

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 15, Number 4

Fall, 2014

Do We Want What We Wish?

At the beginning of fall, a toad moved into our back garden. We first saw him – fat and gray, with warts – making his way from the oak to the apple tree. He surprised me, suddenly appearing just ahead of my next step. I've seen him a couple of times since, so I remember to pay attention.

Fall also brought something else. Our office person, Nadine, who's active in community theater, invited me to see the musical *Into the Woods*. She had a part, so I was eager to go. I'm glad I did. I learned a lot of what I already know, as one of the last choruses says.

Into the Woods puts together some beloved fairy tales like Cinderella and Jack and the Beanstalk in new and different ways. At the beginning, Cinderella wants to go to the royal festival. She goes into the woods to the tree sheltering her mother's grave and sings to her mother's spirit:

I've been good and I've been kind, mother
Doing only what I learned from you.
Why, then, am I left behind, mother,
Is there something more that I should do?
Something must be wrong with me, mother.
I wish –

We can connect with this, can't we? How many times do we think, "I've been competent, I've done well, I've been good. Why am I ignored?" We long for a smile, a promotion, affirmation - but there's nothing. "What is wrong with me?" we ask. "Why can I not get what I long for?"

Cinderella's mother replies

Do you know what you wish?
Are you certain what you wish is
What you want?

Oh! Well . . . Rather than granting the wish, her mother invites Cinderella to consider it carefully: "Do you know what you wish? Are you certain that what you wish is what you want?"

These words are like that toad – they surprise us on the path, gray and warty with watchful eyes. They invite us, like that toad, to attend to the reality under our feet. What we want is maybe something we'd rather not look at. Maybe it's too hard to figure out. This examination, though, is our way out of the longing, the *dukkha*.

Rather than assuming that our longings and wants are real, we can be curious about them. We can ask them where they come from, who they are. Are you what I really want or are you a toy to distract me?

Do we know what we wish? "Well, yes, I wish" – and sometimes it ends there. Sometimes our desire is really specific – "I wish to win the prince." But do I really want this prince? Or is he a stand-in for what I really want? Is what I wish what I want?

When I get what I wish, what then?

Having the adoration of my prince (or, perhaps, princess if one prefers a female soul mate) will mean I belong somewhere; I will never want for love; I will always be comfortable, always feel worthy. Really? Is that how it happens out here in reality?

My experience has been that the things outside myself that I thought would make life all right and satisfy my longing did not last long. How about you? How long did it take for the longing to return?

Yes, it's really good at first. Then we begin to find our prince (or princess) rather shallow and boring. Life as a princess (or prince) becomes constricting. The clothes, the duties are not exactly what we'd envisioned. The servants are overbearing. The prince (or princess) is not so attentive. Has love faded? Are we are not good enough? We wish –

Here again are our longings for contentment, security and a sense of worth - unfulfilled. We got what we wished, but not what we wanted.

The toad under the oak out back doesn't obsess over security, belonging, and a sense of worth. There's a natural contentment there, a lack of longing. The toad is just fine with this life. No need to look for the validation of others. Contentment is wherever she or he is. Security lies in avoiding the feet of people coming through. With us it's this simple, too. If we have no sense of our own worthiness, we sabotage the efforts of others to give it to us. If we have it, we appreciate others' praise, but we know that praise is just temporary. If we are not content, we will find fault even in a palace. If we are content, we can be content wherever we are. If we depend on the world for security, we will feel insecure no matter how much power, wealth and protection we have. If we realize that security is not real, we won't expect it. We'll realize that ill fortune, sickness, old age and death are inevitable and we'll go about taking care of our needs and not obsess over being safe.

And we'll be quietly happy like that toad out there, hopping aside as I pass by, then returning to wait for a nice fat autumn cricket.

- Zuikō Redding

The Three Refuges: A Personal View

I started sitting regularly with a group in July, 2013, in order to actually *sit* instead of reading about sitting. It was only then that I began to get a tiny glimpse of what all the books I had read had been talking about.

Taking a cue from my boss and mentor, I wanted to incorporate the “basics” into my practice before moving on to more advanced stuff (or so I thought at the time). I considered the basics The Four Noble Truths and taking refuge, and since I cherished Ajahn Sumedho’s book on the Four Noble Truths, I went and found what he had to say on the refuges as well. What appears below is what I took from his essay and put into my daily recitation of The Three Refuges.

In reciting the Refuges every morning, I am able to ground myself in the basic sanity of Buddha’s practice. Whether I am mindful of this sanity throughout the rest of the day is up to me. I can say that when I do stay in that sanity for most of the day, I spend less time spinning my wheels over the stories I attach to reality. I am very grateful for this wisdom that has been passed down to me, as well as for the ability to choose to be grounded in it in each and every moment.

I take refuge in the Buddha,
in the nature that's in me and all other living beings
that is awake.

I take refuge in the Dharma,
in the way things are right here and right now,
and in Shakyamuni Buddha’s practice of being awake.

I take refuge in the Sangha,
in the group of all other living beings on the spiritual
path:
in doing good and refraining from doing harm both to
myself and others,
and in the reality that I am responsible for my own
happiness in each and every moment.

The usual Three Refuges in Zen read as below:

I take refuge in Buddha.
May all beings
Embody the Great Way,
Resolving to awaken.

I take refuge in Dharma.
May all beings
Deeply enter the sutras,
Wisdom like an ocean.

I take refuge in Sangha.
May all beings
Support harmony in the community,
Free from hindrance.

- Jake Snyder

In Search of the New Sky

I didn’t know what possessed me to walk around Kumamoto on my last evening in Japan. I had planned to have a little something to eat in my small hotel room, take a bath, and get to bed early in order to get my morning flight back to the US. After nine months in Japan, I didn’t need to go shopping or sightseeing. Wearing my patched old *samue*, *rakusu* and *geta* (wooden shoes), I stepped out just to indulge in an ice cream bar from the *kombini* (convenience store) before hunkering down for what remained of this rather too-warm evening.

Instead of stopping at the *kombini*, however, I headed for the brick path along the Shiragawa, joining the people walking their dogs and the students riding bicycles. The sky turned from blue to purple, and the evening lights of the city came on as I strolled along, idly gazing at the buildings along the river. When my feet got tired, I turned around and headed back toward my hotel. I’d be doing a lot of sitting on airplanes the next day; I guessed maybe it was just as well to be getting some exercise now.

About halfway back, I was stopped by a lady wearing the obligatory bucket hat of traveling older folks, her salt-and-pepper curls peeking out from under the brim. Looking confused and a little worried, she pressed her hands to her cheeks. Did I know which way the ANA New Sky Hotel was from here? She pointed to the left. Was it this way? She turned and pointed to the right. Or that way?

Then she took a good look at me. Tall and bald as I was, and dressed in Japanese work clothes, I was not, after all, a Japanese man. She was both embarrassed and a little frightened. Maybe I wouldn’t know after all, she said. As it happened, I had passed the hotel on my walk. It’s this way, I said, indicating the direction from which I had been coming, and it’s not far. I gestured to indicate that she should follow me back. She hesitated. Her husband was down the stairs from the river with their two small wheeled suitcases. I peered over the edge at him. I’ll help you, I said, and I clopped down the steep concrete stairs, making sure she came safely after me. They wouldn’t let me take over as baggage handler, so with each of them pulling a piece of luggage, we set off down the street. Please excuse us, they said. Thank you so much. We’re sure you don’t have time for this. No, no, it’s just fine, I assured them, but I’m sorry about my poor Japanese. No, no, they said, you’re doing fine. Thank you very much for your help. No, no, I said, I’m not doing anything. But it’s a little warm this evening, isn’t it? Yes, the lady agreed, a little warm. Thank you so much. We’re so sorry. No, no, I said again. I’m not doing anything.

I found them a safe place to cross the street, and pointed out the hotel. Relieved, they thanked me again. We all smiled and bowed repeatedly and set off in our own directions. *Oh*, I said to myself as I retraced my steps back from my unanticipated, spur-of-the-moment excursion. *That* was why.

- Hoko Karnegis

New Year's Celebrations



New Year's Eve

zazen - 7:30 - 10:40 p.m.
 Reading the Precepts
 10:40 - 11:00
 noodles and fun

New Year's Day

zazen - 2:00 - 12:30 p.m.
 New Year's ceremony - 12:45
 Open house
 from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Join us to welcome the year of the sheep.

For more details, contact us:

phone: (319) 247-5986
 email: crzc@cedarrapidszencenter.org
 web : cedarrapidszencenter.org

Keeping the Zendo Warm

The weather is getting colder and we tend to hunker down and hibernate. This is natural when the days are short and the weather can be dangerous. However, don't hunker down so much that you forget to come to zazen. The constraints and efforts of winter can sap our spirits and sitting with others is a real help for that.

Credits

Artwork	Gina Vavra
Editing/ Proofing	Travis Hunt Matt Alles
Writing	Hökō Karnegis Zuikō Redding Jake Snyder

The Five Reflections

- 🌀 This food is the gift of the earth, sky, rain, sun, bees, human beings, and others. We are grateful.
- 🌀 We consider how this food will help us be joyful and help others as others have helped us.
- 🌀 We notice our greed and take enough but not too much.
- 🌀 We see this food as good medicine to make us healthy and useful.
- 🌀 Being awake as we eat, we now receive this food.

Since we'll be eating many special meals in the coming weeks, we learned about the Five Reflections in dharma school this month. As part of that, the Five Reflections got rewritten a bit so kids could connect more easily with them. It occurred to me that we might all like to have another way of saying them at mealtime, so, with a few extra changes, here they are. Please enjoy the season.

- Zuikō Redding

Sitting Groups

Here are some sitting and sangha opportunities that might be closer than Cedar Rapids.

Cedar Falls 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.

Bloomington-Normal, Illinois meets at 7:00 p.m. on Friday nights at the Main Street Yoga studio in downtown Bloomington. For more information, visit <http://bnzengroup.wordpress.com> or contact them at bnzengroup@gmail.com.

Dubuque meets on the second Sunday of each month in the Conlon Building at 1100 Rockdale Road. For more information, visit <http://dubuquezcommunity.org> or email them at dbqzen@gmail.com

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Zen Practice and Tradition Course - 2015

January 6, 13, 20, 27
March 10, 17, 24, 31
June 2, 9, 16, 23
September 1, 8, 15, 22

Dharma School

November 2
December 14
2015
January 4
February 1
March 1
April 5
May 3
June 7

Daily Schedule

MORNING ZAZEN

Sunday Morning

9:00 – 9:40 am zazen
9:45 – 10:30 dharmatalk
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 Sittings

November 16 All-day sitting
19 Introduction to zazen
December 5 - 7 Sesshin (Rohatsu)
17 Introduction to zazen
31 New Year's sitting
2015
January 1 New Year's open house
18 All-day sitting
21 Introduction to zazen
February 15 All-day sitting
18 Introduction to zazen
March 18 Introduction to zazen
20 - 22 Sesshin (Ohigan)
April 5 Buddha's Birthday
15 Introduction to zazen
26 Annual Meeting
May 17 All-day sitting
20 Introduction to zazen
June 17 Introduction to zazen
21 All day sitting (solstice)
July 15 Introduction to zazen
17 - 19 Sesshin