

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 4, Number 1

Winter, 2003

Ritual

Happy New Year! I hope your holiday season was a joyous one and that you are now filled with good memories. Here at Zen Center we began the year with sitting on New Year's Eve and an open house on New Year's Day.

There's been a lot of ritual in my life lately. This season is filled with it – Thanksgiving, Ramadan, Hanukkah, Christmas and New Year's all have their special rituals. Also, this fall I had the honor of attending the celebration of the 750th anniversary of Dogen's death. In July, I went to Shogoji to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the building of the zendo and the sixth anniversary of Ikko Narasaki Roshi's death.

For various reasons, many Americans are reluctant to deal in ritual. The formality and prescribed behavior are a bit worrisome to some in our informal, individualistic society. They feel like actions with no meaning, celebrating meaningless things. Why waste time on such doings? Why all this bowing and chanting when I could be sitting zazen or doing something useful like making dinner?

In *Returning to Silence* Katagiri Roshi says, "Ritual in Buddhism is attaining *kanno doko*, which means 'the interacting communion of appeals and response.' Ritual is . . . setting in motion the interactive communion between us and the universe, not between us and something small, between us and the universe."

Kanno doko is wondering about an old friend, then
receiving a letter from him
or her in the afternoon mail.
It's also turning and
saying, "Yes" when
someone calls our name,
before we even think about
it. It is desire and
response beyond our
intellect, without
ideas or judgments.
In *kanno doko* there
is no caller,
responder and
response. It's all
one thing. Once
they become
part of us,

the rituals in our lives, whether they are large and public or small and private, connect us intimately with the vastness of the universe.

When we participate in ritual we are ourselves, but we are simultaneously part of something much larger. We are people with our own independent wills, our own individuality and humanness. We are also the vastness of the universe, part of the oneness of all creation, supported by it and supporting it. Ritual connects us with each other, with ancestors, with the world. In chanting *Jijuyu Zammai* at Eiheiji, I was connected with all the other participants, past, present and future. I was connected with Dogen, with the early sangha and with the Buddha. Also, with the buildings, trees, rocks and the whole world. I was taken out of my usual small egoistic self into big self, the self that is the whole universe.

This is not just true of large ornate rituals like the one for Dogen Zenji's anniversary. It is true of the smallest rituals we do – brushing teeth, driving to work, cutting vegetables. In folding towels the way my mother taught me, I am connected with her, my grandmother and many generations of women folding towels. We are all together there in that one moment.

We connect with each other in in an everyday way, too. At Shogoji, on the day before the ceremonies we were all hustling about preparing the hall and the altar. In late afternoon when most everything had been done, I joined three young monks in cleaning incense burners. Sitting down, I took one that had all the unburned incense ends removed and tamped down the ash. When I'd finished, someone handed me another with a silent smile. Through this ritual of cleaning incense burners we connected through the barriers of our age, gender, and cultural differences. We knew the steps of this dance and we became the dance – incense burner cleaning. Each of us was our own individual separate usual self, but at the same time we were something much vaster than ourselves.

New Year's is over and we can all breathe a sigh of relief that we are free from all the effort and ritual that surrounds the season, at least for the time being. The many small daily rituals - brushing teeth, folding towels, arriving at work – are still with us. Let's do them in the spirit of *kanno doko*, interactive communion between us and the universe.

- Zuiko Redding

SMALL PRACTICE

My life is not always so peaceful. It is far from the quiet and serenity that I imagine would be conducive to what I think of as Big Practice. While I do not have Big Practice, I am sustained by my small practice.

There was a time when I became discouraged because all I had was my small practice, and I was tempted to give it all up (Big Practice or no practice!). I seemed to be unable to sit zazen more than occasionally or make it to Zen Center on Sundays or even during the week, and all I could seem to manage was to read a few pages at night in one of my Zen books. This felt like no practice whatsoever, and I began to believe that, although I was drawn to and even in some way protected by the dharma, I was somehow completely lacking in ability or aptitude for Zen practice. I was just not cut out for Big Practice.

Fortunately, and perhaps not coincidentally, right around that time I came across a sentence in a book (and to this day I can't remember which one) that said something to the effect that if you can't sit for forty minutes, sit for however long you are able – even ten minutes is beneficial. If you can't sit every morning and every night, sit when you can. Even small effort has great merit. This simple truth, while probably obvious to most, was a revelation to me and has completely changed the way I view my practice. This brief statement gave me permission to accept myself and my small practice, and it was a great relief. I didn't have to give up just because I couldn't meet some self-imposed standard. Some effort, however small, was better than no effort. Small practice was better than no practice!

What do I mean by small practice? Small practice means making an effort to sit, even for ten minutes, and if I can't sit, just accepting the reality of that, knowing that not sitting is not permanent. It means every so often during the day looking at the little dharma reminders (as I call them) in my home and my office and remembering to breathe in and out and be aware of just this moment. It means seeing the interrelationships among things and being thankful for life as it is (things just as they are), in spite of not always getting what I want and instead getting what I need.

When I am feeling hurt or betrayed, small practice means remembering to stop and look within before reacting, to understand what is underneath this painful and very unpleasant feeling. Am I grasping at something or someone? Am I clinging to ideas that are not helpful? Can I understand what might be going on for the other person, that they might be suffering also and for different reasons? It means putting even a moment's space between thought and deed to give myself a better chance of really being right there and taking the next step, right action. Sometimes it means saying or doing something I would

rather not say or do, and at other times it means not saying or doing that which I very much want to. Sometimes I tell the guys next door to turn down their really loud music, and sometimes I let it go and just sit with it anyway! Always it means to remember to do no harm.

Although simple, small practice isn't so easy. I don't always remember even my small practice, and at those times I can get lost in reaction and harmful thoughts and actions. In those moments I cause suffering for myself and others. Even small practice seems to require great effort. Every situation, every moment, is new. Everything is always changing! To make the effort to refrain from all evil, to practice all that is good, to purify my mind, is the work of a lifetime, and maybe even more. However, the more I practice in this small way, the more I am protected, guided and nourished by Buddha, dharma and sangha. And maybe there isn't small practice and big practice. Maybe there is just practice, which is living every moment. And, as Katagiri Roshi said, we just take the next step.

- Ellen Wetzel

BOOK REVIEW

Around once a year or so I pick up and read from a book that I first came upon back when I was in high school. I saw it on the shelf at a library, as the title caught my attention. It's called, *This Book Needs No Title* by Raymond Smullyan. Smullyan is a Taoist, humorist, and mathematician who leaves out the mathematics in this book of short humorous essays and observations. Several of his essays have stuck with me for years.

I would like to share his final essay with you – a lengthier piece, around 30 pages or so, entitled, “The Planet Without Laughter.” It is a short story about, as you may have guessed, a planet where humor is unknown. That is, except for some people known as Laugh Masters, who set up Laugh Monasteries and attempt to get people to “see” laughter. Alas, so many students keep trying to arrive at laughter and humor through intellectual analysis and study. Others try to achieve a sense of humor through morality. Even worse, some try to attain realization through memorization of jokes and mimicking laughter.

The story documents the history of the planet, from The Ancient Period to the Middle Period to the Modern Period, and how the inhabitants react to the laughers and the effect the laughers have on their society. God's role in all this is humorously established, as is that of the psychiatrists – who view laughing as a psychosis and treat it with a horrible drug called “laughazone.” What will be the final fate of the laughers and Laugh Masters? Alas, you must purchase the book to find out.

- Tim Macejak

POEMS

*Yeah—whole bunch of 'em out there
 Lounging around in that forest—
 Show up every year about this time—
 Call it the Rainy Season—
 I don't know—sit around—play cards
 Drink some wine—I suppose
 Come in here wanting me to feed 'em—well, I don't.
 Traipse around town with their hands out
 Their leader? Guy they call Boo-hi—or Buddy—
 Something like that—
 Supposed to be a duke—
 Lives out there with his servant—
 Not a care in the world*

~~~~~  
*Who gave you a special dispensation  
 To traverse the Universe—  
 What power poured into your eyes  
 The sight of the stratosphere?*

- Bob Osterman

## SESSHIN

**March 21-23**

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

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by March 14th 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.

## ZEN CENTER LIBRARY

Zen Center has a growing collection of books and periodicals located in the library on the second floor. Everyone is welcome to come and browse, study in the library and check out materials. The library is a wonderful space, and we hope many of you will pay a visit and take advantage of this resource.

If you have books or other materials of interest that you would like to donate to the library, please contact Zuiko Redding.

## SANGHA NEWS

∪ The annual meeting of Zen Center's Board of Directors will be held on April 13<sup>th</sup>. The meeting will be held after morning zazen and dharma talk. All are welcome to attend.

∪ There will be two work days, May 31 and June 21, to begin the preparation work for painting the house, which will be done over the summer. More details will be forthcoming in the April newsletter.

∪ *We encourage your contributions* of articles, poetry, book reviews, art work, and examples of how you incorporate your practice into your daily life. For more information or to submit material for inclusion in the newsletter, please contact Ellen Wetzel at ERW400@aol.com.

## DOGEN'S ZAZEN: STUDY AND PRACTICE

On Saturday, April 19, we will offer a day of study and practice centered on some of Dogen's writings about zazen. Zuiko will discuss "Fukanzazengi," Dogen's basic instructions on zazen, and "Zazengi," another shorter writing included in Dogen's collection of essays, *Shobogenzo*. Lecture and discussion periods will be interspersed with zazen so that we can practice, as well as study. We will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. Copies of the texts will be provided and a vegetarian lunch will be served. The fee will be \$20 for non-members and \$10 for members. Please contact Zuiko if you have questions or are interested in attending.

## Credits

Artwork Tom Rauschke  
 Editing Ellen Wetzel  
 Mailing James Eich  
 Writing Tim Macejak  
 Bob Osterman  
 Zuiko Redding  
 Ellen Wetzel

## Published by

Cedar Rapids Zen Center  
 P.O. Box 863  
 Cedar Rapids IA 52406

(319) 247-5986  
 email: crzc@avalon.net  
 www.avalon.net/~crzc

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P.O. Box 863  
Cedar Rapids IA 52406-0863

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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 |
| 7:20 - 8:00    | zazen  |

### Calendar

|          |         |                   |
|----------|---------|-------------------|
| January  | 15      | Zazen instruction |
|          | 19      | All-day sitting   |
| February | 16      | All-day sitting   |
|          | 19      | Zazen instruction |
| March    | 19      | Zazen instruction |
|          | 21 - 23 | Sesshin           |
| April    | 6       | Buddha's Birthday |
|          | 13      | Annual Meeting    |
|          | 16      | Zazen instruction |
| May      | 21      | Zazen instruction |
| June     | 1       | All-day sitting   |
|          | 18      | Zazen instruction |
|          | 22      | All-day sitting   |