

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

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Big Attachment

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Once, when I had just started practicing with Katagiri-roshi, I remember dejectedly telling him about my problems with finding time to practice in the way I wanted.

"Perhaps my idea of how to practice is just an attachment and I should give it up," I said. He nodded and smiled sympathetically. I absorbed this for a moment and a further thought came. "Maybe I should give up practice. That seems to be just an attachment, too."

"You don't give that up!" he replied, his face completely changed, "That's BIG attachment!" I was surprised, but Katagiri-roshi's answer invited no further inquiry. Thanking him for his time and patience, I went off to think about his answer. I've been thinking about it for nearly twenty years now.

In Zen we often use the terms "big mind" and "small mind." Big mind is the mind that sees all things supporting each other in the life of the universe. Big mind sees impermanence - how everything is in constant change, how things appear, stay for a while, grow old, and disappear. Big mind sees that self is the whole universe and the whole universe is self. Small mind is the mind that has forgotten these conditions. Small mind is like Gollum in *The Hobbit*, stunted and bent with long grasping fingers and big shining eyes, saying, "We wants our preciousss!" I have always loved Gollum. He has his failings, but at his core he means no harm. His desire for the ring blinds him to the rest of life - his attachment has become his world. Small mind is not evil. It is constricted and vulnerable and in need of our compassion.

Big attachment arises from our big mind. It is the habit of thinking and doing that arises from awareness of our life in the midst of the whole universe. Big attachment is appreciating life just as it is and acting in harmony with it. When we have big attachment, we don't seek something for ourselves, but simply do what is most useful for all beings. Dogen speaks of even small worms and animals rearing their young though they receive no rewards when their children grow up, and he asks us to follow their example. A small worm, just doing what worms do, has big attachment. When we have the mind of a small worm, our attachment to our practice, to our loved ones, to the things in our lives, is big attachment. It is vast and flexible, having no ideas and no expectations.

Our mind is usually not small worm mind. It's Gollum mind - comparing, judging, figuring

costs and benefits. We confuse our ideas with reality itself and we become blind, vulnerable and fearful. We reach for things to hold onto. We desperately want "our preciousss." When we find it, at first we are very happy. Not wanting to part from it, we hold on hard, stunting and distorting ourselves with the effort and making ourselves miserable. Unfortunately, like all things, "our preciousss" departs and leaves us with only our misery. When we have this kind of attachment, we diminish and warp our practice, our loved ones, ourselves, and the life of the universe.

These days, two small birds sleep in the shelter of the eaves just outside the zendo window. Each morning I peek at them. They sleep, feathers ruffled, heads under wings, until about thirty minutes before sunrise. Then, after a stretch or two, they fly off. Their harmony with each other and with the changes of the seasons is each morning's Dharma teaching. In this New Year season of biting cold I try to return to small bird and small worm mind and have big attachment. I hope you'll join me.

Atonement and Being the Barrier

by James Eich

In November, our Iowa City Book Discussion Group gathered to discuss *The Heart of Being* by John Daido Looi. Since weather was inclement (southeastern Iowa's first snowfall mixed with sleet), Zuiko was unable to attend the meeting. The next day, I e-mailed Zuiko and told her what we discussed. She e-mailed me back and soon a cyber dharma dialogue emerged.

James: We discussed atonement and "being the barrier," and came to the conclusion that the two are very similar. Atonement (at-one-ment) is interdependence--not seeing ourselves separate from anything we do or say and taking responsibility for our actions and words, not because of guilt, but because of compassion for the entire universe.

Zuiko: Yes, atonement is returning to the awareness of oneness. Our unfortunate actions arise from forgetfulness of this point, from seeing ourselves as separate and more important. To repent is to open up and see again the connection -- "Oh! Excuse me."

James: "Being the barrier" is seeing the interconnectedness of life also, not forming "this" and "that," but rather "all." If we separate ourselves from whatever blocks us, whatever we dislike, whatever causes us to suffer, then we never take responsibility for our lives. We're always blaming something or someone else. We shouldn't say "that" is the barrier, but rather "I" am the barrier. If we don't, then we're always building an externalized brick wall which we can point to and say, "That's the problem" or "She's difficult to work with" or "I could never live in that city." What we're doing is getting in the way of what needs to happen, which seems like ego. Is that right?

Zuiko: Yes, and dealing with ego is a difficult thing. To cling tightly, to reject something simply because we don't like it, is definitely ego. However, to totally reject our like, dislike, anger, fear, love, happiness, is also ego. We need to investigate it and take care of it. If you

find it difficult to give up some idea, there is something that needs to be taken care of. The way we react to our world is part of reality also--it's just not all of reality.

For several days after this exchange, atonement and being the barrier kept emerging in my thoughts and I saw a word within the word "atonement": "one moment". To atone, to be at one with, is to be in the moment, is to be that one moment. It means to accept the present situation, "to dwell happily in things as they are," as Thich Nhat Hanh says. As soon as we step out of the moment, step out of reality, we separate, categorize, evaluate, and judge. Soon, we're pointing toward barriers rather than breathing and being and accepting that we are the barrier. When we do the latter, then we are given the freedom we wouldn't otherwise have to change how we view the situation rather than to believe that we need to change the situation itself.

Sesshin

Sesshin is a chance to enter the life of the Buddha for a day or a few days. Surrounded by sesshin, we can leave our usual concerns and distractions at the door, and just concentrate on paying attention to the moment in front of us. It is a time to sink deeply into self, to see our judgments, resistances, and ideas more clearly and to work with them.

Our usual sitting is very good. A period or two of zazen, whether just a few minutes by oneself or a full formal period in the zendo, is useful in helping us harmonize our minds. However, when we sit longer, we sink more deeply into things. New levels of ego are reached, and we can learn about ourselves and begin to deal with new layers of greed, anger and delusion. Sesshin is sometimes peaceful and pleasant, sometimes painful and frightening, but always fruitful. We invite you to join us.

March 16-18 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.

Dharma talks will be given by Rev. Shoken Winecoff and Rev. Zuiko Redding. You are welcome to join us for all or part of the sesshin. For details, fees, housing, etc., please contact: Cedar Rapids Zen Center, P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406. (319)247-5986 email: crzc@avalon.net.

Shoken Winecoff

Rev. Shoken Winecoff is a Soto Zen monk ordained in 1985 by Dainin Katagiri-roshi at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center. He received dharma transmission from Katagiri-roshi in

1989, and then studied in Japan for three years at Zuioji and Shogoji Monasteries.

Rev. Winecoff is currently founder of the Decorah Zen Center in Decorah, Iowa. He is also establishing a Soto Zen temple outside of Decorah on land which was donated for this purpose. The name of this temple will be Ryumonji.

Annual Meeting

Our second annual meeting will be Sunday, March 4, from 10:00 a.m. until 11:45 a.m. The sangha will elect two new board members at this meeting, and the board and the sangha will consider any business which needs to be brought before either body. Please come with your ideas and suggestions. Nominees for the board should be submitted by February 19.

Sangha News

- Farewell and best wishes to Margaret Baldwin. Margaret helped found the Zen Center and is now living in Atlanta after graduating with an MFA in playwriting from the University of Iowa. We will miss her greatly.
- Jeffrey Wright has written and published a book, Dubuque Yoga, based on his experience as a yoga teacher. It is available at Amazon.com.
- CRZC has a cyber home! Our website is up and waiting for a visit from you. Check it out at www.avalon.net/~crzc. You're here now! :)
- We will be holding a rummage sale on May 4-5. We need stuff to sell, people to sell it, and a yard to have it in! If you have things to donate or would like to help out, please let us know.

Thank You

We wish to express our appreciation to the following friends of Cedar Rapids Zen Center who have generously supported our efforts in the past year. We are grateful for your help and encouragement. Our apologies if you are not on the list.

Wendy Adamek
David Ard
Calvin Appleby
Margaret Baldwin
Lisa Bartman
Flannery Bateman
Stacey Behr
Lynne Bisson
Philip Blackburn
Dave Brus
Robert Burnham

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Ellen Wetzel
Kaaren Wiken
Shoken Winecoff
Ann Zerkel

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Editing: Ellen Wetzel
Mailing: James Eich
Writing: James Eich and Zuiko Redding

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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