

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 3

Summer, 2014

Geology and Perspective

A while ago I was reading John McPhee's *Basin and Range*¹ on a plane from Denver to Los Angeles. McPhee gives a fine account of the relationship between the history of life and the history of the planet. Earth is about four billion, five hundred million years old, he says. The first three billion years or so are marked by basalt, a very hard, gray or black rock. The next billion are marked by red sandstone.

Multicellular animals have been around only for about the last five hundred million years. With the beginning of life there are limestone and shale. These are deposited on the basalt and sandstone. Then there's us human beings. We came on the scene three or four million years ago, a mere blink of an eye in the Earth's reckoning. Maybe not that long, even. Beings that we might easily recognize as other humans are perhaps only 200,000 years old. We started cultivating crops seven to ten thousand years ago and we began building cities only seven thousand years ago.

There at thirty thousand feet, as I had just finished reading about planetary history with its basalt, sandstone, and limestone and had gone on to the relationship between silver deposits and hot springs, the captain casually mentioned that we were flying over the Grand Canyon. Never having seen this wonder, I turned my eyes from geology to real rock. It was truly worth paying attention to. Fascinated, I watched the cliffs and the huge space between them passing beneath us. Then one cliff caught my eye. The bottom three-quarters or so were gray. The next three eighths were dark red, the color of Shakyamuni's robe. Then there was a layer of nondescript stuff that was whitish, like buttercream frosting on a cake, topped off by a fuzz of vegetation.

"Oh." That rock had just clarified reality for me. I don't know if my understanding of what I saw was correct, but it doesn't matter here. Reality had just pointed out how we fit into it.

It's very easy to get lost in our lives and forget reality – the miles of basalt and sandstone on which we exist. We forget how they are lived out on a thin film of stuff that supports life – the soil that's a gift from the basalt, sandstone, and previous generations of living things. A single human life is probably not even one *kshana*² in the time scale of the planet, but we don't notice. We move through our lives like ants through grass – seeing only grass, thinking the whole world is grass, assuming that we are very important beings going

about very important business. The vastness of the reality in which we live doesn't show up if we don't stretch ourselves up above the level of the grass.

We also don't see that we are expressions of a vast Universe, part of the vast functioning from the very beginning. We are necessary and we are connected. We make carbon dioxide and breathe it out. Plants take the carbon dioxide, strip off the carbon to make carbohydrates, and return the oxygen for us to use to soak up more carbon. Together we are a little carbon and oxygen circulating system. We would likely not exist without each other. Nor could we exist without all that basalt and sandstone on which to build life. I'm not sure what the basalt and sandstone get out of all this, but I'm sure there's something.

"So," you say, "what does this have to do with my life?" It's just this: being awake to the big picture, as the geologists call it, is the way out of *dukkha*. Knowing our place in the reality of things, we understand that we do not exist alone and we are not separate. We exist together with and are supported by all other beings including all that basalt. Our role is to support and contribute to the wellbeing of all things. When we wake up to this, we lose our sense of self-importance and just do what reality asks of us. Then our lives and all things prosper and we have peace.

•We wake up, then we forget and we're back in the grass. We think this bit of life that has become us is of great import and must be foremost in all things at all costs. We think we are separate from the rest of reality. We consider only ourselves, forgetting that our actions have consequences for all of reality. We don't see that harming others is harming ourselves. We do a lot of harm and we become deeply unhappy and discontent. Our unhappiness and discontent lead us to expend more energy uselessly, do more harm and be even more unhappy.

So looking up above the grass and seeing reality is the way to peace for ourselves and all things.

Siddhartha Gautama, when he looked up and saw the morning star, basically said, "Oh. I get it." Seeing the vastness and interconnection, he exclaimed, "I and all living beings have attained realization together." Then he spent the rest of his life showing others how to look up and get it, too. When Kaundinya, the first person to understand the teaching, expressed his joy, Shakyamuni said, "Kaundinya's got it." We can get it, too.

¹ John McPhee. *Basin and Range*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

² A *kshana* (Sanskrit) is 1/60th of the time it takes to snap your fingers.

Mottai-nai

"Mottai-nai" is a Japanese word which I'm sure most of you are familiar with. This word expresses an important Japanese value. Lately, I've noticed several references in Little Tokyo to this word and concept, so I thought to write about it.

"Mottai-nai" is a word one often hears in Japan. The meaning is that something is being wasted and it would be better not to waste it. This idea is used in many contexts including material goods, time, and energy. Etymologically, it's a little bit difficult to see the meaning simply by looking at the Chinese characters. Looking online, I see that "mottai" (没) literally means "dignity." So, "mottai-nai" indicates a lack of dignity and, by extension, it means a lack of "respect" since "nai" (ない) is the negative form. This value comes from the Buddhist teaching of demonstrating respect towards all things because in essence all things are interconnected.

I lived for many years in a Japanese Zen monastery and often think back to those times. In fact, I often see scenes from the monastic life in my dreams. I would like to relate a few things from that life in relation to this idea of not wasting things.

Since moving to Los Angeles four years ago, I have been cooking for myself. In fact, this is the first time I've had to cook only for myself in thirty-five years. The reason is that I was living all those years in monastic communities where food was prepared for the whole group. Of course, there were times when I had to cook in the monastery. But nowadays, as I stand in front of the sink washing rice or washing dishes, I often think of a saying that was written on the wooden block monks hits when they ask to enter the monastery: "Be careful not to waste even one grain of rice or you will grow horns on your head." I've heard that there are other similar Japanese sayings warning of blindness and other terrible things happening if even one grain of rice goes down the drain. This isn't to say that I've never wasted a grain of rice. Nevertheless, this teaching of taking great care not to waste food is deep in my unconscious. Certainly, one aspect of "mottai-nai" is the awareness that we mustn't waste those resources that we have been entrusted with.

Another example that comes to mind from my days in Japan is the wonderful way that Japanese kimonos are designed. If one part becomes worn out, it is possible to take the kimono completely apart and rearrange those same pieces so that a stronger piece can be placed where the weaker piece was and vice versa. I have to admit that this isn't something I learned to do myself. Nevertheless, I had an elderly Japanese friend who was highly skilled at making and mending kimonos. She often told me about how kimonos are made and how they can be repaired. It often occurred to me that this was an example of Japanese genius. I think of "mottai-nai" in this context because this is an ingenious way through which the life of a kimono can be extended indefinitely.

While reflecting on life in the monastery, another important thing comes to mind when thinking about "mottai-nai," and

this is in relation to time. At the end of evening zazen, the monk leading the chanting hits a wooden block and then says, "Respectfully, I appeal to you: birth and death are a grave matter; everything is impermanent and passes swiftly. May you awaken. Do not be negligent." This idea of not being negligent, of not wasting time, is something that I often heard mentioned in the monastery. Over and over, my teacher encouraged us to make effort, even when we felt that we had made as much effort as we possibly could. He would say, "Really be diligent. Those who make great effort will certainly attain great results. It is because of the great effort of the Ancestors that we can now do zazen. But before you can encourage others to do zazen, you must first experience for yourself that zazen is something wonderful. Don't do it for yourself. Do this practice for others. Please endeavor like this."

We all understand that time passes swiftly and waits for no one. As Dogen Zenji says in the *Shushogi*, "Time flies faster than an arrow, and life is more transient than the dew. With what skillful means or devices can we retrieve even a single day that has passed? A hundred years lived to no purpose are days and months to be regretted. It is to be but a pitiful bag of bones. Even if we live in abandon, as slaves to the senses for the days and months of a hundred years, if we take up practice for a single day therein, it is not only the practice of this life of a hundred years, but also salvation in the hundred years of another life. The life of this day is a life that should be esteemed, a bag of bones that should be honored. We should love and respect our bodies and minds, which undertake this practice. Depending on our practice, the practice of the buddhas is manifested, and the great way of the buddhas penetrates everywhere. Therefore, the practice of a single day is the seed of the buddhas, the practice of the buddhas."

•Dogen Zenji is also famous for having said "Each person is amply endowed with the Dharma, but without practice (this Dharma) is not manifested; without realization, (this Dharma) is useless." These are at once hopeful words and very strict words. Every person has the potential to awaken to their innate perfection; this is the hopeful part. This is the great egalitarian and inclusive aspect of the Buddhist teaching. But if we don't put this teaching into practice, the Dharma will not appear in our lives. If we do not awaken to the Dharma, we won't be able to use our true potential. For me, this is the most important meaning of "mottai-nai." We have all received this precious life and furthermore we have been able to encounter the Buddhist-teaching. To not put this teaching into practice and awaken to its true meaning would truly be "mottai-nai."

- Daigaku Rumme

Rev. Rumme is the Chief of the Japanese Soto Zen organization in America and has visited Jolt a number of times. This article recent/y appeared in "Busshin," the newsletter published by Zenshitefi Temple in Los Angeles.

We Have a New Pipe – Thank You!

By the time you read this we will have a new pipe running from the house to the main sewer line under the alley. We've had some trouble with the basement drain over the last couple of years, so when water backed up into the basement in April, the Roto-Rooter guys ran their video camera through the line and had a look at things. The last segment, where our pipe meets the main pipe, had collapsed. Their equipment opened the line by drilling through the fallen earth.

Thanks to all of you who contributed, we now have a fine new pipe with a 50-year guarantee. We are relieved not to have to deal with backed-up water.

If you forgot to send in your donation, we'll still be very happy to receive it. Because we needed money for sewer repairs, our operating funds are a bit thin. We'd welcome your support in keeping the lights on and the place warm.

Garden Practice

We took down the old chimney this summer. Though it added a bit of style to the house, the mortar was no longer holding it together. The bricks are now stacked neatly beside the garage waiting to become a garden border.

We hope to replace the old, decaying wooden border around the back garden with the bricks from the chimney, and Zuiko would like some help with this. The plan is to lay the bricks on a bed of gravel at ground level. This will provide a boundary for the garden but allow the lawnmower to mow the grass next to it.

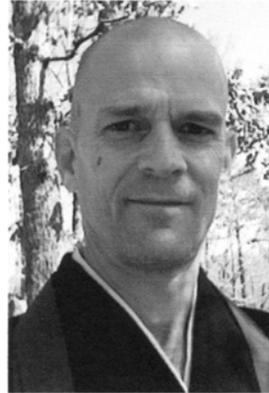
If you can help, let Zuiko know. No skills are needed. It helps if you can handle a shovel. Shovel work is not one of Zuiko's skills, though she is really good at carrying bricks and spreading gravel.

Do You Have a Story to Tell?

Or perhaps a thought or two about dharma you'd like to share with others? We are in need of articles for the second page of the newsletter and we are hoping you can help us out.

We like to publish articles, poems and other things that encourage our readers' practice. Many recipients of our newsletter practice alone, looking to the things they read for instruction and encouragement in their sitting and daily life. The best encouragement often comes from hearing thoughts and stories from other practitioners about their practice.

If you have something to offer, send it in. We can't guarantee we'll publish it, but the chances are really good.



Fall Sesshin

October 17 - 19

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

Shoryu Bradley
guest teacher

Shoryu Bradley received dharma transmission from Shohaku Okumura. He has a small monastery, Gyobutsuji, in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. He is a fine teacher of the everyday way and a warm, accessible presence.

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by July 10 to assure a place. Out-of-town participants are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

Cost: \$25/city or \$15 for city residents.

All are welcome at 9:00 zazen and dharma talk.

To register or get more details, contact us:

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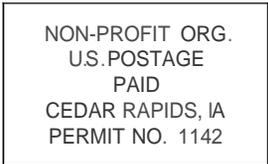
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Return Service Requested

Daily Schedule

Zen Practice and Tradition
Course

September 9, 16, 23, 30

Dharma School

June	1
July	6
August	3
September	7
October	5
November	2
December	14 (second week)

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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6esshins and
ALL-day 6ittings

June	15	All-day sitting
	18	Introduction to zazen
July	16	Introduction to zazen
	18-20	Sesshin
August	17	All-day sitting
	20	Introduction to zazen
September	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All-day sitting
October	15	Introduction to zazen
	17-19	Sesshin
November	16	All-day sitting
	19	Introduction to zazen
December	5 - 7	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	17	Introduction to zazen
	31	New Year's sitting
January	1, 2015	New Year's open house