

# Cedar Rapids Zen Center

## Newsletter

Volume 4, Number 2 Spring 2003- [Click here to return to Newsletter index](#)

### Listening

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Along the Cedar River at the very top of a tree a cardinal conducts a conversation with blue sky and bare branches. Rustling in damp decaying leaves turns out to be a robin. Quiet running river sound accompanies redwing blackbird song. Listening, we hear early spring. But mostly we're not listening. We're too busy with our judgments and ideas. We let their sound drown out reality and limit us to the "reality" inside our heads. Sometimes only the song of a motorcycle out for its first spring ride will penetrate our fog. Are we grateful to be returned to reality by this buzz? No, we're irritated.

This bird song season is also the season of the Buddha's birth. I don't remember the Buddha saying much of anything about listening, though he said a great deal about talking. I suspect, though, that right speech includes right listening. If there's no wholehearted listening, wise and compassionate speech is difficult. If we don't put aside our egoistic notions and just pay attention to another person, we often create suffering even though we may be trying to relieve suffering. To listen to life just as it is with the wholehearted mind of the baby Buddha is to celebrate the Buddha's birth.

How to listen? First of all, be quiet. We don't learn anything by talking. Second, ask questions. You can discover a lot by asking about things you don't quite get. Third, rephrase what you're hearing, asking the speaker to affirm or deny your perception or to clarify it. If we have the heart of a good listener, we will naturally want to hear and understand the other person's point of view.

This attention makes the speaker feel genuinely respected and honored as a human being. When we feel heard, we hold on less tightly to our judgments and ideas. Often, simply being listened to lightens the heart and gives the confidence and reassurance needed to make changes that were formerly pretty frightening. Being heard opens us up, helps us form new ideas and see a more flexible harmonious way of being.

To develop good listening skills is to develop an inquisitive, concerned heart. It's not a heart that judges, and it's not a heart that always agrees. We might think someone misguided, but we can still listen and acknowledge their perspective - "Ah - that hurt you." "Please tell me more about. . ." "You think perhaps

that . . ." Developing listening skills is a long, difficult process with many fiascoes along the way. Be kind to the defeats and embarrassments and get up and try again the next time an opportunity arises.

This is difficult practice. The hardest thing is to stop our mind, give up ego, and only pay attention. It's important, though. If we don't really understand another's ideas, we can't work with them to form our two points of view into useful action. Not seeing the fears and the desire for happiness behind their words and actions, we can't help either the other person or ourselves.

Listening is not a strategy for changing others or for getting some other reward. We do it to take care of our own practice, our hearing. We're likely to learn things we didn't even suspect by just putting aside our agendas and judgments and simply listening. We drop our leading questions and judgmental remarks. We don't burden the other person with our point of view. Even if we disagree strongly or feel the speaker has wrong information, we save our remarks for later and continue listening. We're not trying to prove something here - we are trying to understand.

At first, doing these things is like imitating listening. We feel stiff and our responses sound contrived to us. If we continue, it will begin to work in our lives. It will become us and we will become it. We'll find ourselves naturally acknowledging others' ideas and feelings without trying to change them. We'll find ourselves taking those notions and weaving them together with our own to create something new, rather than discarding them and simply relying on our own agendas. This kind of listening is the Buddha's life, and through this imitation of the Buddha's life we gradually become Buddha. We grow from baby Buddha into wise, compassionate Buddha who makes wholehearted effort to be here with life just as it is.

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## **Present, Present, Present**

by Janice Karnegis

I coach presenters for a living. Because I work for the government, many of my presenters' talks deal with rather technical information on topics ranging from affordable housing to water quality to traffic congestion. It's easy to turn these presentations into audience naptime, and some presenters do. But there's a Stanford study which says that only 15% of our success as presenters comes from our technical knowledge. The other 85% comes from our ability to connect with other people. I like to remind presenters that the word "present" has three meanings: make a speech, a gift, and being here. When we present, we are present and giving a present.

Of course, this applies to any mindful work. If we're present with the task, we realize that what we're doing is an offering to others. Putting aside our likes and dislikes, our fears, our pride, we see what's really happening, both for ourselves and for other people. It's the only way we can respond effectively to a situation. We pay attention to the here and now, rather

than wishing it was all over and that we were home eating dinner.

I encourage presenters to think of each audience member as an honored guest, and to treat even the tasks of preparing and delivering the presentation with respect. Each interaction we have with an audience member, coworker or service provider is an opportunity to learn something, to give something, and to express who we are. We can do each thing with the idea that it's an offering, whether to the audience, the community, the universe or ourselves. Since everything we do supports others, and they support us, we can approach our work as a gift.

Sometimes my presenters are puzzled when I remind them that presenting is other-directed. Well, of course it's other-directed! I'm up here directing my presentation at all you others! I'm hoping that all you others understand me. I'm trying to make sure all you others think I'm a credible and knowledgeable presenter. I, I, I.

The fact is, most of the time we're more self-focused than we realize or like to admit. We focus on what we need to get from the audience, a relative, the boss. We have fears about making idiots of ourselves, and we're proud of a good result. We can't see what's really going on because we're trapped in our own little worldview. That's when our presentations, our work and our relationships stop being other-directed. What's going on in the mind of the listener? How is your mother feeling today? How can you and your supervisor work together to be successful? When we forget ourselves and offer something genuine and generous, the universe offers something back.

Although many presenters are tempted to focus only on the value of their data, I try to help them keep in mind the larger gifts they bring, beyond the content-related stuff. The wholehearted effort to take care of the audience and make the presentation the best it can be is a real gift. Even if we never have the opportunity to stand up and give a talk, to be right here while we boil pasta or water tulips or clean up after the dog is to present a true offering.

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**book of wings**  
**(my little manifesto)**  
by Margaret Baldwin

i used to say i made plays to  
make sense of the world around me  
but the world around me confounds sense  
and can lapse me into  
judgment separation despair  
(convenient cynicism)  
and lead me to say  
what's the point?

the point shifts

now i say  
i make plays to make contact

gertrude stein said,

a play is a box  
a metaphor is a basket  
basket is a dog

(basket was her dog)

i say  
if you don't have a dog  
named basket  
find a box  
better yet  
find a cabinet  
paint it red  
call it a theater  
red cabinet theater  
put things in it  
strange tokens  
broken things  
funny atrocious things  
move them around  
in your cabinet  
make them do things  
say things hard to say  
find fault lines of  
incidence/consequence/coincidence

arrange with abundance  
arrange grief  
arrange fear  
arrange delight  
in your cabinet  
before your very eyes  
shut

make to stay awake

find an audience, even of one  
find that one  
make that contact  
if you can't make sense  
make more plays

make them small enough to  
make them whole

make manifest [manifestus  
lit., struck by the hand  
manus, (see MANUAL) +  
infestus (see INFEST)]  
your vision  
manually infest it  
strike it by the hand  
your hand

make what you crave  
with whatever means you have  
+ whatever strikes your fancy  
(exquisite detritus/life's tender dross)  
make your plays your cabinetry  
build them with  
craft chance choice change  
don't wait for perfection  
make mistakes  
make unmake remake  
mistakes

make contact  
when you can't make sense  
make to articulate  
make to stay awake  
make light  
(action is the antidote to despair)  
(humor is the antidote to fanaticism)  
(grieving is the antidote to grief)  
don't wait to be invited  
invite endure persist wonder play  
always play always  
love always  
question the point  
but not to the point  
you can't make

assume nothing  
notice everything  
some small thing  
remember

the smallest things have wings

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## **JULY SESSHIN**

July 18-20

from Friday at 7:00 p.m.  
to Sunday at 5:30 p.m.

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by July 11 to assure a place. Out-of-town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

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## **Sangha News**

Zen Center's Board of Directors met on April 13. Jan Karnegis from Minneapolis was elected to replace Robert Meikle. We are in good organizational and financial health. Discussion centered around building sangha.

There will be two workdays, May 31 and June 21, to prep and paint Zen Center's exterior. Come enjoy work practice and contribute to taking care of the building. Let Zuiko know if you can help on either or both days. Pizza will be provided for lunch.

The next Introduction to Zen Practice course begins on Tuesday, May 6th and continue for the next three Tuesdays. For more information, contact Zen Center

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## **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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[Resident Teacher](#)

[Daily schedule](#)

[Activities](#)



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[Newsletter](#)

[Calendar of events](#)

[Contact information](#)

[Resources](#)