

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

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Nyoho

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Priest and Teacher

I often think of Rido-san when I put on my okesa - the robe that goes over the black long-sleeved koromo. Rido-san gave me the fabric for it and taught me about sewing it. When he presented the cloth to me, I noticed its texture and asked what it was. "Alpaca," he said. I was stunned - "Is that nyoho?" I asked. "It's nyoho," he assured me. It's warm in winter and cool in summer, it doesn't stand out and it wears like iron. He was right. This okesa looks common, serves in all seasons and seems like new after ten years of hard wear. Given its durability, Rido-san got his money's worth. It's truly nyoho.

What is nyoho? Nyoho is about living our lives in harmony with the needs of our situation. "Nyo" in this case means "thus" or "just this." It points to the reality that's in front of us right now. "Ho" here means "dharma" or "the Buddha's teaching."

I first learned about nyoho from Tomoe Katagiri, my first okesa sewing teacher. She also translated an essay on nyoho by my teacher. In it, he quotes Eko Hashimoto Roshi, who was one of his and Katagiri Roshi's mentors. In discussing building, Hashimoto Roshi expresses nyoho like this

We should be free from love or hatred because the main point is the substantiality of the materials rather than the external appearance of the building. We should not worry if any part of the boards is ugly, for we can use them where they cannot be seen. We should strictly observe ourselves so as to emancipate ourselves from particular ideas. Using more material and resources than are necessary is the same as throwing them away. On the other hand, being too conservative is only the passion of greediness. Both of these are not good. When we practice avoiding these, we walk the Buddha's way smoothly like a cloud.

Hashimoto Roshi taught that nyoho guides us toward harmony with the things we need to sustain our lives and toward harmony with all things. To follow nyoho is to follow the Buddha's teaching. He spoke of the nyoho of food, clothing and shelter. There are three important aspects to consider in making and using these things.

First, the materials we use for food, clothing and housing should do their job but not be needlessly costly or luxurious. Food should have simple, tasty, nutritious ingredients. Materials for clothing and housing should be durable and serviceable, selected from readily

available resources. The nyoho of materials means that, without being attached to plainness or fanciness, frugality or expense we opt for what works right here. We put aside our ideas and preferences. We focus on what we need to take care of the project in front of us. Doing this, we are liberated from the confusion caused by our egoistic likes and dislikes.

Second, we use just enough to accommodate our needs, being neither too sparing nor too generous. Awareness and wisdom are really important here. We have to know what is enough. Perhaps we have thought little about this and we have to investigate it. To eat the right amount for our bodies, to have the right amount and kind of clothing for our needs, to have a dwelling that meets our needs takes much insight and brings us face-to-face with our human nature. I think it was a Rockefeller who, when asked how much money is enough, replied wryly, "Just a little more." So it is with us. We always want "just a little more" no matter how much we already have. The nyoho of quantity helps us live wisely and give up striving for things we don't need.

Third, the appearance of these things shouldn't arouse attachment in either self or others. A guest in our home feels comfortable and warm, not impressed by the decor. At dinner, we enjoy the food, but we leave it when we leave the table. The nyoho of appearance shows our tendencies to search for peace by impressing others. It brings us back to the Buddha's teaching that peace and contentment are gifts we give ourselves. When we have peace, we don't need to stand out, and we don't worry about fitting in or setting standards for others.

Nyoho is also about walking the Middle Way, being flexible and appropriate. At zazen we wear a plain shirt. At New Year's, we wear something with some sequins or a silk tie. I was shocked the first time I saw my teacher in a yellow koromo and brocade okesa. Yes, he would rather have worn something less gaudy and a lot lighter in Japan's August heat, but he was doing what was expected of him. The laity would not have felt honored by his brown light linen okesa. He wears that every day - this is a special occasion.

As we go through our lives, let's remember nyoho and live in harmony with the Buddha's teachings and with the universe and ourselves.

- Zuiko Reddin

What Would Buddha Do?

by Suisan Goldberg

It started off innocently enough as these affairs of the heart often do. An attraction. Then a mild flirtation. Over the course of two years, however, my passion had grown until it had become an obsession. I had my fantasy and I wanted it to be real.

I wanted it bad.

For years I had wanted a Zen garden. Of course, nothing fancy. Something beautiful in its simplicity. A place for quiet contemplation, a respite. It takes a lot of planning for simple. I

guess that is why it's considered an art. Now, I am eminently practical but an artist I am not and even less a gardener. Nonetheless, I wasn't to be foiled. I had a dream.

One spring day, whilst on a walk, I almost literally stumbled upon my muse - a rock of fine proportions. A rock to be the crowning glory of my Zen garden and, at that point, my entire Zen garden. I must have it.

I tried the conventional means at first. I made inquiries. I was ready to bargain. "Listen, " I said to the residents, "I'll pay you to take this eye-sore off your property!" Such a deal. Except that the people living on said property were renters. I assumed that renters were less territorial than owners and I was delighted at this turn of events. I went to the owners. I called. I left mysterious notes. I knocked on the door. All to no avail. This did nothing to deter me. Nay, it only fueled me to rethink the thing. I would steal it. Well, "steal" is such an ugly word. Rather, I would relieve that property of the rock and transplant it to my property. Not stealing. "Relocating."

My husband was the wet blanket on my bright and shiny Zen garden - "It's stealing, Sue." I took this to mean he'd help me but his heart wouldn't be in it. But no, he was sincere. It wasn't stealing, I argued. I had long ago rationalized that I was "honoring" this rock. It was to be a throne to my Buddha statue. It was a sacred place and therefore a sacred act. I was performing a sacred act. Or trying to.

"It's stealing, Sue." Well, not stealing, really . . . merely paying homage to Mother Earth on my property as opposed to their property. Stealing. It conjured up images of THOU SHALT NOT STEAL on the stone tablets and Moses staring at me fiercely saying, "It's stealing, Sue."

Spring gave way to summer, then to fall and the months fell away. I occasionally caught sight of the rock. I was privileged to admire it in all seasons and I always thought of this ignored thing as my rock. This year, I began to lament my decision to be honest. I vowed that, with or without help, I would have it.

I bought "special" garden gloves. For private handling, as it were. I plotted. I would drive by the rock on my way home from work at zero-dark-thirty in the morning, and, with my special gloves, would snatch the little darling and take it home. Attired in my dark suit in my dark car, it would be a cake walk. Later, I'd deal with any consequences that arose from such an undertaking. For now the moment was right.

It was a dark and stormy night. Okay, it was dark. I had cased the situation for a week and tonight was going to be the night. I drove slowly down the street. In my neighborhood, a dark car rolling stealthily down the street was no oddity. I felt right at home. A tingle of anticipation wet my back and my heart beat a bit faster. All of this for my sweet Zen garden. I turned up the alley and slowly approached my quarry. There it was, nestled in its usual spot under the bush. Come to mamma! But wait, what was this? The police. How did they know? I practiced my story. Middle-aged woman sees a rock on her way home from work, under a lot of stress... Blame it on menopause or something. They sat, watching the place with their

headlights on. Waiting. Obviously, my rock was small beans compared to what they were looking for. I drove on. Another time.

It went on this way. Always something thwarted my plans. Then, one Sunday night after choir practice (how innocent can that be?), I stopped. This was it. Do or die. Relocation time. I got on the gloves. I walked fearlessly to the rock. I assumed the correct body mechanical position and grabbed the rock and pulled and tugged and grunted and ...nothing. It was rooted. I would need a "Bobcat" and certainly that would arouse entirely too much attention. I returned home defeated.

I decided to give it some philosophical thought. What would Buddha do? What would Buddha do?

We turn to the teachings of Buddha for advice. The Buddha's teaching that stealing is wrong is fairly straightforward. Don't do it. If it isn't given freely, it's not ours. This includes both tangible and intangible things. We read further and we see that this is all tangled up in what is called desire. We humans desire things. We humans want. We want stuff we think we need - attention, a good house, cars, money. Not only do we want, we think we deserve.

And getting. The getting makes us happy. No? No. It is the root of unnecessary suffering. And more to the point, when we envy, when we desire, we are missing the opportunity to live in the moment. We have lived in the fantasy and have not been mindful of the reality. We glean the fundamental truths about what and who we are.

I've learned from this experience. I've learned that though we are not to live a life of deprivation, neither are we to live a life of indulging our desires. Ours is the middle road in all things.

Summer Changes

Zen Center has a different look thanks to the work of Ken Burnside, Alan Brink, Courtney Cook, Nikhil Desmukh, Suisan Goldberg, Anna Krener, Mary McCulley and Ryan Wheeler. We now have a railing along the walk leading to the sidewalk. There's new paint on the sun room woodwork, the discussion room walls and on the air intake grates. Thanks to all of you for making Zen Center a more comfortable and welcoming place.

The kitchen also looks much more inviting these days. It all started in April when a vintage 1910 galvanized pipe sprang a leak and water began dripping from the kitchen ceiling. The plumbers had to tear out a chunk of the ceiling in order to replace the pipe, so we decided it would be good to get the rest of the pipes replaced before we sealed up the ceiling again. Since there was also wiring in that space, we figured it would be good to get that taken care of, too. We now have new pipes, a new circuit breaker box, several newly-upgraded and grounded circuits and a new ceiling and paint in the kitchen. In the process we also replaced one of the kitchen lights with a ceiling fan and light.

Zazen and Celebration

New Year's in the Buddhist calendar is a time for reflecting on the past year and celebrating the promise of a new one. It's a time of taking care of the loose ends of the previous year and gathering with family and friends to eat good food and renew ties, much like Christmas in the West.

On New Year's Eve we will sit from 7:30 - 10:30 p.m. Then we'll greet the New Year in traditional Japanese fashion with buckwheat noodles (soba). Drop in anytime for some zazen and some food.

This is followed by our New Year's Day open house from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. on the following day. There will be lots of Japanese New Year's treats, along with tea and sake. Since we are American, there's also champagne.

Help is always needed to prepare food for New Year's Day and to do other preparations. If you'd like to help or if you'd like to bring a dish, contact Zuiko at crzc@avalon.net

News Notes

Work day There's one last work day on October 20 - the Saturday before the October all-day sitting. Come and join in the work and the fun. Work begins at 9:00 a.m. There are a variety of things to be done from yard and garden cleaning to office work to home maintenance and repair. We can guarantee work for everyone no matter what your capabilities. And don't forget - there's pizza for lunch!

Great Sky Sesshin at Hokyoji brought together 21 people from around the country to practice quietly in harmony and good cheer. We were honored to have Rev. Brad Warner among our teachers this year and we thank him and all the teachers for their practice with us. We also thank all the participants for the effort, good cheer and hard work that made Great Sky the finest one yet. On the home front, Ken, Courtney, Nikhil, Gus, Suisan and Ryan led zazen and took care of the Center while Zuiko was gone. We are fortunate to have your effort and your service in support of the dharma.

Hokyoji Originally founded as part of Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, Hokyoji is now a separate Zen practice center under the able direction of Rev. Dokai Georges. We invite you to investigate it as a place for retreat and monastic practice. For more information, go to www.hokyoji.org.

Volunteers needed Do you like to work with books, set up copy, garden, sew, draw, work with wood, repair things? If so, we need your skills and interests in our library, office, yard and house. If you don't have any of these skills or interests, we probably have a place for you,

too. Just contact Zuiko (crzc@avalon.net) or Tim (tmace00@msn.com).

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