

# *Cedar Rapids Zen Center*

### **Nyojo on Zazen**

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

One evening I was browsing about in a new translation of the Hokyoki, Dogen's record of his teacher Tendo Nyojo's instructions, when old Nyojo's slipper whacked me on the head.

"Among the worlds of desire, the present one is very suitable for practicing zazen," Nyojo said. That wakes us up and settles us right into life just as it is, doesn't it?

Shakyamuni Buddha's, Nyojo's and Dogen's worlds were filled with pain and destruction caused by clinging desire. In Dogen's home, territorial wars had ruined crops and driven people from the land. He tells in Zuimonki of starving families begging for food or money at Kenninji Temple. Landless people do the same now. Today we human beings have even better means of causing pain and destruction with our desire, so even more people suffer in more places - America, Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel, Rwanda, Guatemala . . .

We often think we can't practice zazen with so much chaos and uncertainty, but the midst of great desire and suffering, including our own, is the very best place to do zazen. Putting aside our desires and judgments we can encounter and deal with life just as it is.

Nyojo further says that, "...if we do zazen over and over ...our minds will become more flexible." Flexible mind sees all sides of things, leaning neither to one side or another. It puts aside ego-centered criticism and judgment and intimately touches reality. It is the mind which, grounded in the Buddha's teaching, sees the Way among the trees of various desires.

With flexible mind we can look at each situation, no matter how horrific, as an opportunity to put aside our desires and just be there. Our flexible mind sees the terrorist in ourselves and ourselves in the terrorist. Then we can take care of both terrorists.

Our zazen is flexible mind. To do zazen, we find a sheltered place that offers few distractions - as few as can be managed in modern life! Then we sit aimlessly facing the wall, letting our thoughts swim freely, like fish in a big pond. Nyojo said, "...doing zazen is like sitting at ease at home." With the quiet spirit and steadfastness of one who is fully at home, we sit with life just as it is.

This is not easy. Body and mind make great effort and experience great pain. It may not be as comfortable as we'd hoped, but just being there in the midst of it all, with no gap between us and reality, is the Buddha's realization. Suffering stops and we see the path through the trees.

Nyojo says Shakyamuni's zazen aimed at saving all beings. "...he never forgot nor abandoned others. He gave the favor attained by zazen to all living things." Zazen is not our personal

self-improvement program; it's not going to the mental gym to improve our minds and be healthy. It is settling ourselves into reality for the sake of all beings. It is being the Buddha's wisdom. Seeking improvements from zazen, whether in ourselves or in the world, is only clinging desire. For the sake of all beings, let's just let go of that and sit in peace in the midst of life just as it is.

- Zuiko Redding

Quotes are from Hokyoki, tr. by Hiroshi Habu and Don P. Baker (self-published, Japan, 2001)

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## **Reflections**

by Mary Lou Emery

Two weeks ago, I planned this essay as a reflection on a dialogue that engaged several members of the Iowa City Dharma Group during the past year. The dialogue concerned affinities between the writings of Dogen and those of Virginia Woolf and, more generally, with the presence of the "East" within the "West." It would have been titled Zen Poetics/ East and West: An Open Conversation, with the emphasis on "open," as we hoped to invite more dialogue from anyone interested in the crossings of Zen and Western culture. Given the devastating events of the past week--the attacks by suicide bombers on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the loss of a fourth plane of people in Pennsylvania--to write of literature seems almost frivolous. Writing itself seems an inadequate response.

However, as the country reacts to these events, the experience of self described by Dogen and Woolf and the affinities between two writers so distant in time and culture seem all the more important. In our Dharma Group discussion this past Friday, we talked of the twin impulses to demonize as "evil" the perpetrators of the acts or, on the other hand, to dualistically oppose ourselves to the U.S. government and the national media which promote such rhetoric. Either response separates us from others and externalizes responsibility. We shared our anguish at the suffering that has occurred and which we fear will increase with a violent, military reaction. We had just begun reading Dogen's Instructions for the Zen Cook, in which he writes, "Be very clear about this: A fool sees himself as another, but a wise man sees others in himself." At this moment, the ability to see the stranger in ourselves is crucial to the world's well being.

Looking back now to the conversations inspired by our readings in Zen and the writings of Virginia Woolf, I find them remarkably relevant. They involved many e-mail exchanges and in-person conversations, including the following passages and comments on them:

From Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*:

But how describe the world seen without a self? There are no words. Blue, red--even they distract, even they hide with thickness instead of letting the light through. How describe or say anything in articulate words again--save that it fades, save that it undergoes a gradual transformation, becomes, even in the course of one short walk, habitual--this scene also.

Blindness returns as one moves and one leaf repeats another. Loveliness returns as one looks with all its train of phantom phrases. One breathes in and out substantial breath; down in the valley the train draws across the fields lop-eared with smoke.

From Zuiko:

Virginia Woolf and Dogen could have shared much together. He, also, was concerned with fading, gradual transformation, becoming habitual, that words do not let the light through. Her last lines are the best Western haiku I've ever seen:

Down in the valley  
the train draws across the fields  
lop-eared with smoke.

I guess I should qualify this by telling you that I haven't seen many Western haiku and that I know very little about haiku and their structure.

However, I am standing there on a mountain road watching the train pull itself through the green fields below. There is nothing between me and the lop-eared train.

From Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," describing childhood experiences of "moments of being":

As a child, my days, just as they do now, contained a large proportion of this cotton wool, this non-being....

Then, for no reason that I know about, there was a sudden violent shock; something happening so violently that I have remembered it all my life. I will give a few instances. The first: I was fighting with Thoby on the lawn. We were pommelling each other with our fists. Just as I raised my fist to hit him, I felt: why hurt another person? I dropped my hand instantly, and stood there, and let him beat me....

The second instance was also in the garden at St. Ives. I was looking at the flower bed by the front door; "That is the whole," I said. I was looking at a plant with a spread of leaves; and it seemed suddenly plain that the flower itself was a part of the earth; that a ring enclosed what was the flower; and that was the real flower; part earth; part flower.

From Zuiko:

I think Virginia Woolf in her unreligious way discovered the basic core shared by all religions. I think we all do that at sometime or other, but we forget it or dismiss it.

Virginia Woolf describes her philosophy:

...behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern...that we - I mean all human beings - are connected with this; that the whole world is a great work of art; that we are parts of the work

of art. Hamlet or a Beethoven quartet is the truth about this vast mass that we call the world. But there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself. And I see this when I have a shock.

This week we have all had a shock, and it has given us an opportunity to see deeply - the world "without a self," as Woolf imagines it, or as Dogen puts it, the others in ourselves.

With Gassho,  
Mary Lou Emery  
September 16, 2001

Zen Master Dogen and Kosho Uchiyama, *Refining Your Life: From the Zen Kitchen to Enlightenment*, trans. by Thomas Wright (New York, Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1983, 16).

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**ROHATSU SESSHIN at CEDAR RAPIDS ZEN CENTER**  
November 30 - December 4

The schedule will be as follows:  
Friday 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.  
Saturday - Monday 5:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
Tuesday 5:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

You are welcome to join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by November 23 to assure your place. Out of town participants are welcome to stay at Zen Center. For details, fees, housing, etc., please contact Cedar Rapids Zen Center, P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406. (319)247-5986, email: [crzc@avalon.net](mailto:crzc@avalon.net)

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### **Sangha News**

A special thanks to all of you who helped with the fall yard sale. We are very grateful for your efforts.

At the sangha meeting on September 2, the possibility of purchasing the house on Bever Avenue was discussed. It was agreed that CRZC would move forward with investigating the feasibility of buying the property, and determining ways to raise funds for the down payment.

Anyone interested in doing a one-day or weekend retreat at CRZC may contact Zuiko to make arrangements.

### **Conflict Resolution Workshop**

Moving On: Using Mediation Skills in Everyday Life, a pilot workshop on conflict resolution will be held at CRZC on Friday, October 19 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. The workshop will be led by Helen Kudos and Zuiko Redding. No fee will be charged for this session.

Conflict with others is a normal part of everyday life, and we sometimes find ourselves hindered by our inability to take care of the situation and move forward. Helen, a family therapist and Zen Center member, and Zuiko will show how we can use mediation skills along with Buddhist practice to move forward in our relationships with others. Bring some paper and a pen for the workshop exercises. All are welcome to attend.

### **Limitless Life**

(From *Limitless Life: Dogen's World*, by Rosan Osamu Yoshida, resident teacher at Missouri Zen Center)

Even herbs and trees  
Without hearts wither today.  
Doesn't a person seeing them  
With the eyes feel sorry?

~

The mind loved secretly  
Is simply the autumn dusk  
Of the mountains and rivers  
In this world.

~

Even in the autumn, when  
I'd expect seeing again,  
I could not have slept  
With the moon of tonight.

~

### Credits

Artwork Tom Rauschke  
Editing Ellen Wetzel  
Mailing James Eich  
Writing Mary Lou Emery  
Zuiko Redding  
Ellen Wetzel

### **Newsletter Submissions**

We appreciate and encourage your submission of material for the newsletter. The deadline for the next newsletter is September 15th. You may contact Ellen Wetzel at (319) 341-9668 or by email at [erw400@aol.com](mailto:erw400@aol.com) if you have questions or items you wish to share.

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