I slowly backed out of my daughter's now quiet room I finally understood. This was what it was all about. Just to be there in everyday life, even with something that was not what I thought I wanted to be doing. There is where true treasures are found.. I remembered the roll of my eyes as I left my computer. Silly me. . .resistance to receiving the greatest treasure of all. One I could have missed for a discussion of copyright issues or someone's expressions of their opinions on oneness

I cannot even imagine the number of moments like these I missed with our first daughter for things I was convinced were more important. Tonight, if I had given in to my own desires, the opportunity would have gone in an instant. Vanished in a flash. And I would have gone on secure in my rightness, focused on my issues, never having the least idea of what I had missed.

- Fudo Koppang

from Friday at 7:00 p.m.
to Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

SESSHIN

July 16 - 18

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by July 9 to assure a place. Out-of-town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

To register or get details, contact us:
P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406
phone: (319) 247-5986
email: crzc@avalon.net

unknown to the potter

dwelling a seed

blown from afaraways

unwanted

no desire

yet a life

albeit small

insignificant in mind

though living

&

where change is

welcome

or

un

it will persist beyond control

& live

& breath

- Brian Prusnek

Opening the Buddha's Eyes

Tsugen Narasaki Roshi, Zuiko's teacher, will visit Zen Center on Monday, June 28. The schedule includes

- 10:00 a.m. Dedication of Buddha image on altar
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Tea and discussion (until 3:00)

- 7:00 p.m. Public talk at Prairiewoods

Born in Hiroshima in 1926, Narasaki Roshi was ordained at age 13. He completed a degree at Komazawa University in 1948 before entering monastic training at Eihei-ji in 1949 where he trained together with Katagiri Roshi under the direction of Eko Hashimoto Roshi. He is presently the abbot at Zui-ji Training Monastery in Ehime Prefecture and is one of the most respected Soto Zen teachers in Japan.

Truly this is a rare occasion and a great honor. We invite you to come and experience the warm and flexible heart of this wonderful dharma teacher.

Let us know by June 1 if you plan to come so we can plan logistics. You can contact us at crzc@avalon.net or at (319) 247-5986 or by mail.

Rooms for overnight guests are available at Prairiewoods, a Franciscan retreat center ten minutes by car from Zen Center. Call (319) 395-6700 for reservations. Single rooms are \$30 per night and double rooms are \$40 per night. Space is limited, however. Also, there is room at Zen Center for four or five people who have sleeping bags. Call Zen Center to reserve a space.

Help with cleaning, setting up, cooking and logistics will be needed before and during Tsugen Roshi's visit. If you can lend a hand, let us know.

Notes

Some friends were forgotten when we thanked everyone for their support of Zen Center during 2003. We'd like to thank them now. They are Bob and Nittaya Burnham, Carl Hultman and Susan Nelson, and Toni McCloney. Thanks so much for all the ways in which you support us.

Christa Brusen Gomez has followed her job to Herndon, Virginia. She and her cat, George, have found a home in a friendly neighborhood and she's having a good time at work and visiting Buddhist centers in the area.

Annual Meeting News

The annual meeting of the sangha and the board was held on April 4. We had good attendance and a lively meeting.

Susan Dalton was elected as a new board member and Ellen Wetzel was elected to a second three-year term. The board now consists of Tim Macejak (President), Margaret Baldwin (Vice President), Susan Dalton (Treasurer), Ellen Wetzel (Secretary), Jan Karnegis, and Tönen O'Connor.

The main issue before the sangha was building sangha – building practice among present members and attracting new members. To begin to include families in Zen Center, we discussed a family outing at Palisades Park that would combine fun with a service project like picking up trash. To attract new members, we have bought a listing in the phone directory and we are publicizing our quarterly "Introduction to Zen Practice" course more widely.

The main issues before the board were building maintenance and Zuiko's health insurance. The board agreed to set aside \$5,000 to cover maintenance projects this year. We will probably replace some shingles on the upper story and the zendo and entryway windows. Zuiko has elected to change her insurance to \$1,000 deductible to decrease Zen Center's costs. The board agreed to pay the deductible should that be needed since the reduction in payments will save Zen Center around \$1,200 per year.

It was also suggested that we explore the possibility of holding a joint sesshin with Milwaukee Zen Center at Hokyō-ji in the summer of 2005. Zuiko and Tönen O'Connor will pursue this. Members interested in helping with the effort should let Zuiko or Tönen know.

Thanks to the dedication of our members, Zen Center's practice deepens and grows steadier. Attendance is definitely up over the past year, as is membership. We are also in good financial and organizational condition, again thanks to all who have contributed their time, effort and funds. We are fortunate to have such a fine group of folks.

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Daily Schedule

Zen Center – 1618 Bever Ave. SE

Morning

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
6:00 - 6:40 am zazen
6:40 - 6:50 kinhin
6:50 - 7:20 zazen
7:20 - 7:40 sutra chanting

Sunday
9:00 - 9:40 am zazen
9:45 - 10:30 dharma talk
10:30 - 11:15 tea
11:20 - 12:30 work period

Evening

Tuesday
6:30 - 6:50 pm zazen
6:50 - 7:00 kinhin
7:00 - 7:20 zazen
7:20 - 7:30 kinhin
7:30 - 7:50 zazen

Wednesday, Thursday
6:30 - 7:10 pm zazen
7:10 - 7:20 kinhin
7:30 - 8:00 zazen

Calendar

April	4	Annual Meeting
	11	Buddha's Birthday
	21	Zazen instruction
May	2	All-day sitting
	4	Zen Practice class begins
	19	Zazen instruction
June	13	All-day sitting
	16	Zazen instruction
	28	Visit by Tsugen Narasaki
July	16 – 18	Sesshin
	6	Zen Practice class begins
	21	Zazen instruction
August	15	All-day sitting
	18	Zazen instruction
September	15	Zazen instruction
	19	All-day sitting