

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

Volume 4, Number 1 Winter, 2003- [Click here to return to Newsletter index](#)

Rahula

by Zuiko Redding, Resident Teacher

Lately I've been doing talks about the Buddha's major disciples, and I'd like to share Rahula's story with you. Rahula was the Buddha's son, born just before his home-leaving. Rahula was about eight years old when his father returned to Kapilavastu to visit his family and teach for a few weeks. The Buddha and his followers settled into a grove on the city's outskirts and the Buddha made a visit to his family. As he sat down, Rahula's mother told their son, "This, Rahula, is your father. Go and ask him for your inheritance." *

Rahula approached his father and greeted him, "Pleasant is your shadow, recluse." The Buddha must have sensed that something was up, for he rose and left. His son followed, saying, "Give me my inheritance, recluse, give me my inheritance, recluse."

Rahula was not going to let go, no matter what. Rejection didn't matter - he'd just follow along and ask again. This is the determination of Bodhidharma's frown and the straight back of a Zen monk - the determination to seek the truth that will carry us forward in our practice. If we don't have it, we'll turn away at the first hard spot - well, maybe the second. This single-minded desire in the face of all obstacles is called "raising Bodhi Mind." Without it, we let rejection and inconvenience get in our way. With it, life is less convenient, but much more fulfilling.

Seeing his son's single-mindedness, the Buddha allowed him to join the sangha. He was ordained by Shariputra, who was his main teacher during his childhood.

Did this kid know what he was getting into? The cold nights in a hard bed, the myriad rules? He probably was clueless. When I was about Rahula's age sometimes my parents would have a special book or an interesting snack. "I want some, too, I want some, too," I'd demand. Weary of my persistence, my mom or dad would let me sample the treasured thing. Ooog! Ugh! James Thurber. Club soda. French bread. I would quietly give it back and slink off. Rahula, though, when he got his wish didn't give his robe back or slink off.

Like Rahula, we commit ourselves to things - marriage, a career - that look pretty wonderful until we're right in the middle. Suddenly we are very intimate with the hardness of it all, the

work to be done, and we don't feel so good anymore. Can we put aside our ideas and be with the situation just as it is? When things are totally beyond our control, can we single-mindedly continue on, moment by moment, with no thought of leaving? This is setting aside ego, and when we can do it, we live the Buddha's life. At eight years old, Rahula did this.

This does not mean we are saints. Rahula wasn't, either. He developed a habit of lying, and he sometimes wished his father were still a powerful ruler. Like most of us, he wasn't too interested in letting go of his destructive habits, but his father each time showed him a more constructive way, teaching him to use mindfulness and zazen to take care of problems. Again, Rahula showed determination. In one sutra, he is eighteen and, having been corrected by his father, he sits down by the side of the road in zazen, determined to deal with himself. When Shariputra comes along and gives him some further instructions, he accepts and follows them. With his determination, Rahula became a great bodhisattva and a great teacher.

We're in the same boat. We lie, we think about how it would be if we were really the long lost child of a great person and not part of this really dismal family. This is just how we are - we are human - and, like the Buddha did for Rahula, we can kindly correct ourselves.

To make this continuous single-minded effort is to live the Buddha's life and realize the Buddha's peace. It's very simple, gentle, and supremely difficult.

*For the full story see *The Book of the Discipline*. I.B Horner (trans.), Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2001.

Small Practice

by Ellen Wetzel

My life is not always so peaceful. It is far from the quiet and serenity that I imagine would be conducive to what I think of as Big Practice. While I do not have Big Practice, I am sustained by my small practice.

There was a time when I became discouraged because all I had was my small practice, and I was tempted to give it all up (Big Practice or no practice!). I seemed to be unable to sit zazen more than occasionally or make it to Zen Center on Sundays or even during the week, and all I could seem to manage was to read a few pages at night in one of my Zen books. This felt like no practice whatsoever, and I began to believe that, although I was drawn to and even in some way protected by the dharma, I was somehow completely lacking in ability or aptitude for Zen practice. I was just not cut out for Big Practice.

Fortunately, and perhaps not coincidentally, right around that time I came across a sentence in a book (and to this day I can't remember which one) that said something to the effect that if you can't sit for forty minutes, sit for however long you are able - even ten minutes is beneficial. If you can't sit every morning and every night, sit when you can. Even small effort

has great merit. This simple truth, while probably obvious to most, was a revelation to me and has completely changed the way I view my practice. This brief statement gave me permission to accept myself and my small practice, and it was a great relief. I didn't have to give up just because I couldn't meet some self-imposed standard. Some effort, however small, was better than no effort. Small practice was better than no practice!

What do I mean by small practice? Small practice means making an effort to sit, even for ten minutes, and if I can't sit, just accepting the reality of that, knowing that not sitting is not permanent. It means every so often during the day looking at the little dharma reminders (as I call them) in my home and my office and remembering to breathe in and out and be aware of just this moment. It means seeing the interrelationships among things and being thankful for life as it is (things just as they are), in spite of not always getting what I want and instead getting what I need.

When I am feeling hurt or betrayed, small practice means remembering to stop and look within before reacting, to understand what is underneath this painful and very unpleasant feeling. Am I grasping at something or someone? Am I clinging to ideas that are not helpful? Can I understand what might be going on for the other person, that they might be suffering also and for different reasons? It means putting even a moment's space between thought and deed to give myself a better chance of really being right there and taking the next step, right action. Sometimes it means saying or doing something I would rather not say or do, and at other times it means not saying or doing that which I very much want to. Sometimes I tell the guys next door to turn down their really loud music, and sometimes I let it go and just sit with it anyway! Always it means to remember to do no harm.

Although simple, small practice isn't so easy. I don't always remember even my small practice, and at those times I can get lost in reaction and harmful thoughts and actions. In those moments I cause suffering for myself and others. Even small practice seems to require great effort. Every situation, every moment, is new. Everything is always changing! To make the effort to refrain from all evil, to practice all that is good, to purify my mind, is the work of a lifetime, and maybe even more. However, the more I practice in this small way, the more I am protected, guided and nourished by Buddha, dharma and sangha. And maybe there isn't small practice and big practice. Maybe there is just practice, which is living every moment. And, as Katagiri Roshi said, we just take the next step.

Book Review

by Tim Macejak

Around once a year or so I pick up and read from a book that I first came upon back when I was in high school. I saw it on the shelf at a library, as the title caught my attention. It's called, *This Book Needs No Title* by Raymond Smullyan. Smullyan is a Taoist, humorist, and mathematician who leaves out the mathematics in this book of short humorous essays and observations. Several of his essays have stuck with me for years.

I would like to share his final essay with you - a lengthier piece, around 30 pages or so, entitled, "The Planet Without Laughter." It is a short story about, as you may have guessed, a planet where humor is unknown. That is, except for some people known as Laugh Masters, who set up Laugh Monasteries and attempt to get people to "see" laughter. Alas, so many students keep trying to arrive at laughter and humor through intellectual analysis and study. Others try to achieve a sense of humor through morality. Even worse, some try to attain realization through memorization of jokes and mimicking laughter.

The story documents the history of the planet, from The Ancient Period to the Middle Period to the Modern Period, and how the inhabitants react to the laughers and the effect the laughers have on their society. God's role in all this is humorously established, as is that of the psychiatrists - who view laughing as a psychosis and treat it with a horrible drug called "laughazone." What will be the final fate of the laughers and Laugh Masters? Alas, you must purchase the book to find out.

Poems

by Rob Osterman

Yeah-whole bunch of 'em out there
Lounging around in that forest-
Show up every year about this time-
Call it the Rainy Season-
I don't know-sit around-play cards
Drink some wine-I suppose
Come in here wanting me to feed 'em-well, I don't
Traipse around town with their hands out
Their leader? Guy they call Boohi-or Buddy-
Something like that-
Supposed to be a duke-
Lives out there with his servant-
Not a care in the world

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Who gave you a special dispensation  
To traverse the Universe-  
What power poured into your eyes  
The sight of the stratosphere?

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### **SESSHIN**

March 21-23

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.

Join us for all or part of sesshin. Please sign up by March 14th to assure a place. Out of town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

To register or get details, contact us

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### **Zen Center Library**

Zen Center has a growing collection of books and periodicals located in the library on the second floor. Everyone is welcome to come and browse, study in the library and check out materials. The library is a wonderful space, and we hope many of you will pay a visit and take advantage of this resource.

If you have books or other materials of interest that you would like to donate to the library, please contact Zuiko Redding.

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### **Sangha News**

The annual meeting of Zen Center's Board of Directors will be held on April 13th. The meeting will be held after morning zazen and dharma talk. All are welcome to attend.

There will be two work days, May 31 and June 21, to begin the preparation work for painting the house, which will be done over the summer. More details will be forthcoming in the April newsletter.

We encourage your contributions of articles, poetry, book reviews, art work, and examples of how you incorporate your practice into your daily life. For more information or to submit material for inclusion in the newsletter, please contact Ellen Wetzel at ERW400@aol.com.

### **Dogen's Zazen: Study and Practice**

On Saturday, April 19, we will offer a day of study and practice centered on some of Dogen's writings about zazen. Zuiko will discuss "Fukanzazengi," Dogen's basic instructions on zazen, and "Zazengi," another shorter writing included in Dogen's collection of essays, Shobogenzo. Lecture and discussion periods will be interspersed with zazen so that we can practice, as well as study. We will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. Copies of the texts will be provided and a vegetarian lunch will be served. The fee will be \$20 for non-members and \$10

for members. Please contact Zuiko if you have questions or are interested in attending.

## 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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[Click here to return to Newsletter index](#)

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[Resident Teacher](#)

[Daily schedule](#)

[Activities](#)



[Home](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Calendar of events](#)

[Contact information](#)

[Resources](#)