

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 18, Number 3

Summer 2017

Of Cats and Thoughts

Ananda is sitting in the window enjoying the show this morning. He appreciates the sounds and smells, and he'll complain when it gets colder and the windows have to be closed. Reality has changed and he won't like that. Like me, he clings to his expectations when things move on.

In our tradition we hear that we should put aside language and concepts and live in the middle of reality. Does this mean we shouldn't think? Should we do away with language and concepts? What does not having them get us, if anything?

Our practice is not about using or not using language and ideas. It's about the relationship of thoughts and ideas to this concrete situation in front of us.

When I think about thoughts and words, I sometimes remember my two cats. They don't seem to have words and sentences but they learn and remember things; they have a sense of justice and are upset when the world does not conform to their wants. They know that at four o'clock each afternoon they get a treat and they know how to remind me to come and make it happen. They also know that I can do something about the temperature and complain when I don't. They know that biting or clawing my hands hurts and they are careful not to do it.

If cats are any indication, ideas and feelings are part of the lives of living things. In fact, without them we would not survive. They are a part of the reality of our lives that's often useful and sometimes not. Language, concepts, love of family, our intellectual understanding are part of being human. So - in daily practice, we are not abandoning thought, language, concepts, or any of that.

What we are dropping off is the self-obsession. We return to reality as it is before we fry it up, as Uchiyama Roshi says, with the herbs and spices of our self-referential ideas and judgments. The ones that center on what I like, what I want, what makes me comfortable, whether I'll be adored or hated or even punished. For instance, if we need new shoes, our concepts take us into the store and help us select what we need. What we drop off is the attachment to what we want. We may lust after that bright purple pair of sneakers when we need dignified shoes for work. We notice it, honor it (Yup - those would be really fun!) then go on to the less fun shoes. We deal in reality as it is, rather than the reality we want.

This doesn't mean that we tolerate injustice. We work for justice not because it makes us happy but because it helps all beings. We forget ourselves because, if we work for justice for everyone, it will be there for us as well.

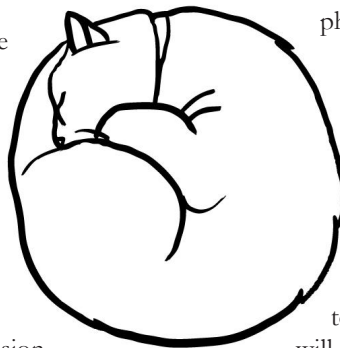
Our original self is who we are before we begin thinking about how we should be or how others see us. It's smiling at kids when they do something silly with no thought of whether they'll like us for it or whether it fits our image of "parent" or "person." We just do it. In the next moment, we begin cooking it up with our judgments and ideas. That's how reality works. If we're awake, we notice the judgments and ideas and let go of them - let go of "good father," "they love me," and all the rest.

Walking is a good way of understanding original self. Original self is who we are as we walk in the midst of the reality of where we are, accommodating to each step, just seeing the trees, feeling the sun or rain, with interest and good cheer. There's no one around to perform for, so we can see who we are when we aren't responding to others. We can see our own internal demands on ourselves and give those up, too. Original self has lots of words, perceptions, concepts. They're just not about us.

I've been reading about Albert Camus, the writer and philosopher, and his friend Jacques Monod, who solved the mystery of how DNA transmits information for manufacturing proteins. Monod spoke of seeing ideas become reality through his experiments. Some ideas became real. Some didn't and got revised or dropped. Camus also considered the connection between ideas and reality, noting that "You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life." When our primary focus is the reality of this moment, happiness is naturally here.

Let's not worry about whether we should have ideas or about the meaning of life. Let's give up self, relax, and just live wherever we are.

- Zuiko Redding



¹ If you want to read further, the book is *Brave Genius: A Scientist, a Philosopher, and Their Daring Adventures from the French Resistance to the Nobel Prize* by Sean B. Carroll. It has love, philosophy, science and cloak-and-dagger stuff. Who could ask for more?

Gassho

As followers of Buddha's teachings, on numerous occasions we place our palms together in the gesture known in Japanese as "gassho." We greet our teachers, each other, the zendo, our cushion, and the altar with this ancient gesture.

I sign my letters "in gassho" and then add "palms together in respect" in cases where the recipient might not know what it means. For a very long time, people in China, Vietnam, Thailand, Korea, Japan and India have been greeting each other with this gesture, which has many names, but always means respect, whether it is used in a religious or a social context.

When asked about the meaning of gassho, I usually use an explanation someone else gave me long ago: it demonstrates that I have no weapon in my hands, and that I expose my neck to you as I bow, i.e. "I come in peace." In the West, we also have the ancient gesture of extending our weaponless right hand to grasp another's hand: "I come in peace."

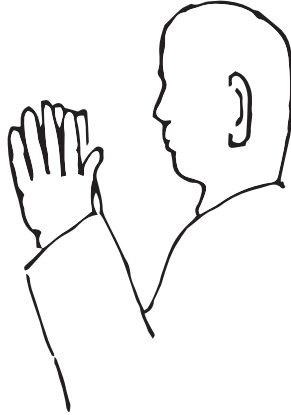
Yet I think that gassho has perhaps a deeper meaning than our handshake. First of all, as we place our palms together we are creating a metaphor for the coming together of opposites: self and other, you and me, ignorance and wisdom, life and death. In this sense, it is an expression of emptiness, in which all things depend for their definition upon their opposite. Dark is the absence of light, Light is the absence of dark.

There is also a significant difference in the manner in which the two gestures of gassho or a handshake are applied. We in the West shake hands only with other human beings in a way that hints at our understanding that our sole relationship of respect is with other human beings. And we face them directly, even sometimes utilizing the handshake as demonstration of superior strength. In gassho, we bow our heads slightly in humility and we bow to everything we encounter, be it a person, a room, a cushion, or plate of food, expressing our respect for all things. We are acknowledging them as entities with whom we share this life and upon whom we depend for our very being.

So, for me, gassho is more than a strange Asian gesture that we are asked to use as part of a Zen Buddhist practice that comes to us from Japan. Gassho is an expression of respect for all life, including our own.

- Tonen O'Connor

(This article appeared previously in Milwaukee Zen Center's newsletter, *The Mirror*)



Thoughts on Ordination

Eugenia (Gina) Kendall received novice ordination from Zuikō on July 8. Here are some of her reflections on it.

When I began talking to Zuiko about being ordained, she suggested taking a year to make sure I was making the right decision. Over this past year of reflecting on what ordination was about and seeing what training as a Zen teacher entailed, it became clear that this was the right next step.

I am truly humbled when I think of all that came together to make this ordination possible. By the time Zuikō shaved my head I felt relief that it was all finally happening. With each full bow I felt a deep sense of appreciation that I am able to take this step in my life. The lines from the ceremony I remember most are those during the shaving of the last lock of hair — "Cutting off attachment, retiring from favor, I become a home-leaver to seek the holy path vowing to free all beings." I feel I have found my new home and family with Zuikō, the sangha, and our larger network of teachers and sanghas.

It has been a wonderful journey so far and I am committed to learning with full body and mind in order to continue the practice.

As part of training, I will start to take on more duties at the Center. We're planning a trip to Japan to meet Zuikō's teacher, Rev. Tsugen Narasaki, in the spring. I will also attend Sotoshu meetings with Zuikō in Los Angeles next year. I am very excited to continue on this path and am thankful for the support from our sangha members. It has been a wonderful journey so far and I am committed to learning all there is to know to continue the practice.

- Myōhō Kendall

Jesus Tattoo

How should I have responded to a man who, approaching me and my son very aggressively on the street while slapping a tattoo of Jesus-on-the-cross hastily etched into the skin on his chest, and very obviously under the influence of an unidentified intoxicating substance that has him amped, bug-eyed, and, from the looks of his body language, ready to beat the hell out of anyone who offends him, asks me, "What does this say to you?!"

Several possible answers ran through my mind in an instant.

Scenario 1: "I'm not sure what you're asking. Would you please rephrase the question?"

Scenario 2: "Not much. I'm a Buddhist."

Scenario 3: "What does it say to you?"

Scenario 4: "It could say any number of things at any given moment within any number of contexts.

For example, it could say, 'Accept Jesus Christ and be saved!

Together we'll work to ease the suffering of billions! Or it might say, 'I'm a tasteless memorial to a man who was tortured and executed for resisting empire.' Or it might say, 'My story is frequently manipulated and distorted to justify the actions of whoever decides to invoke my name to suit their purposes. Use me now to instantly make all your deeds righteous!'

But in this particular case it seems to be saying, 'The story of my life, and the loose community of believers who claim to subscribe to it, has given this poor, depressed, aggressive and shirtless addict something to hold on to that in some small way keeps him from falling into complete and utter despair and self-destruction. Please don't ruin it for him by pointing out the story's myriad inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and the way it has been used to subjugate, oppress, and keep people generally ignorant and willing to obey and work toward goals that serve the interests of elites for over a thousand years.'

What I actually said to him was simply, "I don't know, man." To which he replied, "You like it?!" I said, "Yeah, it's nice."

He said, "I got an idea for a big cross right here across my back!" What could I say? "Go for it, man." "Alright, I'll let you get back to your walk. You take care of that baby! God bless." "Thanks, you too."

- Stefen Robinson

Thanks

To all of you who've sent in a donation to our summer fund drive. If you forgot, there's still time! Or you can go to our website and donate electronically.

Things to Do

Write for the newsletter We're always looking for articles. A tale about how you came to the practice, what it's done for you, or about a dharma-learning experience would be great.

Buildings and grounds Like to work with your hands? Pull weeds, prune, and plant things in the garden. Make needed repairs to things. Develop an improvement project and do it.

Credits

Artwork	Myoho Kendall Lauren Manninen Tom Rauschke
Writing	Tonen O'Connor Myoho Kendall Zuikō Redding Stefen Robinson
Editing	Travis Hunt
Layout	Lauren Manninen
Proofreading	Matt Alles

October Sesshin



with Shoryu Bradley

October 13 - 15

Celebrating Bodhidharma

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

Join us for all or part of the weekend

Please sign up by October 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

To register or get more details, contact us

phone: (319) 247-5986

email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org

web: www.cedarrapidszencenter.org

Announcements

Zen Practice and Tradition The next offering of the four-session course on the basics of Buddhism will begin on September 5. Both beginning practitioners and people who want to learn a bit about Buddhism are welcome. Fee is \$50 (\$25 for students and those with fixed incomes).

Bloomington-Normal – Zuiko will be doing a half-day sitting with the Bloomington-Normal group on October 1. For more information, please email Stefen Robinson - stefenrobinson@gmail.com

Published by

Cedar Rapids Zen Center
P.O. Box 863
Cedar Rapids IA 52406-0863

phone: (319) 247-5986

email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org

web: www.cedarrapidszencenter.org

Cedar Rapids Zen Center - Jikyouji

P.O. Box 863
Cedar Rapids IA 52406-0863

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CEDAR, RAPIDS, IA
PERMIT NO. 1142

Return Service Requested

Zen Practice and Tradition Course

September 5, 12, 19, 26

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

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

Sesshins and All-day Sitzings

May	17	Introduction to zazen
	21	All-day sitting
June	21	Introduction to zazen
	25	All day sitting
July	14 - 16	Sesshin
	19	Introduction to zazen
August	16	Introduction to zazen
	20	All-day sitting
September	17	All-day sitting
	20	Introduction to zazen
October	13 - 15	Sesshin (Daruma)
	18	Introduction to zazen
November	15	Introduction to zazen
	19	All-day sitting
December	1 - 3	Sesshin (Rohatsu)
	20	Introduction to zazen
	31	New Year's sitting