

# Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 1

Winter, 2014

## The Little Things

Spring should come soon. It's March, and the snow is falling gently, each flake small and distinct, together whitening the dark green needles on the yew tree out the window.

I'm reminded of Pete Seeger's remark, "If there's a world in a hundred years, it's going to be saved by tens of millions of little things."<sup>1</sup> We often don't realize the difference small things make. Small flakes piling up, changing the landscape.

Snowflakes are almost too small to be seen with the unaided eye, yet they become glaciers. Huge ones. Tens of millions of little things do that. The Antarctic ice is two miles thick.

According to the Buddha, this is how it happens with us, too. Changes in our habits, thoughts and spirits are not usually the product of some single large shift. They grow from many small changes, the way a glacier grows. Steady practice shapes our lives in thousands of small ways. Sometimes without our even noticing.

We sit when it's time to sit, then we get up and go about our lives. Then we return and sit again. Sometimes zazen becomes difficult and perhaps we don't do it for a while. Then we take it up again. As we leave our zafus, we take zazen into our daily life, remembering to be awake. It's very small, this effort in this moment. Each effort is a snowflake in the glacier.

The days and weeks of our practice pile up and the years grow full. The moments of letting go become a habit of continuous letting go. This habit has the steadiness and deep momentum of a glacier's slow progress forward.

It takes a lot of stumbling and it gets messy but that's part of the process. Like making piecrust or hitting a golf ball, it doesn't usually work the first time. The recipe says to cut the flour into the shortening until there are pea-sized balls. We cut the flour into the shortening, and we have a glutinous mass. We try again. And again. After many tries, suddenly this one really works. This one's delicious. Each try has been one small part of understanding flour and shortening with body and mind.

Shakyamuni did this, too. He spent six years in the forest practicing many meditation and spiritual development exercises. None of that led where he wanted to go, and he had to leave it all in order to discover the nature of reality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Yes!*, issue 45, spring, 2008, or <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/climate-solutions/pete-seeger-how-can-i-keep-from-singing>

"Six years wasted," we might say. But were they? Shakyamuni learned what *didn't* work. Though they didn't ultimately give him what he sought, each of those moments of wholehearted practice prepared him to understand when the time was ripe. Those years of practice were what enabled him to wake up.

We just do it – like a snowflake. Snowflakes fall with no agenda, no thought. They don't have ideas - they don't look around to see how far they've come. If a snowflake looked around to see what it had contributed to the whole glacier, it would be bitterly disappointed.

There's a quote from William James on Pete Seeger's barn -

I am done with great things and big things, great institutions and big success, and I am for those tiny invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of man's pride.

To rend the hardest monuments of our pride, the monuments that make us rigid, easily offended, fearful and easy to anger – don't we all want to do that? To be flexible, stable, confident and joyful? The tiny, invisible forces creeping through us and from us to others, through the crannies of the world – that's what transforms things. We can call up those forces and send them creeping along like tiny roots in early spring.

It seems to me that changes that come from many small things are the most profound and stable. Often when we try to do big things, make grand gestures, we are successful for a bit, and then we falter. Comparing what we wanted to do with what we've done so far is like a snowflake with glacial dreams – pretty hopeless. Forgetting the glacier, putting ourselves into this bit we're doing right now, we find stability. Each moment, we do what we need to do. Sometimes it's excruciating, sometimes it's joyful. However it is, we just do the next thing. Maybe they look useless and minuscule, but those little things form a solid new reality.

For this it's best to just show up with no agenda and no judgment. It's a lot easier if we don't have to do anything but what's in front of us. Just sit down, just turn on the computer, call up the document I was working on, begin work. OK, that's done. What's next? Ah - turn the computer off and go take out the garbage.

- Zuiko Redding

## Calling England

One snowy March night a few years ago, I couldn't sleep. I was pregnant, and that afternoon my doctor had called to tell me that a test showed signs that the baby might have Down syndrome or another genetic anomaly. I already had a two year old with some special needs. And my husband's grandfather and my grandmother had just died within a day of each other.

When I'm worried, I struggle with insomnia, and so I have developed rules. When I can't sleep, I can do one of three things: (1) go back to sleep, (2) clean, or (3) meditate. The idea is that, if I can convince myself that I'm not going to be able to get up and watch television or read or simply lie there worrying, and I'm never going to want to get up and clean, I'll have no choice but to meditate, which usually leads to sleep and is a good way to spend time even if it doesn't.

So I meditated, lost focus, and tossed; meditated, lost focus, and turned. Then I meditated some more and, being pregnant, got up to pee for the third time.

I decided to abandon my rules and call my friend Eleanor, who lives in England, and so is awake and willing to talk when it's the middle of the night for me.

I lumbered down the stairs and dialed. Leaning against the kitchen counter, I yawned, listening for the double *brr-brr* of English phones. "Nine one one -- what's your emergency?"

I snapped awake, puzzled. "Oh, dear. I was trying to call England, and I must have dialed *nine* one one instead of *zero* one one for an international call. I'm so sorry I bothered you."

"That's all right, ma'am. Thank you."

I hung up, and then carefully dialed the initial zero and the rest of the number.

This time Eleanor answered, and we talked while her son, Robert, toddled around the garden outside her cottage in Yorkshire. Settling down on the couch, I folded my feet under me and tucked the blanket around them.

Eleanor reminded me that she, too, had had an early test with worrying results when she had been pregnant with Robert. "There's always something to worry about, isn't there, when you're a parent. It's just like that."

My stomach unclenched a bit, and I began to feel better. Then I saw a flash of light at the front door, and a face peering in the window.

"Eleanor, hang on a minute," I said, my heart pounding. "There's someone at the door."

"Isn't it the middle of the night there?"

"Yeah, that's what's strange."

As I fumbled for the switch to turn on the porch light, the light held by the person at the door revealed the peak of a cap, the glimmer of a badge -- a police officer, not a burglar. The doorbell rang. I couldn't seem to remember where the light switch was, though I tried to go faster so the bell wouldn't ring again and wake my son and husband. In my haste, I managed to turn on the light in the hallway outside the rooms where they slept. Giving up on the light, I opened the door.

"Good evening, ma'am," said the officer. "We had a report of a 911 hang-up." He surveyed my fleece nightgown with the large, fuzzy white cat on the front.

"Yes, I'm sorry. Eleanor, it's all right, but I have to go. I was trying to call my friend in England," I explained, holding up the phone as evidence. "And I guess I dialed nine one one instead of zero one one for an international call. I explained it to the operator but I must not have done a very good job."

"We have to investigate all calls to 911, ma'am."

"Oh, of course," I said. "I understand. But we're fine, it was just a mistake. I -- we got some bad news today, and I couldn't sleep, so I thought I would call my friend. I'll be more careful next time."

"Bad news?" he asked, looking past me into the house.

"Yes, but -- nothing that would normally involve you. I'm pregnant, and our early screening test was a little worrisome. So I couldn't sleep."

He stared at me, apparently deciding that perhaps I needed some kind of adult supervision. "Are you home alone, ma'am?"

"No, my husband and son are asleep upstairs -- or at least they were until I accidentally turned on the light outside their bedroom." I smiled, but he didn't smile back. "Do you want to come in?" I asked, unsure what it would take to convince him that all was well.

"No, that's all right," he said. "You take care now, have a good night."

I closed the door, and then turned off the hall light upstairs. No sounds -- Eric and Reuben were still asleep. My heart pounded, and I laughed out loud. *The police, for crying out loud!* I thought that Pema Chodron would laugh, too. In one of my favorite books, she writes that there's reality -- plain old worry, plain old suffering, plain old grief -- and then we add our own drama, our own style. I had certainly done that! But the ridiculousness of the situation had thrust me back into the present moment. I went back upstairs, lay down in the cozy warmth under the covers, and fell asleep instantly.

- Jonna Higgins-Freese

## Bring Your Unwanted Books

It's time to begin spring cleaning and you may notice books on your shelves that you no longer need. If you're like some of us, you don't want to just toss them out. So we want to offer you an alternative.

Bring those volumes to the Center and put them in the orange box in the sun room. We will take them to Half-Price books, sell them and use the money to keep the place running. All books, CDs and other media on any topic are welcome. If you wish, you can get a receipt for tax purposes.

### All-day Sitting

with

**Hoko Karnegis**

**Sunday, May 18**  
6:00 a.m. to 4:40 p.m.

Hoko received dharma transmission from Shohaku Okumura. She is presently at Hokyoji where she is helping to build the practice. She is also a teacher of baika.

You're welcome to arrive when you can and sit for as long as your life permits.

**Please note – zazen begins at 6:00 a.m.**

If you plan to stay for lunch, please bring something share. Breakfast is eaten formally with oryoki bowls. The temple supplies both bowls and food.

If you need to stay overnight, email or call the Center.

## Tonen O'Connor – April 27

Tonen O'Connor will give the dharma talk on April 27.

Tonen is the teacher at Milwaukee Zen Center and a longtime friend of our temple. She is a cheerful and forthright teacher in the unadorned, rather irreverent tradition of Kodo Sawaki Roshi and Kosho Uchiyama Roshi, two great twentieth-century Japanese Zen teachers. She received dharma transmission from Tozen Akiyama.

Tonen organized Great Sky Sesshin together with Zuiko and she has visited many times. She is also on our board.

### Credits

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Travis Hunt  
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Writing

Jonna Higgins-Freese  
Zuiko Redding



## Baika Workshop

June 14, 2014

7:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
at Prairiewoods

Baika is Japanese religious music sung to the accompaniment of small hand bells and gongs. It can be used in ceremonies or simply sung for pleasure.

Rev. Shonen Kuga from Japan will teach beginning baika. Instruments will be provided.

Out-of-town participants are welcome. Guest rooms are available at Prairiewoods. Contact Zen Center for prices and reservations.

Registration and details –

phone: (319) 247-5986

email: [crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org](mailto:crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org)

web: [www.cedarrapidszencenter.org](http://www.cedarrapidszencenter.org)

## Annual Meeting

Our annual membership and board meeting will be held on Sunday, April 27 after regular zazen and dharma talk. Everyone is invited to attend. If you're staying for lunch, please bring a dish to pass.

## Thank You

**To all our 2013 donors** for your support for the practice. It takes money and effort to keep the practice going. You are providing for zazen, dharma talks, and kids' dharma school as well as practice at two Iowa prisons. This is important work that benefits all beings.

**Eric Higgins-Freese, Katie Roerman and Amy Eble** for your work with our web, Facebook and Twitter pages.

### Published by

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## Zen Practice and Tradition

January 7, 14, 21, 28  
March 11, 18, 25, April 1  
June 3, 10, 17, 24  
September 9, 16, 23, 30

## Dharma School

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

## Daily Practice

### MORNING ZAZEN

Sunday Morning	
9:00 – 9:40 a.m.	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 p.m.	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 p.m.	zazen
7:10 – 7:20	kinhin
7:20 – 8:00	zazen

Third Wednesday (each month)	
7:30 – 9:00 p.m.	zazen instruction

## Sesshins and All-day Sittings

January	1	New Year's open house)
	15	Introduction to zazen
	19	All-day sitting
February	16	All-day sitting
	19	Introduction to zazen
March	14-16	Sesshin
	19	Introduction to zazen
April	6	Buddha's Birthday
	16	Introduction to zazen
	27	Annual meeting
May	18	All-day sitting
	21	Introduction to zazen
June	15	All-day sitting
	18	Introduction to zazen
July	16	Introduction to zazen

