

Cedar Rapids Zen Center Newsletter

Volume 11, Number 1-2

Winter/Spring, 2010

Who Owns This Practice?

Today is cool and cloudy, but recent days have brought sun and warmth. The crocus beside the porch is opening again, a yellow, cheerful face after the winter's overwhelming snows. It's been joined by purple crocuses and tiny yellow daffodils in the front garden. The back yard is a riot of daffodils with small bright red tulips, purple crocuses and blue scilla.

We're about to celebrate Buddha's Birthday and we're planning for our Annual Meeting in early May. There's a lot going on around here and lots of people doing lots of things.

Doing all these things, we can begin to think that the practice is ours, that it's for us and about us. After all, we're the ones putting new candles on the altar, making decisions about what happens here and where we're going. Not to mention the fact that we contribute money, mow the lawn, shovel the snow, clean the zendo and cook at sesshin. "If I do all the work, isn't this place mine?" we ask ourselves.

It's good to own the practice in terms of our willingness to get in there and do the work that makes it happen. Doing what presents itself for our doing, expecting nothing, is exactly what the Buddha meant when he asked us to wake up. Each of us needs to jump in, no matter how little we're able to do. That's practice, even if it's only a donation of a few cents or one hour of our time. Truly there is something there for us when we put out some effort, whether at home alone or with the entire sangha.

But in the last analysis the practice is not ours. It belongs to all things. It belongs to emptiness – the universe that comes into being in each moment. We do it for ourselves because we are part of all things, but . . . is practice really practice if we keep it for ourselves? What is the basic goal of this effort? To make myself a better person? We are complete just as we are – why do we need to become better? Dogen said that, if we practice the Buddha's teaching, we will naturally improve, and in the next breath he warned against doing it as a self-help project.

Sometimes we extend this logic and think the Center has been established to help our practice. Indeed, this Center is a quiet, supportive place for fostering awakening. Though we think it's *our* awakening that's being nurtured, this is not the case. The awakening of the whole universe is cultivated here. The Buddha said, "For awakening I am born, for the welfare of the world," according to Ashvaghosha. Even the Buddha understood that this did not belong to him.

So we don't own Cedar Rapids Zen Center, even though our name is on the mortgage. The whole universe owns it. Like the Buddha, it was born for awakening. We are offering a place and a practice for the whole universe. The good that comes from this – the merit – extends out to the farthest star.

We take care of the Center in order as a place where everyone can come and experience the Buddha's teaching with body and mind. Whether they come or not, whether they love Buddhism or hate it, this belongs to them.

We can see that when we come to the Center. Some people painted the walls. Others made the zafus and zabutons. A person serves as doan, ringing the zazen bell. There's hot water for tea and the heating bill is paid. If this were mine or yours, we would be solely responsible for all this. And we would have complete control over all this. We can breathe a sigh of relief, you and I, that this is not ours.

And Zen Center can't be solely mine or yours because it depends not only on the sangha but on the entire universe for its existence. It is here because of the support of all things – trees, sun, earth, gravity - so they have some ownership, too. Emptiness has approved its existence – allowed it to happen – and it makes it happen moment by moment.

It's only by giving up "ownership" that we and all beings can find well-being. "Giving up" means to give up our ideas and agendas and operate with what the Chinese referred to as "no mind" (無為). I'm sure that the meaning of this term is much deeper than my poor interpretation, but I understand it as "having no agenda." *Wu* (無) means "without" and *wei* (為) means both "to make," or "to think" or "purpose." I interpret it as "no purpose." It means to give up our agendas – our thoughts and ideas that center on our benefit. With no purpose – "no mind" - we go to the sink because there's a stack of dishes there after everyone has eaten their Buddha's Birthday cake. We wash as many as we can before we have to leave, then pass the job on to the next person. If we all operate out of "no mind," someone will step up to take our place until it's all done. And no one will say "my practice is washing dishes."

This is not about having no will of our own. It's about not always sizing up things and putting ourselves first.

This is true even for our most personal practice – the sitting we do at home alone, the reading, the attempts to be awake in every moment of our lives. Each moment of being awake

benefits the whole universe – like the Buddha, we are born for awakening, for the welfare of the world. We may wonder how, but often we cannot know. This universe in which we exist is so vast and subtle that most times we just have to trust that it happens. Other times, the effects come and surprise us, often many years later.

So we can just relax and know that this doesn't belong to us. We are born for its welfare; it was not born for ours. All we have to do is see what needs to be done and do it. There are always dishes to be washed after tea.

- Zuikō Redding

Great Sky Sesshin

August 7 – 15, 2010

at Hokyōji Zen Practice Community in
southeastern Minnesota near the Mississippi

co-sponsored by Cedar Rapids Zen Center and
Milwaukee Zen Center

Teachers

Zuiko Redding – Cedar Rapids Zen Center
Tonen O' Connor – Milwaukee Zen Center
Rosan Yoshida – Missouri Zen Center
Brad Warner – author and teacher
Dokai Georgesen – Hokyōji

Details and registration –
www.milwaukeezencenter.org

The Perfect Gift

A few weeks ago I was searching for a gift to give to a friend in celebration of the year-end holidays, and especially the much welcomed return of the light to the world. I am *always* immensely thankful when we have reached that point in the year where the days begin to lengthen and I feel hope that light and warmth will once again return to the frozen earth. I like to share my gratitude by giving small gifts of appreciation to those who have helped me on my journey through the past year.

In my search, I went to Ten Thousand Villages, a small shop which offers unique fair-trade items from around the world. I found a number of interesting things, but what really caught my eye was a dark brown ceramic bowl. As I picked it up and looked at it more closely, this seemed like just what I was looking for – the subdued color, the solid feel of it in

my hands, the simple shape and its unusual abstract handle made it very suitably “Zen-like.” It would also be useful, in addition to being beautiful in its austere way. Feeling very pleased to have found the perfect gift, I happily purchased the bowl and put it away for later wrapping.

When it was time to wrap the bowl (characteristically waiting until the last minute), I took it from its bag and, sitting on the floor surrounded by newsprint for wrapping paper, I again held the bowl in my hands, turning it around to look at it from all angles. As I turned the bowl, I looked more closely at a strange protrusion on the rim, which I had initially seen as an abstract design. On closer observation, it was clearly not some abstract design feature, but was unmistakably a little snout! Seeing the little snout led me to examine the bowl more closely and to further recognize little hooves on the rim, and finally to see that the odd-shaped handle was not a handle at all, but was instead a curly little tail.

The bowl seen in this new light was no longer a lovely abstract wabi-sabi Zen bowl, but was quite obviously a pig, and suddenly the formerly perfect gift became completely inappropriate and unacceptable. Just to be certain, I showed it to a friend to see what he saw, and he immediately said, “It’s a pig,” as if there were no question as to its true nature. I couldn’t believe I hadn’t seen this when I bought it. The bowl was absolutely and clearly a little brown pig!

I took the now unacceptable gift back to my room and once again sat on the floor with it in front of me, looking at it and wondering if I would have time in the morning to find something else for my friend in its place. As I just sat there thinking and stewing, I suddenly realized that nothing had changed about the bowl; it was the very same bowl that I had admired so much only days before. The bowl was the same, but what had changed was my perception of it. It was neither the perfect gift nor the unacceptable gift – it was then and now just a little brown bowl. It is - and was - just what it is!

As I saw the truth of this situation, I laughed at myself and my mental acrobatics. It was my perception that first caused me to be happy about my find and then to feel equally distressed about the very same object. Nothing had altered except my mind! The little bowl had brought me a very clear message, and I once again saw it as the perfect gift. It may be a bowl that is a little brown pig, but it also holds within it a big lesson about how our minds are constantly stirring things up and leading us unnecessarily into delusion and suffering. I smiled at the little pig and thanked the universe for showing me -once again - the ways of my mind.

The next day when I gave my friend the gift and shared its story in all its very human silliness, we both had a good laugh and agreed that it really was the most perfect gift on many levels. As the light and warmth return to the earth, the little pig has a new home, and it is my hope that the lesson it holds will continue to grow.

- Ellen Wetzel

Thanks to all our contributors in 2009 Because of your gifts, people can come to sit each week. If you've been a contributor and your name is not included here, please accept our apology along with our gratitude.

Ronald Adkins	John Hale	Thomas Miller and Lynne Steiner
Matthew J. Alles	Beverly A. Hannon	Missouri ZC Reading Group
Carol Anderson	Andy Hansen	Yayoi Teramoto Moreland
David and Ruth Ard	Max Hawkins	Susan Nelson and Carl Hultman
Dennis M. Barrick	Cornelia Hendershot	Tonen O'Connor
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Christa Brusen-Gomez	Alan Holton	Norman J. Randolph
J. David and Alexandria Carey	Ben and Francine Hunnicutt	Phoebe Reinhart
Martin Carver	Michael Jamosky	Dan Retoff
Benny Castillo	Frances Kaliher	Brian Reynolds
Adam Chacksfield	Hōkō Jan Karnegis	Debra Risberg
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Dokai Georgesen	Annora McDougall	Ellen Wetzel
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Cat Gornet	Joseph Michaud	Shoken Winecoff
Linda Graves	Donovan and Ikuko Miller	Jeff Wright
Douglas W. Gustafson	Joyce Miller	Jen and Tim Yuki
		Steve Zieke and Beth Dolder-Zieke

News Notes

Annual Meeting will be Sunday, May 2, from 10:40 a.m. until 12:00 noon. We'll be electing Board members and discussing directions and plans for Zen Center's future. Your input is important. There will be a potluck lunch after the meeting.

Rev. Susan Myoyu Andersen of Myoshinji in Monroe, WI, will give the dharma talk on May 2. Myoyu's teacher was Taizan Maezumi Roshi and she's part of our board.

Rev. Tonen O'Connor of Milwaukee Zen Center will give the dharma talk on Sunday, June 13. Tonen is an old friend of our Center and it will be good to have her here again.

Credits

Editing	Matt Alles Travis Hunt Ellen Wetzel
Setup	Courtney Cook
Writing	Courtney Cook Zuikō Redding Ellen Wetzel

Thank You

Rachael Kane for taking over as web master from *James Eich*, our web master for ten years. Thanks to James for his long years of fine web work.

Kevin Krumvieda for solving the rain barrel problems. You've made our basement dryer and lessened Zuikō's worries about how much water she'll see if she looks down the stairs.

Eugenia, Cat, Tim Y., Jen and everyone else who helped make New Year's Eve sitting and New Year's Day festivities a great success.

Tim Y. and Jen for shoveling most of the snow this winter. There was a lot. And thanks to *Bryan Davis* for the snowblower. We'll make good use of it next year.

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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

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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

Annual Schedule

2010

April	4	Buddha's Birthday
	14	Zazen instruction
May	2	Annual meeting
	16	All-day sitting
	19	Zazen instruction
June	16	Zazen instruction
	20	All-day sitting
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