

# *Cedar Rapids Zen Center*

## *Newsletter*

**Volume 1, Number 3 (Fall, 2000) -**

### **Bowing**

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Before we sit down to do zazen, we bow toward our zafu, then away, putting hands together in front of face and inclining the body a bit, bending at the hips. This kind of bow is called a gassho bow. In the zendo, it's a greeting to our neighbors and to those across the room. "Hello. Thank you for your presence and your effort." We also greet the whole universe, which is sitting with us. "Hello. Thank you for sitting with me." So - we bow even when no other person is present.

But this is not the only time we bow. We bow when we enter and leave the zendo, when we do services, sometimes when we greet one another. Sometimes we just bob our heads. Sometimes we touch our foreheads to the floor and lift our hands in a full prostration. There's a good deal of it going on. What's it all about? Where does it come from?

Bowing is a salutation and an expression of respect. Shunryu Suzuki said we should bow to everything we meet. Jack Kornfield talks about how, in the Thai monastery where he practiced, he was expected to bow to all the other monks and how at first he resented having to bow to monks he didn't respect. He learned to find something in each person that he could bow to. He could respect each person - there was no longer "good person," "bad person." There was only "this person." Can we do that?

Bowing is also about making our spirits more flexible and gentle. It's about giving up obstinate, stubborn, dualistic mind that centers on ourselves as the most important thing in the universe and our ideas as the reality of how things are and should be. If we bow, gradually our hearts will follow. In Japan I heard the story of Kishizawa Ian-roshi, who was asked how low one's head should be in bowing to the floor. He answered that the forehead should touch the floor, adding, "I would like to bow even lower, but the floor stops me." He felt that he had much arrogance and selfish stubbornness to get rid of.

The meaning of bowing comes only through bowing. Blooming in the heart, it is a different flower for each of us. At Shogoji, we did about fifty full prostrations in the course of morning services. And all before breakfast! I used to think of them as Zen morning calisthenics, dutifully holding my robes and trying to do them in proper form. Then one morning as I knelt touching my head to the floor, I remembered that I had slept this way as a small child. Bowing was expressing the confident trust of a vulnerable four-year-old. It was trust in the

Dharma as an innocent child trusts his or her parents.

So it's best just to give up all the ideas I've been talking about and just bow. Bowing is the same as zazen - just do it with no you, no bow, no "Did I do it right?" "Does it mean what it's supposed to?" When you do it completely, there is no need for anything extra.

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To be lost.  
What joy!

What higher rapture  
Can there  
be?

To be absorbed so completely  
in the task,  
to be completely divorced  
from self,  
from  
ego.

To be lost  
is sublime,  
is apothiostic.  
How can I become lost?

I attempt superimposition,  
becoming lost through ingestion.  
How far out from one's self can you get-

Testing innersaneness,  
testing outersaneness.

-Quent Duarte

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### **Prison Ministry**

Several inmates in the prison system have contacted us over the past year to ask for instruction and guidance. We have sent them books and other materials, and Zuiko has been making visits and talking with those who call.

In July, we began a Prison Ministry fund to cover the costs of books, Zuiko's visits, and collect phone calls. (Incarcerated people must call collect.) We have received a total of \$215,

enough to cover our expenses for the next year or so.

We wish to thank all of you who contributed for your compassion. Acting from a deep vow to help others, you create peace. We bow to you.

There is other good news. One of our incarcerated sangha members was released six months early on September 29. We wish him well as he returns home, and we hope he continues to be part of our sangha wherever he goes.

## **ROHATSU SESSHIN**

The Milwaukee Zen Center and the Cedar Rapids Zen Center will jointly celebrate the Buddha's Enlightenment by offering intensive all-day sittings during the period of December 1-10. Dharma talks will be given at both locations by Rev. Zuiko Redding and Rev. Tonen O'Connor.

The schedule will be as follows:

Cedar Rapids: Dec. 1-3  
Milwaukee: Dec. 7-10

For details, fees, housing, etc., please contact:

Cedar Rapids Zen Center, P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406. (319)247-5986  
email: or Milwaukee Zen Center, 2825 N. Stowell Ave., Milwaukee, WI  
53211. (414)963-0526

## **Tonen O'Connor**

Tonen O'Connor has been a member of Milwaukee Zen Center since the mid-1980s. She was ordained by Rev. Tozen Akiyama. She trained in both Japan and the United States before receiving dharma transmission from Rev. Akiyama.

Rev. O'Connor is a dynamic, forthright teacher who carries on the unadorned and rather irreverent tradition of Kodo Sawaki-roshi and Kosho Uchiyama-roshi, two great twentieth-century Japanese Zen teachers. We are sure you will learn much from her.

In addition to her practice at MZC, she is translating a book of Sawaki-roshi's lectures and is also deeply involved in working with inmates in the Wisconsin prison system.

## **Newsletter Submissions**

Please share your thoughts, experiences, words of encouragement, poems, news and other items of interest. We appreciate and encourage your submission of material for the newsletter. The deadline for the next newsletter is December 15th. You may contact Ellen Wetzel at (319)341-9668 or email: if you have questions or have items you wish to

submit.

### **Rummage Sale**

We will be holding a rummage sale next May, and we want to put out the word now so you can contribute items from your fall cleaning. We can store things in Zuiko's garage at Zen Center - just contact us to make arrangements.

### **OOPS! Membership Card Correction**

In July, the newsletter we mailed out included a pledge card inviting you to become a member of Zen Center. Many of you returned this card with your contributions and membership pledges, and we thank you.

However, half the cards mistakenly listed the costs for regular membership and out-of-town membership as equal. Out-of-town membership contributions are actually \$15/month.

### **Credits**

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