

Cedar Rapids Zen Center

Newsletter

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Just Moving

By Zuiko Redding

Today the sun is shining for the first time in a long time. In this season my spirits often decline and I welcome things that lift them. I know my wilted morale comes from the cold, short days, the difficulty of getting around in snow and ice and the unpredictable weather. The only solution is to wait for spring but still I look for quick fixes - maybe another cup of tea, calling a friend, a nice warm thing to eat. Knowing nothing will work for long, I still try, laughing at the ridiculousness of my efforts.

We're always hunting quick, easy answers, aren't we? We want shortcuts to being good human beings, to ending our dissatisfaction. We want to be wise and compassionate, do the right thing, be comfortable. We latch onto simple formulas we hope will provide us clear answers and simple patterns to follow, and will - hopefully - always work. That way we won't have to ask questions or be unsure. We just apply the formula and do what it tells us to do.

Even though we may know the pitfalls, simple answers are seductive, promising dependable results for little effort. In college a friend and I were comparing notes on what we'd studied for an exam. I mentioned that I'd read the chapter about a particular social theorist. "Oh, I didn't read that. Tell me about it," my friend asked. I began to summarize ideas and contributions, and he interrupted gently, "That's all very complicated. Just tell me - is he a good guy or a bad guy?" So much easier, isn't it - just "good" or "bad?" This way, we immediately know what to say, what to do.

Life refuses to stay classified, though. We think, "If I follow the precepts, I'll lead a moral life." Then we watch as the precept of not killing collides with the reality that if people are to live, malaria mosquitoes must die. "Well," we decide, "I can just act with compassion for others." Then we come face to face with how to deal with someone who has abused our trust. Is it compassionate to be accepting and hope for the best or is it compassionate to point out that lack of integrity is not a trait that's appropriate in a friend?

Another attractive feature of simple answers is that they often feel like right answers. We forget that there are no right answers in life. No wrong ones, either. Just this answer - the one I have in this moment. We feel more secure with a "right" answer than with a provisional answer. "No right or wrong answers" means we have to be present with what's happening,

beyond our ideas. We have to ask what is true here, not taking sides, not believing simple answers. If we are truly present, we will realize that we can never know for certain the right answer at any time.

Just finding an answer isn't easy. Life is messy and complicated and no matter how hard we try, our quick fixes don't work. In order to find answers, we must drop our ideas and exercise our awareness, wake up. Answers lie in the middle of life just as it is.

The Japanese poet Mitsuo Aida says in his poem, "For M"

Well anyway,
It's just a matter of making yourself move, you know.
To move and act in the here and now.
Is all there really is.

If you make yourself move,
Actual answers will appear.
Whether or not the answers you find
Are those you expected
Is irrelevant.
You see,
By making yourself move,
Answers will naturally make themselves known to you.

The bottom line of the matter is --
The only one who can make you move
Is you.

When we drop our easy answers and quick formula and simply move in the middle of our lives just as they are, answers will come. They won't be as neat as we'd hoped for, or as clear, but they will be more real. They might not be the ones we expected or the ones we might like, but they will be more genuine. The only one who can make these answers appear is ourselves, through our practice in daily life. When we move and act, awake in this moment, answers come up.

They won't be right or wrong, good or bad. They will just be. Life doesn't have right answers any more than a mountain stream has a right or wrong way to make its cold way down a winter mountain. Its path is an ongoing conversation among water, rocks, tree roots, fish, beavers. Today it goes one way, tomorrow a slightly different way. In ten years it's completely changed.

Our lives, like cold clear mountain streams among ancient trees, are constantly flowing. Formulas that work today may be useless tomorrow. The only one who can find the path is us, living wholeheartedly in the midst of our lives with clear eyes.

The Issue of a Teacher

By Kristin Lenertz

I have had many teachers in my life: both the kind you might want to send cards to and the kind that you might rather run a mile than remember.

In terms of academics, I know I've always learned best when there was a teacher in front of the classroom teaching and helping to clarify confusing points. In terms of spiritual teaching, however, I had for a number of years rejected all external teachers in favor of the quieter voices of teachers that I found in books and the evaluative voice in my own head.

I began to consider again the issue of having a relationship with a teacher in spring 2002 after I participated in a one-day sitting in Auburn, Alabama that was led by a visiting Zen teacher. I considered the issue slowly and gently for more than a year. I simply asked the question, "Do I need a teacher?" and I let the thought simmer in the back of my mind like a pot of pear butter cooking itself down. After a couple of weeks, the first response appeared.

"Don't need no stinkin' teacher." I was a bit surprised. "Why?" I asked. I lived with that thought for a couple of months, inviting more details. A response eventually emerged. "I don't want a teacher to tell me what to do or how to think or how to be." I wanted to nod my head. There had definitely been a time in my life when those were exactly what I had wanted. I had wanted someone, anyone, to fix my life for me. I am very thankful that I never found someone who would do that, and I am especially thankful that I didn't find someone to marry during that period. Instead, I had to eventually learn how to take responsibility for my self, my problems, and "how I should be."

The next thought that came was, "I don't think I can be a good student anymore." Again, I was surprised. "Why?" I asked. "Because I no longer want to please a teacher to receive validation to feel good about myself." Again, I just lived with this thought. Finally I asked, "Is pleasing a teacher to receive validation the only way to be a good student? Aren't there people in the world who pay attention to their teachers and seek to learn but who don't do it out of a desire to please them and receive a reward?" I wondered, "In what other way can I relate to a teacher?"

I began making trips to Cedar Rapids about the time I was considering these questions. I met a teacher, and I met several individuals who were accustomed to associating with her. Perhaps she found me tense and closed initially. In truth, I was uneasy and uncertain. I wondered, will this person let me be who I need to be? Yes. I continued to return, and I continued to ponder my last question. What am I capable of as a student?

After weeks of practice with a teacher and with others, finding myself able to remain separate and independent at the same time that I am involved and interacting, I think I might have an answer. First, I can simply pay attention. Second, when interacting with a teacher (or anyone else for that matter), I can try to be respectful. I can pay attention not only out of a desire to

find something new but also out of a respect for the other individual's effort, experience, and knowledge. This doesn't mean that I will faithfully accept what a teacher teaches, but I can commit myself to careful consideration of what is presented.

I think this is what I am capable of. Maybe it can be enough. Sometimes, I think I might be learning something.

SESSHIN

March 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 March 12 to assure a place. Out-of-town people are welcome to stay at Zen Center.

To register or get details, contact us:

P.O. Box 863, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406
phone: (319) 247-5986
email: crzc@avalon.net

Great Sky Sesshin Mark Your Calendar

Cedar Rapids Zen Center and Milwaukee Zen Center are collaborating to offer a joint sesshin for sanghas around the Midwest at Hokyoji from August 20 through 27, 2005. Teachers will include Sevan Ross of Chicago Zen Center, Genmyo Smith of Prairie Zen Center in Illinois, Rosan Yoshida of Missouri Zen Center, Dokai Georges from Hokyoji, Tonen O'Connor of Milwaukee Zen Center and Zuiko. Each will be giving dharma talks and doing daily practice with sesshin participants.

Further details will be available in our April newsletter and on our web site in the spring. Meanwhile, mark your calendar for this important event.

Thank you

Your gifts of practice, material support and skills have made the Dharma available to the people of Cedar Rapids and its surrounding communities during the past year. All who have felt the quiet peace of the zendo owe you a debt of gratitude.

Rev. Gengo Akiba
David and Ruth Ard
Margaret Baldwin
Christa Brusen-Gomez
Rev. Tim Burkett
Robert and Nittaya Burnham
Amy Carr
Martin Carver
Richard Chandler
Stacey Concannon
Susan Dalton
Jeffrey Denburg
John Denny
Gerald Donaldson
Paula Duvall
James Eich
Mary Lou Emery
Brandi Farish
Mark Ferrera
Nancy Footner
Kristine Shingo Fretheim
Nancy Geiger
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Stephen Greif
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Marli Haddy
Leslie Hankins
David and Beverly Hannon
Julie Hannon
Lisa Hannon
Andrew Hansen
Sharon Hays
Tom Hess
Larry and Chimi Higa
Jonna Higgins-Freese
Joyce Hertz
Will Holcomb and Carol Corey
Ben, Francine & Emmalee Hunnicutt
Michael Jamosky
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Gail Koch
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Helen Kudos
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Rev. Ryoten Mary Lehmann
Kristin Lenertz
Tom Linehan
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Kari Alice Lynn
William Maakestad & Jean Wolf
Al and Elaine Macejak
Timothy Macejak
Susan Martinelli-Fernandez
Kalen McAllister
Mary McCulley
Joe and Linda Michaud
Donovan and Ikuko Miller
Thomas Miller & Lynne Steiner
Milwaukee Zen Center
Rev. Shoten Mizumachi
Rev. Genyu Mori
Joseph Molleur
Yayoi Teramoto Moreland
Paul Mundschenk
Rev. Gakudo Nakamura
Rev. Egyoku Wendy Nakao
Rev. Shinsho Narasaki
Rev. Tsugen Narasaki
Rev. Tonen O'Connor
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Shirley Pike and Mike Hemmingson
Gregory Plack
Janet Powell
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Tom Rauschke and Kaaren Wiken
Rev. Phoebe Reinhart
Brian and Mary Reynolds
Laura Rigal
James Robinson
Deborah Rogers
David Ross
Rev. Hokan Saito
Rev. Chimyo Sato
Annie Servin & Michael Crowley

Richard and Diana Sloan
Tom Sushak and Reiko Demura
Jack Terndrup
Thai Flavors
Julie Watts
Ellen Wetzel
Rev. Shoken Winecoff
Jeff Wright
Rev. Daiken Yoshitani
Charles and Victoria Zelnick

Annual Meeting

We will be holding our annual meeting on Sunday, April 17. at 10:00 a.m. This is the meeting at which we decide the direction for our sangha during the next year, and your input is important. We hope to see you there.

If you have items for the agenda or issues you would like to see discussed, please contact Tim Macejak at tmace@netzero.net or (319) 462-4571.

Buddha's Birthday

This year we will be celebrating Buddha's birthday at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, April 10. Children are especially invited to participate

A ceremony honoring the Buddha's birth will follow regular morning zazen. We will chant the Heart Sutra and pour sweet tea over the figure of the baby Buddha. Tea and cake will be served afterward.

This is a holiday especially for children - a birthday party for the baby Buddha. Please feel free to arrive after zazen if you wish. Zazen ends at 9:40 a.m.

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