

# Cedar Rapids Zen Center

## Newsletter

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### New Beginnings: A Conversation With Zuiko

by Margaret Baldwin

#### **We began sitting at Cedar Rapids Zen Center on March 1. How have things been going?**

They've been going well. We have a zendo with zafus and an altar, and people come to evening sitting and the Sunday program and to sesshins and all-day sittings. Morning sitting isn't so popular, but soon people will discover how beautiful the zendo is at sunrise and they'll come.

Cedar Rapids has welcomed us. We now belong to the Linn County Interreligious Council and there's been an article in the *Gazette*. Many people have come to learn zazen and to experience practice, and some have become regular sitters. I am asked often by community groups to participate on panels, give guest lectures, and teach zazen. Presently, the Introduction to Zen Practice course has twelve students.

#### **What place do you see for Zen Center in the community?**

Basically I hope Zen Center can be a part of the religious diversity here – a place for Buddhists to practice. I also hope it can be a place where people of all faiths could come to practice their own meditation traditions and/or to learn and practice ours. We could also be a Zen practice center for people in the region – where they could come to sesshin or on Sunday to sit and participate.

From there, I want to be very open and flexible and respond to the invitations of the community to help with their needs.

#### **What sort of background do people need in order to practice Zen?**

You need to be a human being. You don't need anything special - no preparation, no special talents. The only thing that's really essential is a wish to learn the dharma and a real desire to change your life, a desire to change the way you experience and react to your world.

#### **What is the Dharma?**

The basic meaning is "law" or "the way things are." "Learning the Dharma" usually means learning the Buddha's teaching. But we also talk about being "in the Dharma," which means being in the world just as it is, ongoing. The Dharma is called "law," but we can think of it as the process by which the world is coming up in each moment.

#### **So in that sense, it's like natural law, as opposed to the laws of humans.**

Yes, it's like that. We can think of the Dharma as somewhat like the laws of physics or biology. The Dharma is change, interdependence, and the coming together and drifting apart of things, giving rise to reality moment by moment. This happens independently of what we think about it—how we conceptualize it and feel it should be. We have our ideas about atoms and about DNA, and those ideas are very good. They help us live and to make a better life

for ourselves and others. But life just as it is exists beyond whatever ideas we have.

**When you say that the Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha, do you mean the historical Buddha?**

Yes. He lived about 2500 years ago in northeastern India. He was the son of a wealthy, powerful family. In his twenties he gave up his heritage to become a wandering religious seeker.

He realized the way to end suffering. He was able to teach about how we can avoid suffering and caughtness in our own lives by seeing life just as it is and living in harmony with it. We honor him and learn from him because he was able to transmit that to his disciples, who transmitted it to the next generation, and so forth down to the present.

**You practiced six years in a monastery in Japan. What made you choose to do that?**

I felt, as many Americans have felt, that the Dharma is far too young here for us to really be able to gain the kind of understanding we need to teach and transmit it. I don't mean that someone who practices can't have a good understanding and do daily life practice without having gone to Japan, but in order to teach and be a foundation for others it's difficult to learn what you need to know in America right now. I wanted to learn the traditional way because I felt that if I learned that, I could understand the spirit and be able to translate it to America without losing the basic teaching. Too often, without being aware of it, we think we're transmitting the true spirit of something while what we're really doing is picking and choosing the things we like—

**The convenient aspects.**

Yes. And to the stuff that makes us uncomfortable and that kind of jolts us a bit,

we say, 'Oh, no, no. . . we don't need that. That's just a little quirk.' But if we can really understand something - whether it's Dogen's Zen or Winton Marsalis' jazz - we can really pass on that tradition faithfully. Its spirit will work everywhere in all times. It will be alive and growing and flexible.

This is especially important in a religious tradition. Religion is about living in an authentic manner, and we can't learn that by doing things we don't understand. It's also about making changes in your life. Those changes don't happen if we're always comfortable and happy. To make the kinds of changes we need to make, we often need to be jolted. But those shocks need to be ones that we in our own culture can understand. I felt that by experiencing Japanese practice I could know with more confidence which jolts were part of the practice and have some idea of how to translate them into our cultural language.

## Introduction to Zen Practice

Experience zazen, egolessness,  
emptiness, and effort. Open to both  
beginners and experienced sitters.

September 19, 26, October 3, 10  
7:30 - 9:00 pm  
(optional zazen - 6:30)

Central Park Presbyterian  
1700 B Ave. NE, Cedar Rapids

Cost: \$60  
\$30 – students/fixed income

Text: *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*  
Available at class time for \$7.95

**To register**, call Zen Center – (319)247-5986  
or e-mail us at [crzc@avalon.net](mailto:crzc@avalon.net).

The heart is wet,  
 even though there is no rain  
 Clouds tease workers in the fields  
 who pray for relief from drought and heat  
 eyeing empty thunderheads fast moving  
 false foreshadowing.

Earth is an aquafilter  
 that absorbs, stores, and purifies  
 rain from skies momentarily.

Earth does not hold water,  
 and is continually returning water  
 to the atmosphere in an  
 ageless conversation.  
 The heart is wet and flowing.

- Quent Duarte

## Watching the Stream

Saturday's temperature soared to seventy-five, unusual for the first week of March, so I biked to the river and sat by the bank. In front of me lay the Iowa River, steadily flowing, and the perfect metaphor for my thoughts: a stream floating by I can't stop or grasp. I did zazen for several minutes, watching the river stream by, watching my thoughts float through my mind, frequently returning to my breathing, and then noticed a large clump of dried weeds drifting down the river. It seemed out of place in that placid current. Its beige weeds and lumps of dirt looked like a sea monster's head, tiny tentacles and antennae sticking out in a hundred directions.

It also seemed to represent those tangled thoughts I encounter. My zazen is going well, my mind is calm, I'm letting thoughts

drift by, then snag! I'm stuck on a thought. I'm dwelling in the past, rehashing entire conversations, worrying about the future, setting elaborate plans. After several minutes, however, this weed clump drifted down the river and out of my vision, a reminder that even my thoughts are not permanent. They too are part of the constant stream of thoughts, the constant stream of living. They won't stop in the middle of the river and they won't stop the river. The river flowed without impediments again, and returning to my breath, so did my mind. Then sure enough, another weed clump floated by. This time, however, I knew its nature. It would keep floating. I didn't have to stare at it in fascination or horror. The stream's placid current was stronger and would carry it on its way. The stream's placid current was what pulled this weed clump from its banks and tossed it into the current. Zazen is like that also. It digs up tough memories and irrational fears and tosses them to the surface. It teaches us to view these thoughts as illusory and impermanent, to return to the breath, and to let the thoughts float by, as they always will.

- James Eich

## Credits

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## Daily Schedule

**Morning**Zen Center - 1651 34<sup>th</sup> St. SE #8

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
9:45-10:45	dharma talk
10:50-11:30	tea
11:30-12:30	work period

**Evening**Central Park Presbyterian Church  
1700 B Ave. NE

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

6:30 - 7:10 pm	zazen
7:10 - 7:20	kinhin
7:20 - 8:00	zazen

## Calendar

July	2	Sangha meeting
	7 – 9	Sesshin
	19	Zazen instruction
August	6	Sangha meeting
	16	Zazen instruction
September	3	Sangha meeting
	20	Zazen instruction
October	1	Sangha meeting
	6 – 8	Sesshin
	18	Zazen instruction
November	5	Sangha meeting
	15	Zazen instruction
	30	Sesshin begins
December	1 – 7	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	10	Sangha meeting
	20	Zazen instruction

"Sangha" means community. Everyone is welcome.

**Cedar Rapids Zen Center**


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