

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

Volume 3, Number 4 Fall, 2002- [Click here to return to Newsletter index](#)

Rahula

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Lately I've been doing talks about the Buddha's major disciples, and I'd like to share Rahula's story with you. Rahula was the Buddha's son, born just before his home-leaving. Rahula was about eight years old when his father returned to Kapilavastu to visit his family and teach for a few weeks. The Buddha and his followers settled into a grove on the city's outskirts and the Buddha made a visit to his family. As he sat down, Rahula's mother told their son, "This, Rahula, is your father. Go and ask him for your inheritance." *

Rahula approached his father and greeted him, "Pleasant is your shadow, recluse." The Buddha must have sensed that something was up, for he rose and left. His son followed, saying, "Give me my inheritance, recluse, give me my inheritance, recluse."

Rahula was not going to let go, no matter what. Rejection didn't matter - he'd just follow along and ask again. This is the determination of Bodhidharma's frown and the straight back of a Zen monk - the determination to seek the truth that will carry us forward in our practice. If we don't have it, we'll turn away at the first hard spot - well, maybe the second. This single-minded desire in the face of all obstacles is called "raising Bodhi Mind." Without it, we let rejection and inconvenience get in our way. With it, life is less convenient, but much more fulfilling.

Seeing his son's single-mindedness, the Buddha allowed him to join the sangha. He was ordained by Shariputra, who was his main teacher during his childhood.

Did this kid know what he was getting into? The cold nights in a hard bed, the myriad rules? He probably was clueless. When I was about Rahula's age sometimes my parents would have a special book or an interesting snack. "I want some, too, I want some, too," I'd demand. Weary of my persistence, my mom or dad would let me sample the treasured thing. Ooog! Ugh! James Thurber. Club soda. French bread. I would quietly give it back and slink off. Rahula, though, when he got his wish didn't give his robe back or slink off.

Like Rahula, we commit ourselves to things - marriage, a career - that look pretty wonderful until we're right in the middle. Suddenly we are very intimate with the hardness of it all, the work to be done, and we don't feel so good anymore. Can we put aside our ideas and be with the situation just as it is? When things are totally beyond our control, can we single-mindedly

continue on, moment by moment, with no thought of leaving? This is setting aside ego, and when we can do it, we live the Buddha's life. At eight years old, Rahula did this.

This does not mean we are saints. Rahula wasn't, either. He developed a habit of lying, and he sometimes wished his father were still a powerful ruler. Like most of us, he wasn't too interested in letting go of his destructive habits, but his father each time showed him a more constructive way, teaching him to use mindfulness and zazen to take care of problems. Again, Rahula showed determination. In one sutra, he is eighteen and, having been corrected by his father, he sits down by the side of the road in zazen, determined to deal with himself. When Shariputra comes along and gives him some further instructions, he accepts and follows them. With his determination, Rahula became a great bodhisattva and a great teacher.

We're in the same boat. We lie, we think about how it would be if we were really the long lost child of a great person and not part of this really dismal family. This is just how we are - we are human - and, like the Buddha did for Rahula, we can kindly correct ourselves.

To make this continuous single-minded effort is to live the Buddha's life and realize the Buddha's peace. It's very simple, gentle, and supremely difficult.

*For the full story see *The Book of the Discipline*. I.B Horner (trans.), Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001.

Baby's Work

by Robert Meikle

Before too much time had elapsed since my beginning of Zen practice, I thought it might be of interest to new and old practitioners alike, to hear some impressions from this zazen beginner.

Those of you that were acquainted with me in my first few months of attending zazen, services, and meetings, may have noticed how seemingly easy my transition into the practice was. Don't expect an analytical dissertation from me about why my own personal makeup has enabled such an effortless shift. Although my engineering background would lend itself willingly to the analysis side of such an undertaking, my newfound dharma side wouldn't hear of such egotistical ramblings. Besides, what I've truly come to realize about the practice of sitting quietly in front of a wall, is how absolutely simple, pure, and natural it is, i.e., it's "baby's work".

What do I mean by "Baby's Work"? Think way back to the beginning. Can't you vividly recall nearly nothing? Yet that nothing really is something, isn't it? It is in fact, sitting, facing a wall. Okay, yes, you were in a crib at the time, or nuzzling your mommy's neck as she held you tight, or walking down the school hallway in single file - girls on the left, boys on the right, but all the while you were sitting down quietly, facing the wall. Maybe you can see, or better yet feel, how those simple mindfulness experiences as an unprogrammed being perfectly

parallel your state of mind when fully engaged in zazen. As an infant and young child, you so naturally sat quietly and simply existed, that those temporal moments of unobstructed observation of "this very moment" were the only true nature you had.

We all of us have the innate ability to practice zazen and have done so for some finite time in our lives. Thus we can all relate back to a time when we were all the same and all practicing zazen. We all carry with us, too, life experiences since then that either promote that connection to the past and its engrossment with the here and now, or attach in some other manner which pulls us away from it. Regardless, we need not struggle too hard to find our way back to the pure and simple beginnings of our common practice.

I haven't yet been practicing with my first Sangha for a year, but it won't be long before that time comes. I've read that it's common to "backslide" away from hard practice after the initial WOW wears off, and then your practice will change in some way. For me the excitement and learning and reading and practicing all at once became too complicated to be religious. All things dropped away then, except for this connection back to the beginning and the true form of simple zazen. There's nothing complicated about that, it's steady and unchanging, it's "Baby's Work."

Giving and Receiving

by Ellen Wetzel

On September 11 I had the opportunity to represent Zen Center at the Interfaith Memorial Service held at Coe College. It was a new experience for me to serve in such a formal role as a member of the Buddhist community, so I was a little apprehensive. When I arrived at Sinclair Auditorium, saw the near-capacity crowd and met the representatives of other religious groups, I fervently wished Zuiko were back in Cedar Rapids and not on her way to Japan. However, in spite of my nervousness, I was also grateful that I could participate in such a wonderful gathering and share the dharma with others.

My role in the service was to present a memorial eko (similar to a blessing or prayer), as one of six prayers of remembrance and peace offered by members of various faith communities in the area. As I listened to the other speakers and looked out at the audience, I completely lost my feeling of unease. In its place was a sense of unity and peace, which filled the space almost tangibly. When it was my turn to speak, I stepped up to the podium. As I heard the beautiful words of the eko filling the auditorium, it was no longer me speaking to the audience, but rather just the dharma flowing. The speakers on the stage, the audience, the entire universe for that moment appeared to be enfolded in light and warmth - a sense not adequately explainable in words. As I returned to my seat to listen to the other speakers, I realized that I had experienced the great gift of sharing the dharma. Despite my hesitation and nervousness, to just be there with it and to just take the next step opened the door to seeing in a new way.

I learned in a most profound way that to offer the dharma is to receive the dharma, to receive

the dharma is to offer the dharma. There is ultimately no one giving, no one receiving, and no gift. The dharma just flows.

Volunteering at Zen Center

by Tim Macejak, President

The Cedar Rapids Zen Center is committed to making practice available to all, including those with limited financial means. This goes not only for things such as workshop or sesshin fees, but also for ways to contribute to the Zen Center. In addition, sometimes it can be rewarding in a different way to contribute to an organization with labor instead of money.

"Labor...uh-oh, so what's Tim going to try and trick us into?" you're thinking. Nothing, actually! But I did want to let everyone know that every two months or so I will be e-mailing a "to do" list of tasks that are looking for volunteers. There is absolutely no obligation for anyone; if not a single person volunteers for any of the jobs or tasks, we will survive as an organization. Still, we needed a way to let people know what needs to be done, so that anyone with a deep volunteering nature could come forth.

Lastly, a neat thing about volunteering labor is its efficiency. I have some experience with computers and can type fairly fast, but would be useless - harmful, actually - on a plumbing project. Someone else might find fixing a plumbing leak ridiculously easy, but really might cause serious problems trying to back up all our computer files. Of course, if someone has always wanted to try his or her hand at scraping paint, I'm sure we could arrange some training.

I will be sending these e-mails to my CRZC Sangha e-mail list, which mostly includes people in closer geographic location to the Zen Center. If anyone wishes to be added to the Volunteering-To-Do-List, to be taken off the list, or to volunteer for something on the list, please contact me.

Two Weeks in Japan

by Zuiko Redding

In September I returned to Japan for Dogen's 750th anniversary memorial at Eihei-ji. Judy Monk joined me, tasting Zen practice and doing sightseeing on her own. After seeing friends in Kanazawa and the Eihei-ji celebration, we spent time at Zui-ji talking with Tsugen Roshi, doing morning practice, and seeing friends. We then visited Rev. Hokan Saito, a mentor and friend, who took us to Hiroshima Peace Park. Both Judy and I were deeply affected by what we saw there. I thank Hokan-san for his patience and kindness in giving us this opportunity.

Then Judy went to Kyoto and I to Saiko-ji to see another friend and mentor, Rev. Mugai Takano. Mugai-san was just moving in, so there was lots of work. We did quiet practice - zazen, sutra chanting, eating, kitchen cleaning, weed pulling - in the midst of scarlet fall

flowers and ripening persimmons. Last stop was a Tendai temple to visit with Rev. Ekai Korematsu. We had good talks about sangha in Australia and America, and I got to see Tendai practice, which was Dogen's first practice.

Having again practiced the Buddha's life with teacher and friends, I feel renewed with silence and steadiness. I deeply thank everyone for their generous gift of time and effort which has enabled me to return with empty hands and determined, cheerful heart.

Sangha News

Zen Center now offers mediation for family, friends, and neighbors. Mediation is a process that helps parties in conflict come to some resolution so they can move on with life. A sliding scale fee is charged. Helen Kudos, a family counselor at Mercy Medical Center and a trained and experienced mediator, offers the service. She can be reached through the Zen Center or at her home at 319/643-5469. Proceeds from Helen's work through Zen Center will go to our operating fund.

Zen Center needs tools. A pad sander and an electric drill would be useful right now, and if someone has an extra, it would find a good home here. Also, other tools would be welcome - wrenches, screwdrivers, pliers, saws, etc.

SESSHIN

December 6-8

The schedule will be as follows:

Friday 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Saturday 5:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Sunday 5:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by November 22nd to assure a place. Out of town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

To register or get details, contact us:

Credits

Artwork Tom Rauschke

Editing Ellen Wetzel

Mailing James Eich

Writing Tim Macejak, Robert Mickle, 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 if you have questions or items you wish to share.

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[About us](#)

[Resident Teacher](#)

[Daily schedule](#)

[Activities](#)



[Home](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Calendar of events](#)

[Contact information](#)

[Resources](#)