

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 14, Number 1

Winter, 2013

Dropping Off Body and Mind

It's almost spring. It's still cold, though. The full moon was shining brightly in the night sky a few evenings ago and my face got very cold as I watched it. I thought of Tendō Nyojō's poem about plum blossoms and practice that ends with "a hard cold bites the nostrils."

Dōgen awakened at Tendō Nyojō's temple. A friend and I recently had a conversation about Dōgen's phrase "dropping off body and mind." Dōgen recounts that, one evening at zazen he dropped off body and mind when he heard the sound of Nyojō Zenji's slipper hitting the shoulder of another monk. Our conversation began because a mutual friend used "sloughing off" to describe what happened to Dōgen that fateful night. "Sloughing" seemed a bit stilted and old-fashioned to me so I suggested "shedding."

I looked up "dropping off" - *datsuraku* (脱落) - in my trusty copy of the Nelson Japanese character dictionary. The first English word for *datsuraku* is "moult." *Datsuraku* is maybe not a one-time, never to be done again, throwing away.

The year of the snake is a good time to think about moulting, shedding. Snakes shed their skins. So do many other animals like cicadas and crabs. As time passes, the present skin becomes too small, too inflexible, not useful anymore and it's left behind. Birds grow new feathers as the seasons change. When spring comes, winter feathers drop off.

So it looks as if Dōgen wants us to shed body and mind as a snake sheds its skin or a bird moults. How can we practice with this? What is this body and mind that we shed?

It's pretty obvious that we don't get rid of our physical body and our usual mind. If we did that, we would no longer be helpful in the world. Dōgen certainly existed after he shed body and mind – he wrote *Shōbōgenzō*, founded a monastery and brought the practice of Soto Zen to Japan. He certainly had a body and mind in the usual sense and he used them enthusiastically in the service of all beings.

Shinjin datsuraku means to shed our constant concern with this small self, our concern with fame and gain, winning and losing, ... We shed the sense of self as separate from the rest of the universe and as something really important and special to us. When we stop obsessing over ourselves we become open to all things, all beings. We have good cheer, acceptance and curiosity about everything without constant reference back to this self. We approach others with a desire to help, understanding that they are part of ourselves.

A snake can only shed its skin if the time is right, only if it is mature enough. A bird moults only when the season is right.

When it's time to shed, to moult, the snake must help by wriggling out of it and the bird must help by grooming its feathers. This shedding is a partnership with the universe.

As for us, maturity comes with practice, and we must be patient. It's not totally under our control - this process. However, we must help it along. If we don't create the conditions by letting go of thoughts, it surely won't happen.

When we shed body and mind, we might think that we become naked, but this is not the case. We have a beautiful, supple new skin, the skin that is the vast, changing universe. Rather than becoming a nothing, a doormat, we become everything. This body and mind become important in a different way – they are crucial as dynamically functioning parts of the universe.

It's much more helpful than the one we just shed. It's supple, vibrant and fresh and it gives us new life. We move freely. It can gradually lose its flexibility and life and we may need to shed again. This is not good or bad – it's just how things are. It has beauty in itself. Once I found a Japanese cicada's old skin on a bridge rail in Kumamoto. The veins on the wings were the color of 24-carat gold as the sun glinted on them. I have seldom seen something so beautiful. The cicada had moved on, though, and left it for others to enjoy.

We may really admire the golden tracery on our wings, but when the time comes to drop them off, we just wriggle out. Then, as my friend put it, we are clothed in a new, ever-changing skin.

When we drop off body and mind, we don't disappear. We become what we already are - the body-mind of the whole universe, beyond the small self we have shed. We are impermanence, cause-and-effect and non-self going forward. Through this – us - universal existence verifies and carries out universal existence.

This doesn't last. We return to our habit of thinking that there's something here to call a self, something important, worthy of defending, something to manipulate and make better. Not only that – this self can manipulate the world for our fame and success. Then the process happens again.

I wish I could stay forever in *shinjin datsuraku*. When I by chance cease my obsession with my personal, though non-existent self, the world – I – function completely and peacefully as the universe. Life is wholesome and joyous. When my obsession rules me and my body and mind have grown again, my effect on the life around me is not good.

- Zuikō Redding

Compassion – A Dog's View

Recently I showed a canine acquaintance of mine, Sheila the Zen Dog, Zuiko's newsletter article on page one. Sheila really liked the idea that shedding body and mind involves an increased willingness to help others.

To give a dog's perspective on this, Sheila has written a book, *Zen Unleashed: Everyday Buddhist Wisdom from Man's Best Friend*. In it, she covers the basics of Buddhism and Zen, using pictures, haiku, and simple explanations from a dog's point-of-view. It should be out in April. Here's an excerpt.



*Master is crying
As if a tail was stepped on
I must lick his face*

Compassion and the Bodhisattva Ideal

At the heart of Zen practice is the development of compassion. Compassion is essential for becoming what in Buddhism is called a Bodhisattva: someone who consistently places the happiness of others before his or her own.

Compassion begins with empathy. Ironically, empathy for others starts with our own pain. Someone steps on our tail, our dog food runs out, maybe a cat makes us look stupid one day. Because of these things, we can relate to the pain of others. Then when we see others who are suffering, we have a choice. In order to avoid feeling their pain, we can tuck our tail between our legs and run away. Or, we can choose to empathize, engage, and do what we can to help. Compassion isn't empathy alone; compassion is action.

- Tim Macejak and Sheila

Book Reviews

The Heart Sutra : the womb of the buddhas

Translation and Commentary by Red Pine
Counterpoint, 2004 – 201 pp.

The Heart of the Universe : exploring the Heart Sutra

Mu Soeng
Wisdom Publications, 2010 – 115 pages

One of the fundamental texts of Mahayana Buddhism is the Heart Sutra and in this newsletter we highlight two fine books of commentary in the Zen Center library. Red Pine gives us a scholarly approach, emphasizing the historical setting. Detailed analysis of the sutra explains its importance in Mahayana philosophy as a corrective to the Sarvastivadin emphasis on intellectual mastery.

Mu Soeng covers much of the historical material in lesser detail, but adds a discussion of the striking parallels between reality as presented in the Heart Sutra and in quantum physics. This is an area where the Dalai Lama has also shown great interest. While not claiming they are the same thing, Mu Soeng explores an exciting dimension to the meaning of shunyata for modern readers, and helps illuminate both the Heart Sutra and a field where Buddhism and western science are beginning to have a fruitful dialogue.

Faces of Compassion : classic bodhisattva archetypes and their modern expression.

Taigen Dan Leighton
Wisdom Publications, 2003 – 348 pages

Bodhisattvas are beings who have foregone the final stage of enlightenment to remain in the world and relieve suffering. As such they symbolize compassion in all its forms. Taigen Dan Leighton explains in readable, straightforward language the seven basic bodhisattva archetypes in terms of their history, characteristics and iconographic representations.

This book stands out, however, because for each bodhisattva, Leighton points to modern people of differing backgrounds who in some way exemplify that bodhisattva's attributes. Examples cover the field from Mahatma Gandhi to Muhammad Ali. While careful not to portray these people literally as bodhisattvas, his comparisons remind us that bodhisattva compassion is most clearly expressed in the ordinary acts of people in day-to-day life.

- Bryan Davis

A Gift Can Change the World

Over one hundred people made financial contributions to the center last year. At least twenty other members and friends contributed time and energy to make repairs, shovel walks, mow the lawn, keep the computer running and many other things. Each one of your contributions counted.

A gift – even a very small one – can change the world. The effect of our contributions to the dharma is subtle and powerful. Though it may not be visible to us, it is working in our world.

We take good care of whatever we receive because it is not for us. It was given to the dharma and it is precious, even if it is only few cents in the contribution basket or a moment or two of sweeping. We use it wisely and carefully, knowing that others have contributed what we are using.

Thank you for giving the dharma to the world.

Dharma School

We began a dharma school last spring and we invite you to bring your children. Dharma school meets on the first Sunday afternoon of each month from 2:00 to 3:30 p.m., and it's open to children of all ages. At the moment, our kids range in age from three to eleven. We structure talks, stories and activities so that everyone can have fun.

The schedule begins with ten minutes of zazen. Squirring and bouncing zazen is fine. Then we spend twenty minutes listening to a dharma talk/story, followed by an activity, then juice and a snack. We learn dharma while having fun and making new friends both for parents and children.

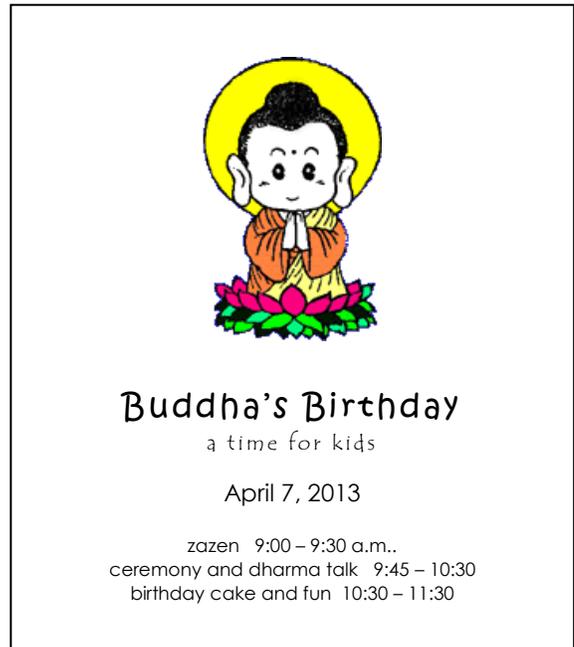
Dates for this year's meetings are on page 4.

News Notes

New landscaping As you round the back corner of the house, you'll notice the new bushes beside the walk. Steve Zieke contributed four native viburnum bushes in honor of his parents. The old-fashioned bushes will recall his parents' time and provide fragrant flowers for us and tasty berries for the birds. And they will grow tall and stately.

Credits

Artwork	Bud Podrazik
Editing/ Proofing	Karen Hartlep
Writing	Bryan Davis Tim Macejak Zuikō Redding



Need a New T-shirt or Mug?

Cedar Rapids Zen Center t-shirts and mugs are still available on Zazzle. You'll get a fine shirt AND, you'll also contribute to Zen Center with your purchase.

To find our designs, go to www.zazzle.com and type "Cedar Rapids Zen Center" in the search box. The t-shirts are well-made from heavy cotton. The ceramic mugs feel good in your hand with warm coffee or tea on a cold day.

Thank You

Matt Alles and Travis Hunt for editing and proofing the newsletter. Your names don't appear in the credits in this issue because it's being rushed to the printer. However, your services will be requested for the next one.

Gina Vavra for the beautiful flowers on the altar and the entryway table. It takes time to arrange flowers. Thanks!!

Bill Bomberry for driving all the way from the Quad Cities to keep our system up and running.

All the folks who helped with New Year's for your veggie cutting, dishwashing, cleaning and good cheer. If you missed the fun of preparing for the open house, be sure to join us next year.

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course

June 4, 11, 18, 25
October 8, 15, 22, 29

Dharma School

January	6
February	3
March	3
April	7
May	5
June	2
July	7
August	4
September	1
October	6
November	3
December	1

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

Annual Schedule

2013

March	15 - 17	Sesshin (Ohigan)
	20	Introduction to zazen
April	7	Buddha's Birthday
	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	Annual meeting
May	15	Introduction to zazen
	19	All-day sitting
June	16	All day sitting (solstice)
	19	Introduction to zazen
July	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All-day sitting
August	10 - 17	Great Sky Sesshin (at Hokyoji)
	21	Introduction to zazen
September	15	All-day sitting
	18	Introduction to zazen
October	16	Introduction to zazen
	18 - 20	Sesshin (Daruma)