

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 11, Number 3

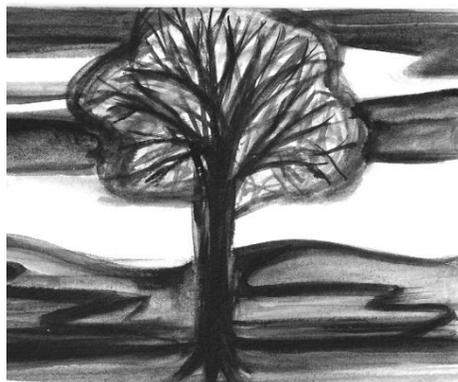
Summer, 2010

Growing an Oak Tree

The bur oak in the back yard has put out long green shoots on its crown this year. It's too tall to be shaded from the morning sun by the apple tree, and it's beginning to hide the garage from the view out the sun porch windows.

I've recently been reading *Faith in a Seed*,¹ an edited volume of Henry David Thoreau's last work. In it he has this, among other things, to say about oaks

It . . . does not imply much wisdom to discover that "little strokes fell great oaks," for the sound of the axe invites our attention to such a catastrophe. We can easily count each stroke and all the neighborhood is informed by a loud crash when the deed is consummated; but they are few who consider what little strokes, of a different kind and often repeated, *raise* great oaks and pines. Scarcely a traveler hears these or turns aside to communicate with that Nature which is steadily dealing them.



Dōgen spoke of mountains and rivers preaching the dharma, and it's good to look to trees for dharma, too. Oaks show the way with great clarity.

Oaks grow slowly and quietly, as Thoreau points out. Pines grow quickly, soon becoming tall and mature. Quick-growing trees also weaken and die quickly. Oaks take their time – they're in for the long haul – for two or three hundred years. And they're solid. A nail goes easily into pine. A nail driven into oak rings as if it were being driven into stone.

The Buddha pointed out that those who attained awakening quickly often were not as strong in their practice as those for whom awakening had been a long, difficult process. In general, it's the practice that's built slowly, bit by bit that withstands the gale force winds of our world and lasts long. This is the practice that's built in small increments. We sit for a few minutes whenever we can, each time adding a few bits to our practice. Each time we notice our ego and put it aside, we add another small shoot to the tree of our practice.

It's so slow that we don't notice when those shoots become huge limbs, when the trunk becomes straight, tall and firm.

It's in taking our time, not wanting to get anywhere soon, that we build strength and steadiness. It is patiently allowing each root and branch to grow healthy and strong. It's seeing all things coming together to create causes and conditions for our practice and working with the reality of our lives. Each bud and leaf takes its own time. In good times they grow fast, in less congenial times they are slower to develop.

This is difficult. Our culture and our basic nature are results-oriented and prize speed. We chafe at slow development and careful building. We want the final product *now*. We are impatient and perhaps disappointed when it doesn't appear as quickly as we'd hoped. We want to quit – pick up and leave, destroying the growth we fostered. Destruction, as Thoreau pointed out, is quick and impressive. Building is slow and no one notices.

But an oak grows at its own pace and so does awakening. There is no "quick path to enlightenment" – don't trust anyone who says there is. We wake up when we ripen, and it's best to just be content with where we are at the moment. We may see others and compare ourselves with them, but in truth, pines are pines and oaks are oaks. Both are beautiful.

This is because we are not growing our awakening ourselves, just as an oak does not grow itself. Its growth comes from the sun's warmth and light, the rain's moisture, the nourishment provided by thousands of previous plants and animals. Thoreau speaks of Nature dealing the strokes that raise a great oak. The great oak belongs to Nature and is part of Nature. It is not a separate thing, controlling its own self.

Like us. "Who is it who is awakening?" the old Chinese masters might ask. "Who, indeed?" we might muse. We come unbidden out of emptiness and we return, somewhat unwillingly, to it. In between, we are supported by air, water, friends, mosquitoes, gravity. Because of these things, given by emptiness – Nature, as Thoreau called it – we are allowed to live and to make whatever it is we make of this life. How can we say, "I awoke?" The Buddha himself said, "I and all beings awaken simultaneously."

So, each time we wake up, we can be grateful to the whole universe for making this happen through us.

¹ Thoreau, Henry D. *Faith in a Seed: The First Publication of Thoreau's Last Manuscripts*. Edited by Bradley P. Dean. Washington, D.C.: Shearwater Books, 1993, page 37.

Dreams and Shadows

Why do we have dreams? Is it a way for our subconscious to talk with our waking self? Or is it simply a way for the brain to process information that has been collected throughout the day? I usually do not remember my dreams; I close my eyes to sleep and the next thing I remember is waking up. However, about a week ago I did experience a dream that I cannot seem to forget.

I was in my room sitting zazen when I felt two taps on my left shoulder. Since the door was shut and I was in the room alone, this frightened me. I slowly turned around to see that it was Zuikō.

This is where the dream ended and started to replay. I felt the tapping on my shoulder, became frightened, slowly turned around and the second time it was the Devil. The third time, I turned around it was Jesus and the fourth time I turned around and it was a black fog or mist with two bony fingers.

This fourth time, instead of stopping and replaying I took the two bony fingers that were attached to the black substance, put them down by my side and continued with zazen. When I finished, I glanced down by my side to see the two bones were still there. I panicked a little because this proved to me that what I had experienced was "real." I placed the bones in a box and drove to the Zen Center to show Zuiko and share my experience.

When I was in front of the Center, I peered into the box to see the bones were still present. When I was inside the Center, I opened the box to show Zuiko and the bones were no longer there. Completely confused, I looked around and realized the "bones" had changed form and had now appeared on the floor as filtered light through tree branches.

I do not believe dreams themselves hold any significance. It is only the interpretations we place on them after the initial occurrence that gives special meaning or value. So how do I interpret the dream I described above? Sitting in zazen was sitting in reality or being present as we know it. The four disturbances, Zuikō, the Devil, Jesus and the black substance are delusions. Grouping the four together is interesting to me. Zuikō is a real person and who I view as my teacher. The Devil and Jesus represent my Catholic upbringing and what I consider to be good and evil. The black substance is foreign to me and for some reason I treated it differently.

My mind bought into the delusion with the black substance by taking the two bony fingers and placing them by my side. I took the bones to prove what I had experienced was "real". Yet when I got to the Center to show Zuiko the material evidence, the bones were gone. Not satisfied with this new reality, I looked to find something to take its place, finding them as filtered light on the floor.

This dream could be about my practice of zazen and how I am trying to connect it with my Catholic upbringing. It could also be suggesting that everything I have learned so far is nothing but a delusion. Even dreams could be considered

Fall Sesshin

October 15 - 17

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

Sesshin is a time for looking more deeply into reality. We practice in silence with zazen, meals, sutra chanting and work. You can see the schedule on our web site.

Join us for all or part of sesshin.

Please sign up by October 10 to assure a place.
Out-of-town people may stay at Zen Center.

To register or get details –
phone: (319) 247-5986
email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org
web: www.cedarrapidszencenter.org

delusions and, as I mentioned, before, have no meaning for me without interpretation. The only real truth I am beginning to understand is sitting in zazen, where no evidence is needed to prove the experience is real.

- Eugenia Vavra

Zen Maize

Buddha's in the cornfields
Dharma fields, of green
Then beige, but always against
The azure sky.

Ear to an ear, in the Fields of Dreams
The Ioway know the pop! the crack!
Of an instant, in an autumn night
The brilliant moon holds the cosmos!

Of course you can hear the corn grow!
You are the maize, and you can hear
Your own heartbeat, so too,
The dharma rows sway thusly.

Awaken!
Now!
Is all we have,
Is all we need.

- Douglas Gustafson

Receiving the Precepts

On July 10, Mark Ahlstrom, Jennifer Yukl and Tim Yukl received the precepts at Zen Center. Many sangha members, friends and relatives celebrated with them, including Ellen Wetzell, Christa Brusen-Gomez and Brian Reynolds who received the precepts in previous years and returned especially to support Mark, Jen and Tim.

To receive the precepts is to vow to live the Buddha's life of being awake. The precepts, like the Eightfold Path, are directions for doing this so that we can constantly turn toward awakening. They are vows to behave in such a way that our actions are helpful rather than destructive.

On October 10, Ryan Wheeler will also receive the precepts. Everyone is invited to celebrate with him as well.

News Notes

Achan Khamsao of Wat Lao Buddhavong in Virginia spent a week with us this month. His presence contributed greatly to our daily practice, and his Sunday dharma talk on the three poisons was really helpful.

Zuiko was in Japan for two weeks in late May and early July, visiting her teacher, attending a gathering at a friend's temple and just hanging out at another friend's temple. For information about the gathering go to <http://zazenkaai.wordpress.com>.

We have invited Rev. Kensho Miyamae from Kakudenji Temple in Japan to visit next year. Rev. Miyamae is a Sōtō Zen teacher who is very interested in helping Americans understand and do practice. He will be here on January 30th and 31st and February 1st. He will be giving the dharma talk on Sunday, January 30th. There will also be chances to speak with him and learn from him. Details are not yet determined. We'll let you know more as arrangements get made.

Our mortgage was paid off on July 15. Now that we are free of the monthly mortgage payment, we are free to begin some strategic planning for the future of our sangha and its facilities. We are beginning to fill up the seats in the zendo, so we are beginning to think about what we want to do in five or ten years when we can no longer fit into the space we have. Another consideration is the choice of a teacher to take Zuiko's place when she retires.

Credits

Artwork	Allan Brink
Editing	Matt Alles Travis Hunt Ellen Wetzell
Writing	Douglas Gustafson Zuikō Redding Eugenia Vavra

Fundraising

Fall is the time to clean house and get ready for winter. As we go through closets and peruse our bookshelves, we usually see things we no longer need. You can help the Center with those things. Drop your books off in the box in the sunroom and we'll take them to Half Price Books. Take the tchotchkes and other items to Stuff, Etc. and ask to sell them under CRZC's account. They'll return half the price to us when the item sells. Stuff, Etc. has four locations in the Cedar Rapids – Iowa City area. For the one nearest you, visit www.stuffetonline.com or call 319-396-6663.

If you aren't able to get to the Center or Stuff, Etc. you can sell your items yourself and send the proceeds to the Center.

The funds will help Rev. Kensho Miyamae's wife, Madoka, come with him. We need about \$300 to \$400 to make this happen. After that, we'd like to use the proceeds from these sources to fund visits by future guest teachers.

We're on Facebook

There is a Cedar Rapids Zen Center page on Facebook, and you can go there to see postings about upcoming events, pictures and other things. You can also post your own thoughts and ideas.

If you're interested in helping with the page, contact Gina Vavra at Eugenia.Vavra@mchsi.com.

Thank You

Work Day participants for work on the leaks, walk, rain barrel and other things during our two summer work days.

Christa Brusen-Gomez, Hōkō Jan Karnegis and Achan Khamsao for your help in preparing for the precepts receiving ceremony.

Yayoi Teramoto Moreland for the fine lunch she provided in Cedar Falls for those who attended the Dalai Lama's talk.. It was good to share delicious sandwiches and Yayoi's apple crisp and talk with folks from the Des Moines group and from Ryumonji.

Bryan Davis, Gus Gustafson, Jen Yukl, Tim Yukl and everyone else who took care of the Center while Zuikō was in Japan. It is good to know that zazen, dharma talks and other activities continue in her absence.

Published by

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Introduction to Zen Practice Classes – 2010

February 2, 9, 16, 23

April 27, May 4, 11, 18

July 6, 13, 20, 27

October 5, 12, 19, 26

Sangha Meetings 2010

January	3
February	7
March	7
April	11
May	2
June	6
July	11
August	1
September	5
October	3
November	7
December	12

DAILY SCHEDULE

MORNING ZAZEN

Wednesday, Thursday

6:00 – 6:40 am	zazen
6:40 – 6:50	kinhin
6:50 – 7:20	zazen
7:20 – 7:40	service

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, Friday

12:15 – 12:55 pm	zazen
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EVENING ZAZEN

Tuesday – 20-minute zazen periods

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 of each month

7:30 – 9:00	zazen instruction
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Annual Schedule

2010

July	18	All-day sitting
	21	Zazen instruction
August	7 - 14	Great Sky Sesshin (at Hokyoji)
	18	Zazen instruction
September	15	Zazen instruction
	19	All-day sitting
October	15 - 17	Sesshin
	20	Zazen instruction
November	17	Zazen instruction
	21	All-day sitting
December	3 - 5	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	15	Zazen instruction
	31	New Year's sitting
January, 2011	1	New Year's open house
	16	All-day sitting
	19	Zazen instruction