

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 2

Spring, 2014

Everyday Courage

This morning I looked down the basement stairs and breathed a quiet sigh. No puddles. In the heavy spring and summer rains, water can seep in through cracks in the stone walls near the floor, making small brooks and ponds. There's nothing for it but to just get down there and start working. At least the floor will be clean and I'll have gotten some exercise by the end of it. As I squeeze out the mop or empty the shop vac, I sometimes wish that I were doing something a bit more glamorous and important than spilling murky water down the basement sink.

The last time I found myself mopping, I remembered a passage in *Eihei Koroku* that I like a lot.

The courage of a fisherman is to enter the water without avoiding deep-sea dragons. The courage of a hunter is to travel the earth without avoiding tigers. The courage of a general is to face the drawn sword before him and see death as just like life. What is the courage of patch-robed monks?

Spread out your bedding and sleep; set out your bowls and eat rice; exhale through your nostrils; radiate light from your eyes. ... With vitality, eat lots of rice and then use the toilet. Transcend your prediction of future Buddhahood from Gautama.¹

We often think courage is something special – something that first responders and soldiers have but we don't. Courage is much more pedestrian than entering burning buildings or staring down tigers. It's about facing things we don't want to face - making the bed, taking care of a sick child, mopping up the basement are acts of courage.

Lady Bird Johnson understood courage. At a dinner toast in 1965, she said:

Let's drink to ... courage, just the sort of pedestrian courage that makes you get up in the morning and go on about the day's business, however frustrating and hopeless and endless and imperfect and unsure the course of the day may be.²

She wasn't speaking abstractly – this was her life. And ours. Some days are fulfilling and purposeful. Others are frustrating, hopeless, endless and it's hard to see any direction. We can only put the sodden basement rugs in the washer and trust that this is what's needed.

Courage is to live every day, paying attention to each moment, to just take the next step with full attention. It is taking care of all the things, large and small, that come our way. Those things may seem insignificant and endless. We may do them with awkwardness and clumsiness. And not know where all this will lead. The only thing we can do is take the next step and find out.

To do this means to vow to fully live in the reality of our lives. Or maybe we can call it faith. It's the force inside us that gives us a natural discipline, keeping us on course, keeping us moving. It comes from truly seeing this life, right now – having the Buddhas' and ancestors' awake minds. This is what Dōgen means when he tells us "Transcend your prediction of future Buddhahood from Gautama." We "get up in the morning and go about the day's business." Mrs. Johnson did not say "our business," but "the day's business." This "business" was the business of the Universe. She saw that it was not about her convenience. She just let it be frustrating, hopeless, endless and imperfect and lived in the midst of all that. Understanding that our lives are lived to benefit all things, she could take the next step.

I'm sure Dogen would have recognized the light in Mrs. Johnson's eyes. "Radiating light" is being aware and active. When we live with vitality, our eyes are clear and shining. To be in the midst of life is not to be a victim of it. The situation may be a hard one. We may be in a job that destroys our spirit or we may be caring for a sick, frail loved one in the midst of job and family responsibilities. Not being a victim means standing up in whatever way we need to, to do whatever is needed to take care of things. As a political wife, Lady Bird Johnson had to fit into a mold that allowed little freedom to do the things she loved. But that didn't stop her from finding something that fed her spirit. She worked to promote the use of wild plants as roadside landscaping. Her pedestrian courage in speaking for wildflowers makes me think of her every time I see native grasses and flowers on our Iowa roadsides.

Everyday courage is not easy. We eat our dinner, then wash our dishes, thinking that the time might be more fruitfully spent on other things, not having confidence in our present action. We turn down the covers and climb into bed, being kept from sleep by the anxiety about tomorrow. We waver

¹ Leighton, Taigen Dan and Shohaku Okumura, eds. and tr., *Dogen's Extensive Record* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), pp. 238-9.

² Lady Bird Johnson. *A White House Diary*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), p. 206

between trying to get to sleep and getting up and working on that project for tomorrow.

Everyday courage is the faith that doing our dishes or going to bed is what the reality of life needs right now, trusting that if we take care of these details our lives will take care of themselves. Faith and courage are intertwined. To have the faith to take a step requires courage. If we can just do it, then we will see whether it works or not and be able to know the direction from there.

Miyazaki Ekiho Zenji once remarked that enlightenment is living without fear. Living without fear is just doing what reality asks of us, no matter how hopeless, frustrating and endless it seems to be, with the confidence that this is where we need to be right now. When we can have this kind of courage, our lives radiate light.

- Zuiko Redding

Making a Plan and Taking a Step

Life is one plan after another, one decision after another, one step after another. How we approach these plans, decisions, and steps is up to us. If we want the best for ourselves, if we want a life of emotional, mental, social, physical, financial, and spiritual well-being, we keep this well-being at the forefront of our planning, decision making, and stepping.

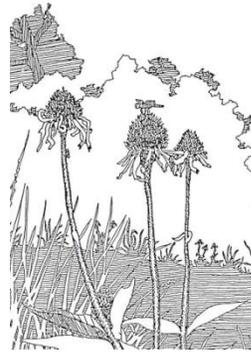
When things go awry as they are apt to do, seeing the source of our fear and understanding what we need to be content creates the inner peace necessary to get us through. Then, we can think clearly and calmly and move forward with composure and confidence. Often we still have doubts and fears but we keep planning, deciding, and stepping forward. We feel the fear and do it anyway, as Susan Jeffers advises in her invaluable book of the same title, because otherwise, we will never do the things we want to do. Fear will slow down or stop our lives.

This may not sound like Zen but it is. Zen is not passive acceptance or inertia. Zen is not detachment or non-attachment in the sense of not caring or giving up. Zen is about positive action for a meaningful, contented life. Zen is about being in the moment as you are doing the moment.

That moment constantly changes, sometimes to our liking and sometimes not to our liking. Nonetheless, we must step forward wholeheartedly and appreciatively. Walking meditation, *kinhin*, reminds of this. We just take the next step forward, and the next step forward, and the next step forward into the sand of the moment flowing in the hourglass of eternity, over and over again into the present moment.

Robert Maurer explains in his book, *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way* that we can do anything we put our minds to and we can go forward in life with serenity

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SUMMER SESSHIN

July 18 – 20
from Friday at 7:00 p.m.
until Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

Join us for all or part of sesshin. 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.

All are 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

Weeding the Gravel

I stand at the edge of the pebble bed that is my children's play area in the backyard. I look with regret at all of the green that's growing through the stones. I've waited too long to weed, and now the area could be termed "overrun."

Kneeling, I work my fingers along the stem of a dandelion, down into the pebbles as deep as I can get before pulling up with the root and head in hand. I move on to the next ... and the next ... and the next and I still haven't moved from the spot where I began. I think to myself that this is hopeless and maybe I should just poison it all and forbid the kids from playing here until after a few rainfalls.

Breathe.

Pulling this weed is breathing this breath. And pulling *this* weed is breathing *this* breath. I am knelt in a bed of pebbles surrounded by breath. It is not hopeless. This is this breath and that is that breath. All of the breaths cannot be breathed at once. The breath in the fortieth minute of zazen can only be breathed in the fortieth minute. No sooner.

Pull this weed. Breathe this breath.

- Ryan Wheeler

Making a Plan and Taking a Step (continued)

instead of anxiety and confidence rather than fear if we just do the next small thing we need to do and take the next small step we need to take. This is *kaizen*. When we practice *kaizen* we take the next step necessary to continue on our spiritual path in a way that is meaningful and mindful to us. *Kaizen* is *kinhin* (walking meditation) outside of the zendo.

The ability to adapt to the ever-changing future and to know that we can handle it is a crucial skill to have. Adapting often means changing our minds about a situation and making a decision that creates a new and better reality. This creates well-being in our lives.

- James Eich

You can read other essays about Zen at James' website - www.thewisdomofzen.blogspot.com

Ancient Way – New Medium

Hoko Karnegis has a new little magazine, *Ancient Way*, at <http://www.magcloud.com/browse/magazine/730876> that might interest you. It has articles on general practice and on things we may not talk about much, like the supernatural, the various buddhas and bodhisattvas, rituals and holidays. These are quick introductions for the curious that can be read in about five minutes in order to gain some acquaintance with the subject. We invite you to go have a look.

Sitting Groups

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

Cedar Falls group 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.

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

Dubuque group 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.

.Credits

Artwork	Tom Rauschke
Editing/ Proofing	Travis Hunt Matt Alles
Writing	James Eich Zuikō Redding Ryan Wheeler

Baika Workshop

Baika (plum blossom) music is a form of Japanese Buddhist music with Buddhist lyrics set to traditional folk melodies. It's sung as a form of *zazen* in which we let go of thoughts by paying close attention to singing and ringing the accompanying bells. *Baika* is not about singing beautifully or performing well; it's about just singing and playing with no judgment of self or others.

On June 14, Rev. Shonen Kuga came from Japan to teach us a bit about this music and encourage our singing. We all were impressed with the spirit of his singing and teaching and we hope to continue our efforts and develop our practice.

We now have a small practice group that meets two Wednesdays per month. If you'd like to join, email us.

To hear a bit of *baika*, you can go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPcwcyfkVU8&feature=youtu.be>

New Officers

We have a new president, vice president and secretary as of our April annual meeting. Amy Eble has stepped up to take the president's duties, Bill Bomberly and Eric Higgins-Freese are sharing the vice-presidency and Jen Yukl is our new secretary. We thank them for taking on the work of an increasingly complicated organization – let's support them with our encouragement and effort.

Jen Yukl was our president as we grew from a small, rather informal sangha to a much larger, more complex one. Thank you for leading us through those changes during the past five years. It wasn't easy to get us all to line up and do what needed to be done, but you did it!!

Thank You

Linda Graves who covers noon *zazen* for Zuiko so she can sit with the men at Mt. Pleasant Correctional Facility.

Hoko Karnegis, Eido Reinhart, Jay and Gina Vavra for your help with the *baika* workshop and with Kuga Sensei's talk at the all-day sitting on the next day.

Published by

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course

June 3, 10, 17, 24
September 9, 16, 23, 30

Dharma School

May	4
June	1
July	6
August	3
September	7
October	5
November	2
December	14

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

June	15	All-day sitting
	18	Introduction to zazen
July	16	Introduction to zazen
	18 - 20	Sesshin
August	17	All-day sitting
	20	Introduction to zazen
September	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All-day sitting
October	15	Introduction to zazen
	17 - 19	Sesshin
November	16	All-day sitting
	19	Introduction to zazen
December	5 - 7	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	17	Introduction to zazen
	31	New Year's sitting

