

# Cedar Rapids Zen Center

## Newsletter

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### **The Best of All Possible Days**

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

There are five yellow crocus flowers in the garden beside the porch. They came out just before sesshin last weekend, promising spring and warm times to come. They beamed at the sun all weekend, but come Monday there was snow, wind and cold. I wondered if they would survive. "Every day is a good day," I reminded myself, remembering that the prairie coneflower seeds on the other side of the house needed such weather to germinate.

When the wind died down and the snow melted, the five yellow faces were still there. Feeling the sun again, they opened up. Every day is a good day - it's so much easier to feel that when I see five yellow crocuses smiling up at me.

When I think about "Every day is a good day," I'm often reminded of Voltaire's "Candide," in which the protagonist declares that "This is the best of all possible worlds," no matter what happens. The Buddha was not Pangloss; his teaching is different. Today is not a good day because it is the best of all possible days, but because it is the only of all possible days.

It is up to us to make this day the best of all possible days. Can we put aside our ideas and live wholeheartedly right in the middle of what it brings us? If we can do that, every day is a good day. If we can't live in the middle of this day, where can we live? I don't know about you, but no one heeds my complaints about gray cold days and exchanges them for another kind that's more to my liking. If I don't enjoy this day where the cold bites my fingers as I put soil in pots and the tightly-closed crocuses point at the gray sky, when will I enjoy a day?

In "Eight Awarenesses of Great People," Dogen admonishes us to be content with what we already have. Looking at the crocuses on this gray day, I understand this a bit better. Dogen is asking us to know satisfaction in the midst of the only of all possible worlds. Right here, in this moment, with these cold fingers, can I stop wanting more sun and just settle into what I've been given? This is knowing satisfaction - being content. It's not putting "if only . . ." at the end of our observations on life. Dropping all those wishes and judgments we come home to our lives in this moment.

All this does not mean that we shouldn't dream of peace, of good health and good food for everyone, or even of a better life for our own families and ourselves. "Every day is a good

day," points out that we often let our aspirations drag us around. We let them kill the basic joy we would otherwise have in the present moment and we let them blind us to what the present moment asks of us. Sometimes we become so bound by our judgments that no day is a good day, no matter how sunny and no matter how good our lives are.

When we know satisfaction, not only is every day a good day, but every person is a good person, including ourselves. This person is the only of all possible persons in front of me right now. It is up to me to make him or her the best of all possible persons for me in this moment. We can learn about ourselves through this practice. We can also learn about others - people bloom like crocuses if they have encouragement and acceptance.

If we can let our judgments and aspirations be just our ideas, we can put them aside and be right here with what's going on in this moment. Meeting this day or this person with no ideas in between, it becomes a good day or a good person. We can see what needs to be done right now, where our effort can be best used, and we can benefit all beings. Seeing in this way opens our hearts. We naturally become wiser and more compassionate.

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### **Sitting Quietly, Doing Nothing**

by Tim Macejak

I had a boss a few years ago who was under a lot of stress. He had 700 man-hours to work with per night, but was being given 1400 hours of work to do. He had just been dragged through the coals in a management meeting where he was blamed for not making deadlines. He was, shall we say... "unclear" about how he was supposed to get an extra 8 hours work out of each and every employee every day. He was not looking forward to more Vice Presidents literally screaming at him over the phone during the next several weeks or months.

So I told him I knew this Zen poem that went:

Sitting quietly  
Doing nothing  
The grass grows by itself

This look of peace came over his face, and he said, "Oh, how wonderful!" He asked me to write it down. He taped it to his telephone. (I think, so he could look at it every time he was being yelled at.)

Of course, as a Tactical Plan, it's pretty useless. Doing nothing in his situation would have gotten him fired pretty quickly. Even doing everything he could, he didn't make his deadlines and got yelled at frequently by different Vice Presidents. After about a year of this he was told that he could forget about getting any raises again anytime soon, so he left.

But as an Emotional Plan, it hit him on an intuitive level as right on. Maybe it's not an Emotional Plan either, or any type of plan at all. Somehow, though, it seems remarkably

calming to me, too.

I think it helps to deal with problems at work when you realize: 1) One's work is really important. 2) One's work is not important at all. It takes some flexibility of the mind to keep both of these equally valid at the same time, but when I'm able to, it helps a lot.

I have a coworker who has no such flexibility and consequently has lots of frustration at work. He wants to take his job really seriously. And he really does, he's an excellent worker. He'd probably even work off the clock to get a job done if our employer would let him. But it will occasionally happen that he won't be given the time to do his job properly, and he gets really pissed! "If they don't care about how things are done here, why should I?" he'll cry. He's even punched out a few times and left, with his work undone and not letting anyone know. He'll tell me, "I know, I shouldn't care about this job. I should just come in here like all these other people, not give a shit, and just be here to put in my time and get my paycheck. But I just can't do that. I just care too much, that's my problem."

The thing is, quite a few of our coworkers have excellent work ethics and do care about their jobs. Even the ones who say they are there just for the paycheck, sometimes, quietly, put in the extra effort to get their job done right and on time. But for my friend here, he can't hold simultaneously that work is both important and unimportant at the same time. Instead, it's an either-or proposition.

One should put good effort into one's work. One gets a sense of accomplishment and value that feels just right at one's core. To put our full effort into the things we do is part of our Zen practice. But if the job doesn't get done on time, no one dies or contracts a disease. Typically, no one suffers financial ruin either. If the quality or customer service isn't there, it usually doesn't result in divorce or children being sent to foster care.

Of course, everyone has things that push their envelope. The other week, I made a joke to a coworker that I was getting a lot of junk at my station, and maybe some of my coworkers were trying to sleep and work at the same time. He replied back, "Hey, don't be saying stuff like that" and walked away. So then I start thinking, did he not realize I was joking? Or was he just making a comment? Maybe he thought I was being arrogant, and I should point out how incredibly judgmental he's being. This sort of garbage went on in my head for a couple of hours. It was really ridiculous. I would think: Stop thinking about this! It would make no difference. I'd keep thinking about it. Eventually, things in my mind calmed down. I would keep trying to come back to my breath, and, more importantly, I didn't take what I was thinking so seriously. It was important, of course, since I kept thinking about it, but then again...it clearly wasn't important at all!

by Tim Macejak

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**SESSHIN**

July 19-21

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.

You are welcome to join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by July 5 to assure a place. Out of town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center. For registration, fees, housing, or more details, contact us at P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406, (319) 247-5986, or at [crzc@avalon.net](mailto:crzc@avalon.net).

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### **Book Notes** by Cris MyoshinOdell

*This Side of Nirvana*, by Sara Jenkins, is the story of a middle-aged American woman and her struggle with spirituality, the rigors of meditation and self-acceptance. Laced with quotes from Kabir, a 15th century Indian mystic poet, the book is a well-written memoir and reassuring to those of us who are in quest of awakening. Jenkins' sojourn through therapy, experimentation with various styles of meditation and her ultimate embracing of Buddhism mirrors the jagged route so many take before settling into a spiritual path. With the aid of a challenging teacher, Jenkins arrives at the final realization that "as soon as you reside wholly in yourself, you have the whole world."

The book also abounds with golden spiritual nuggets worth contemplating, such as:

\*Accept full responsibility for everything in your life. Then practice as if your hair is on fire

.

\*What in myself is the same as what I don't like in the other person?

\*We can't fit spiritual training into our lives; we must fit our lives into spiritual training. When it begins to dawn on us that there is no life apart from spiritual training, then we begin to practice.

\*Every moment we make a choice. What is important now? And now? And now?

\*Meditate with the same mind a cat uses to watch a mouse-hole. Your job is to watch in that same way...the Cat will sit there absolutely unmoving, totally absorbed and alert, and very, very patient. The cat doesn't go to sleep or wander off. Nor does it get bored and make a dive at the hole, demanding that the mouse come out.

Because it was written by a layperson, *This Side of Nirvana* is easily read and grasped. Highly recommended.

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## **Sangha News**

Remember to mark your calendars for the annual meeting of the CRZC Board on April 14 following zazen and dharma talk. All are welcome and encouraged to attend!

CRZC is planning a plant sale in early May at the farmers' market in Noelridge Park. If you are interested in helping, call or email either Zen Center or Susan Dalton (sdalton@mcleodusa.net, 319/363-8611). Plant contributions are welcome.

A work weekend is scheduled at Hokyoji, Minnesota Zen Center's retreat center just north of New Albin, IA, on April 27-28. People from MZMC, CRZC and other centers will do maintenance and repair work to ready Hokyoji for summer events. If you are interested, contact CRZC or MZMC. Fee for the weekend is \$15 to pay for food and incidentals. Any remaining funds will go into Hokyoji's operating fund.

Zuiko will be visiting the Bloomington-Normal, IL, Zen group on April 20-21. Zen Center will be open for zazen on April 21, but there will be no dharma talk that day.

New members are welcome in both the Cedar Rapids and the Iowa City practice discussion groups. The Cedar Rapids group meets at Zen Center on the second Monday evening of the month and the Iowa City group meets in members' homes twice a month. For more information, contact Zuiko or email Zen Center.

## **We Need Your Help**

We will be making the final decision on the house purchase at the upcoming annual meeting. If we move forward with the purchase as planned, we will need some additional funds to get CRZC through the first year in which we make the down payment and pay closing costs. We will be developing a housing fund to cover this and additional maintenance expenses in the future. All ideas are welcome in our development of fundraising strategies. All contributions are also welcome. In May, you will be receiving a letter asking for a donation. If you haven't already made a contribution to the housing fund, we would appreciate any donation you might wish to make.

## **Credits**

Artwork Tom Rauschke  
Editing Ellen Wetzel  
Mailing James Eich  
Photos James Eich  
Writing Tim Macejak  
Zuiko Redding  
Ellen Wetzel  
Published by

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

P.O. Box 863  
Cedar Rapids IA 52406

(319) 247-5986  
email: [crzc@avalon.net](mailto:crzc@avalon.net)  
[www.avalon.net/~crzc](http://www.avalon.net/~crzc)

### **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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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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