

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 19, Number 1

Winter 2018

Being Flexible

It's six below zero and there's a bit of snow on the ground. Before dawn, the moon was huge and bright. The world is quiet on this January morning.

In the midwinter cold everything becomes hard and brittle. The once-supple flower stalks hovering above the garden's snow will snap if we bend them. Our muscles creak and our joints hurt. Perhaps our minds are a bit stiff, too.

The Japanese poet Mitsuo Aida wrote

The branch of the tree grows because
it is flexible
The leaf of the tree grows because it
is flexible

Even in the most gentle breeze,
The leaf of the bamboo rustles
Because it is flexible

The problems we face as we get older
Are not just those of
body and limb . . .

Our heads get harder
Our hearts get harder

I want a flexible heart so I can stay
young forever¹

Flexibility is the ability to bend with circumstances and not be broken or twisted by them. To be flexible is to be open to different ways of thinking and doing, to accommodate ourselves to conditions wherever we are.

This accommodation and openness allows us to learn and grow. With no rigid ideas, we become part of what's happening, understand it, and adopt new perspectives. We try new things and our experience of them gives us more options for solutions when problems come up. We swim more freely and effectively in the world

Being flexible, we are not overcome by our circumstances. We survive, learn and become stronger and more resilient. We become like bamboo. As the wind blows we bend with it and our leaves rustle, but we don't break. When the wind settles down we stand up straight. Oaks, whose trunks are very strong but don't bend, are blown down.

Young plants need the spring wind to grow strong. Without the wind jostling them, their stems don't broaden and they are unable to support new growth.

The wind in our lives promotes strength and growth, too. The important thing is to be open to the wind – the things

that aren't so comfortable – in our lives. We tend to turn away from these, harden our hearts to them. We're willing to deal with them only on our terms, not on theirs, and we end up not dealing with them or dealing with them badly. We can see this in the situations in our lives that seem never to be resolved, and in the anger and judgment in our hearts. We build fences rather than allowing new ideas into our lives and those fences need a lot of maintenance and surveillance. Life becomes exhausting.

Hardness of head and heart usually comes from attachment to who we think we are and who we think we want to be. Fearing that our views will be disregarded and we'll come to harm, we dig in our heels and hold tightly to our position. We forget that if we want others to be flexible we must be flexible, too.

Flexibility of head and heart is also a source of joy and contentment. Our supple minds and hearts approach new experiences with curiosity and anticipation. We delight in them, make new discoveries, and mature our insight. With new ways of being and acting, we move more freely in the world with resilient strength. Life is less exhausting when there's no need to fear it or struggle with it.

Flexibility also gives us balance. We can appreciate the situation as it is and we're not afraid to bend with it. Seeing more clearly, we act helpfully and wholeheartedly in this situation right now. We can move toward resolving matters and help them become what they need to become rather than imposing our will on them.

This flexibility is our zazen. Sitting quietly with a straight back, we see our thoughts and let them come and go as they please. Seeing them as just our thoughts, our minds and hearts neither hold onto them nor push them away. With flexible attitude we understand them and are not ruled by them.

Having let go of thoughts, in daily life we return to the natural curiosity of our childhood. With no preconceptions filling our minds, we are able to absorb new ideas and viewpoints. This is waking up.

We see our judgments and resistances arise and let them go so we can meet reality just as it is. We acknowledge our ideas and what they're asking us to do, but we don't necessarily follow orders.

On this midwinter morning, let's have youthful, flexible minds and hearts no matter what our age.

- Zuiko Redding

¹ Aida, Mitsuo and Tim Jensen, *A Phrase by My Side: The Art, Ideas and Poetry of Mitsuo Aida* (Tokyo: Mitsuo Aida Museum, 2000), p. 17.



Disaster and Dharma

A little after 5:30 last Sunday morning, my cat Jack and I became homeless. Things happened so fast I was barely able to get Jack, keys, shoes, glasses and a jacket on. Sheer panic and the young man from across the hallway holding the entrance door open for us was what got me and Jack, despite heavy acrid smoke in the air, up those stairs and outside to safety. Once outside, I sat on the curb across the parking lot with Jack's crate on my lap and watched the almost beautiful, metallic copper flames moving behind a second floor window.

Thanks to this young man, his fiancée, her mother, and a friend who were all staying overnight, almost everyone got out safely. John and his friends ran through the building, making sure everyone on all three floors was awake, knew there was a fire, and got outside as soon as they could. There seemed to be about ten people outside and one trapped on the third floor. He leaned out a window to breathe fresh air and the firefighters rescued him unharmed. A couple of hours later we were settled in the lobby of a nearby hotel with Red Cross people giving us information and aid. Eventually we humans and felines found either friends or a place to stay. Then we began to process what had happened, then focus on getting back on our feet.

But this is not going to be about my impressions and struggles. It's about realizing that I was given this experience as a gift so I could better understand people and further develop compassion. We get so caught up in our emotions, swept along by circumstances and our own needs, that we forget other players in the scene.

At least I sometimes do. I had two moments of terror. The first was trying to get Jack into his crate when he was refusing to go. The second was climbing up those steps in all that smoke. But once I was outside with Jack and sitting on the curb, I was at peace; I was alive and so was he. Jack was a trouper; he stayed in his crate for eight hours without complaint.

So here are the players in this disaster as I remember them and their experiences through their words and my observations. I've used pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

This was the first apartment John and Jenny had ever had, and they'd lived in it for two months. One of their friends, from another building, was standing, shivering, in the cold, without a jacket, to be there for them. He had also retrieved Jenny's shoes. John and Jenny were both confused and frightened. John still did not have shoes, just socks, and both were cold and hungry.

They alternated in putting on strong faces for each other. Jenny's mother had gone home but his father joined them once we were in the hotel lobby. Later that day they found out that their apartment had been destroyed from the water used to put out the fire. Their wiring, like mine, had been burned out so there was no electricity. But they had renter's insurance, so they had some resources. They hope to rent another apartment when things settle down.

The young man in the apartment next to me was mainly concerned because none of us knew the status of our various apartments. He refused Red Cross help. He had resources others might not have and a place where he could stay, he said. The guy across from him took his aid and left.

The Desert Storm veteran showed up later. He'd moved into the complex two days before. He suffered from PTSD and had been homeless for six years with extreme anxiety problems. I saw him shaking as he was talking to the Red Cross representative. He thought he'd caused the fire, but didn't know how it could happen, as he was just baking something in the oven. He apologized profusely to all of us. Jenny gave him a Dr. Pepper to help him calm down.

The fire personnel and the Red Cross representatives were cat lovers and it brought smiles to our faces to watch the Marion Fire Chief carrying Jenny's tiny kitten around. Jenny was afraid she was going to lose her kitten to the Fire Chief's affection.

This was just a small disaster, affecting only a small group of everyday people. But it's the same for all people everywhere in large and small disasters. Everyone wants to be happy. So many times we get strung out and close down when tragedy strikes; we get trapped in our fears, emotions and thoughts. But if we can breathe and open our hearts, if we can accept the way our karma is playing out, even if there is nothing we can do to actively help the others involved, we can open up and let them in, giving them space to exist in, so that all of us can breathe, relax and recover quicker.

Even though we may feel we can do nothing or think what we're doing is not much, we can help. The friends and family giving reassurance through their simple presence spread calm and courage to all of us. The tenant who left resources for others who needed them more gave hope. A Dr. Pepper given with warmth could ease fear and pain. Treating a kitten with affection gave everyone good cheer and the sense that there was a way forward. This is what I learned and this is what I hope to practice.

Book Recommendation

This one is from Jenn Day and Kristian Leitzen: *10% Happier* by Dan Harris

From Jenn: Harris is critical about the whole process. He tries mindfulness meditation and metta/lovingkindness, even a meditation retreat, and feels he becomes kinder and happier - at least by 10 percent. This book not only made me laugh from time to time, but also gave me some tips about mindfulness practice that helped me a lot.

From Kristian: It's the story of how a cynical, neurotic, T.V. personality took a round-about path to becoming a regular and devoted meditator. From a rocket ride up the ranks of ABC News, then a very public, live-broadcast nervous breakdown, through self-help gurus, he finally landed in Buddhist meditation.

Harris gives an "everyman" version of his meditation journey and debunks the myths that keep many people from ever starting. While he can be a bit insufferable at times, it's an entertaining and informative read that I would recommend for anyone who thinks that meditation isn't for them.

Thank You

To all our 2017 donors for your support of our practice. It takes money and effort to keep the practice going. You are providing for zazen, dharma talks, and practice in the Iowa prisons. This is important work that benefits all beings.

To all the New Year's workers for your cheerful cleaning, chopping, and organizing. Thanks for your contribution to the success of our holiday celebration.

Credits

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March Sesshin

March 15-17

with Zuiko Redding

Friday - 7:00 p.m.
to Sunday - 5:30 p.m.

Join us for all or part
of the weekend



Please sign up by March 10 to assure a place

Out-of-town participants are welcome to stay at the Zen Center
Cost: \$25/day or \$15 for a half-day

Everyone is welcome at 9:00 a.m. zazen and dharma talk

Registration - crzc@cedarapidszencenter.org

Details and daily schedule - www.cedarapidszencenter.org

Work Days

We usually have a work day one Saturday per month. We do cleaning, organizing, and maintenance at the center. Check the monthly newsletter and the Facebook page for details.

Annual Meeting

Our annual membership and board meeting will be held on Sunday, April 29 after regular zazen and dharma talk. Everyone is invited to attend. If you're staying for lunch, please bring a dish to pass.

Sitting Groups

Bloomington-Normal, Illinois meets at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings at Pal ail them at bnzengroup@gmail.com.

Cedar Falls, Iowa 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.

Cedar Rapids Zen Center - Jikyouji

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Zen Practice and Tradition

2018

January 9, 16, 23, 30
March 6, 13, 20, 27

Dharma Study

Every Monday – 6:30 p.m.
at the Center

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 Sitzings

February	18	All-day sitting
	21	Introduction to zazen
March	16-18	Sesshin (ohigan)
	21	Introduction to zazen
April	8	Buddha's Birthday
	18	Introduction to zazen
	29	Annual Meeting
May	16	Introduction to zazen
	20	All-day sitting
June	17	All-day sitting (solstice)
	20	Introduction to zazen
July	13-15	Sesshin
	25	Introduction to zazen
August	15	Introduction to zazen
	19	All-day sitting
September	16	All-day sitting
	19	Introduction to zazen