

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

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Spring Flowers

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Sitting here looking at the crusty snow of early March, it's hard to imagine the flowers of April blooming as you read this. It is easier to get my mind around the fact that we're moving and that, by the time you read this, we will be in a two-story house on Bever Avenue. Though I will miss the woods and the wild turkeys, we'll have more room and a more public location.

The season is changing. Light comes earlier - there are signs of dawn as zazen begins. The birds sleeping in the eaves leave before kinhin now, and they break the silence with their songs.

The Buddha was born in spring in Lumbini Garden in Nepal in the sixth century BCE. Many Buddhists celebrate the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death at Vaishaka which usually falls in May. In Japan, these events are observed separately, and the Buddha's birthday is celebrated on April 8. Just in front of the altar, a figure of the baby Buddha stands in a bowl under an arbor of fresh, colorful flowers. In celebration, people come and pour sweet tea over the figure, washing the infant in welcome.

The infant Buddha was a newly-opened flower among the spring flowers of Lumbini Garden. In time, this flower bore fruit, spreading seeds throughout the world, giving rise to new green saplings.

To do zazen is to become a new sapling and a fresh bright flower of the Buddha Dharma. Dropping off "I want" and "I don't want," we are free. To conduct our daily lives like this is to do zazen continuously - to unfold the flower of the Dharma as we scrape the last of the winter's ice from our windshields or say good morning to our workmates. To do this kind of practice is to be the Buddha's life functioning in the world.

With no ideas and judgments, we can meet the world directly. "Oh! This is it!" Nothing more. This is the peace and joy that Dogen and Keizan spoke of in their instructions for practice. Peace and joy are wonderful, but getting to them is not easy.

All of us, when we get up in the morning, intend to spend the day doing right, not doing wrong. We want to give up our egoistic ideas and judgments, just meeting reality intimately

and living with wisdom and compassion. We don't make some great statement about this - a vow in front of the mirror as we regard our sleepy faces - but we want it for our lives. However, reality surprises us, and we are pulled about by our thoughts and emotions even before we have a chance to notice them. There's the partial answer to an embarrassing question, the small sabotage born of anger at an unexpected demand. The fresh flower of our lives becomes wilted and colorless. What was that talk of new saplings and fresh bright flowers? No peace and joy here!

In the office/informal dining hall at Shogojihangs a calligraphy by Murakami Sodo Roshi- "Shashu, close to the chest. Just this, this." Shashu is how we hold our hands when we do kinhin.

Simply folding our hands next to our chest, taking the next step, being present with life just as it is - this is peace and joy. Even when we feel great suffering, just to be present with our lives just as they are, putting aside ideas and opinions, brings peace and joy.

A flower unfolds its petals, supple and vivid, and all beings benefit.

The Mystery of Sangha

by Jeffrey Wright

The Dharma is so simple and yet there are so many mysteries without an easy explanation. One of these is sangha, the community of those in Dharmic practice. How is it that the depth of one's solitude is enhanced in the company of others in proximate solitude? Among herons and turtles on their river snags I am more still. My mind is less restless sitting an hour with others in an old, broken-windowed building on a busy street, or a little room in a noisy YMCA.

Perhaps the answer is as obvious as unspoken peer pressure. When I feel like moving, I know that my neighbor is not moving. I can do as well. If she can sit still for an hour, so can I.

Or security. Especially in the Midwest, where such directed idleness is mostly suspect, quietly doing nothing is often justified only as a short restoration, like a nap, in order to be more active again. There is comfort in sitting with the like-minded. What a relief to set aside one's eccentricity; to share with others an interest in detail, in the process more than the end result, in paying attention, and suspending judgment; to express one's deeper intentions by what and how one eats; to set sexuality aside; to elevate stillness in itself and kindness in itself. How much more comfortable the practice becomes, and in that, the growth of commitment.

Of course, as with all pleasures, I am wary that they become a focus: that the good company of the like-minded does not digress into orgies of self-righteousness and the distraction of rallying to causes. One must always remember that the touchstone of sangha, as of the Path generally, is stillness; the attention to this moment and this moment. Beyond that there are

said to be 84,000 Dharma doors.

Or, my search for an explanation to the paradox of sangha's worth shifts carefully toward the arcane. What is there in the presence of more than one separate individual? Point sources of the breath; point sources of volition, thought, or feeling. The meditation room is like the bed of a large spring with many little flowerettes of fine sand rising from coarse sand. Do we share the dark and formless stuff that lies below this spring?

But, these matters "tend not to edification"...there is an event; another event; another event... Suffice to say, in my final and most simple rationale for sangha, I am aware of and appreciate the faintest radiance of heat from those with whom I sit. Beyond that is mystery which is also a moment and a moment and a moment.

Limitless Life

Poems by Dogen

(From Limitless Life: Dogen's World, by Rosan Osamu Yoshida)

Poem made on the mind arising in no abiding:

Waterfowls come and go
Leaving no traces behind,
And yet they do not forget
The path they pass.

Poem made on the awakening in the Way by seeing peach flowers:

The blossoms of peach trees
Have bloomed in the spring breeze
Leaving behind no doubts
Even to twigs and leaves.

Making a poem on the tenet of the skillful striving in zazen:

The moon settling in
The clear mind-water,
Waves, being broken,
Become bright light.

JULY 20-22 SESSHIN at CEDAR RAPIDS ZEN CENTER

The schedule will be as follows:

Friday 7:30 - 9:00 p.m.
Saturday 5:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Sunday 5:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Zuiko Redding, resident teacher, will lead the sesshin. We invite participation in all or part of the weekend. Please sign up by July 1 to assure your place. Out of town participants may stay at Zen Center.

Fees: \$25 per day or \$15 for a partial day.

Information or registration: Cedar Rapids Zen Center, P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406
phone: (319)247-5986,
email: crzc@avalon.net

CRZC Is Moving!

We have good news. On April 1, we will be moving to a two-story house in an older neighborhood in Cedar Rapids. The zendo should accommodate about eight people, but we can expand into the dining room when there are more. Zuiko's space will be on the second floor and it will be more private. Also upstairs will be office space and room for tea and discussion, as well as space for overnight sesshin and all-day sitting guests.

Evening zazen and classes will be held in the new house, so we won't have to carry zafus into the church three nights a week. Rent is \$550 per month, a bit more than for our previous quarters.

The address is 1618 Bever Ave., SE.
The phone number is the same: 319/247-5986.

Sangha News

Sangha member Julie Hannon is moving to Boston with her husband, Katsushi Nagao, and their son, Enzo. We will miss her greatly, but we're sure she will return from time to time since she has family in Cedar Rapids.

Sangha member Ellen Wetzel will be receiving the precepts on Sunday, June 10. She has been studying the precepts with Zuiko and sewing a rakusu. We wish her good luck as she enters this Dharma gate.

Zuiko was recently in San Francisco for a meeting of Soto Zen teachers in the U.S. The meeting was sponsored by the Soto Zen Education Center and held at San Francisco Zen Center. Zuiko enjoyed seeing many old friends and making some new ones, and she found the meetings fruitful.

Participants discussed the need for a U.S. training center for clergy and offered ideas about the form such an institution might take. They also exchanged points of view on the role and meaning of receiving the precepts.

Rummage Sale

The spring rummage sale will be held on Friday and Saturday, May 4 and 5 at our new home, 1618 Bever Ave., SE. This is a good chance to do daily life practice with other sangha members, working together and having a good time together.

On Wednesday and Thursday evenings, May 2 and 3, we will need people to organize and price items. On Friday and Saturday during the day volunteers are needed to set up and to sell things. If you can help or if you have items to donate, call us at 247-5986 or email crzc@avalon.net

Annual Board Meeting

The annual meeting of the CRZC Board of Directors was held on March 4th. Among other issues, the Board discussed the move to Bever Ave., CRZC activities over the past year, and future directions. In addition, the Board elected two new members, Tim Macejak and Ellen Wetzel, both members of the local sangha. Tim has agreed to serve as President of the Board and Ellen is the new Secretary. Other members include Margaret Baldwin, Vice-President, James Eich, Treasurer, Lynn Mennenga and Shoken Winecoff.

Newsletter Submissions

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

Credits

Artwork: Tom Rauschke, Mary Ryoten Lehmann

Editing: Ellen Wetzel

Mailing: James Eich

Writing: Zuiko Redding, Ellen Wetzel, Jeffrey Wright

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: erw400@aol.com if you have questions or have items you wish to submit.

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Cedar Rapids Zen Center
P.O. Box 863
Cedar Rapids IA 52406
(319) 247-5986

email: crzc@avalon.net

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