

# Cedar Rapids Zen Center

## Newsletter

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### "Dankas Are Paying for Us"

by Zuiko Redding

One winter evening shortly after I was ordained at Zuioji, I left the light on in my room as I scuttled off in a hurry to retrieve something from the Buddha Hall. Halfway to my destination, I heard an elder dharma brother: "Zuiko-san! The light's on in your room. It's a waste of our donations." I returned and turned out the light, and I didn't forget again. I was reminded of this incident recently by an American friend's story. She participates in practice periods at the temple of a mutual friend in Japan. Whenever our Japanese friend saw something going to waste, he would say quietly, "Dankas are paying for us." "Danka" are member families of a Japanese temple - our friend Anglicized it by adding a final "s." Danka offerings of time, money and goods provide for the temple, and our friend wanted to honor their donations by not wasting them.

In America, also, Buddhist temples exist because of generous gifts of time, money and goods. In reality, these contributions are made to the dharma, not to the teacher or the temple. They come from people who could have used them for many other things, sometimes from people who can ill afford them. Donors give because of their faith in us and our practice. They trust us to use their gifts carefully and wisely in maintaining the dharma and making it available to all beings.

This is not just true for temple life. We often think we have money or possessions or love because we did something to deserve them, or because we created them, but this is not the case. Everything we have is ultimately given to us by earth, sun, water, and other beings. This goes for our bodies and spirits, too. I can say I am writing this article, but where did I get the ideas I put in it and the strength and health to write with? The whole universe is our "dankas" who are paying for us.

So, my friend, where does that leave us? Knowing that nothing is ours, we receive everything as gift. We regard each thing that comes into our lives, even air and water, with gratitude and use it wholeheartedly. That goes also for the things we didn't want in the first place - the really strange scarf from the elderly aunt, the mean remark from the spouse. Even our deaths. Each is a gift from the universe. How can I use this, not waste it?

Each person gives what they can, and each donation is a donation of that person's spirit. Our refusal of others' gifts kills their spirits. We can see this killing when we pay attention. It's in

the crestfallen feeling we have when we offer a friend some of our ice cream and hear, "No, thanks. I'm on a diet." Or maybe we notice the disappointment of someone whose offering we refuse. If the gift is something we truly cannot use, we can accept it, then decide how best to use it.

We can also put aside our ideas - our usual comparing and judging. In January at Shogoji, we went out nearly every day to do takuhatsu - begging. We walked in the cold in straw sandals, holding our bowls out for donations. Takuhatsu money provided about ninety percent of our daily needs, so this was important activity. When we received something, we simply received it, whether it was five yen or a thousand yen or a bag of oranges. Each thing got an equal welcome. Upon our return to the temple, we immediately counted the donations. When we wrote the day's total in the ledger, we didn't compare it with other days and cheer or complain. If our donations were small, we just ate more daikon and taro. "Dankas" gave what they could and we existed on it.

This is not limited to friends and relatives and the things we usually consider as gifts. Air, food, our environment, good health, a job, the people around us - all are gifts. We often think of these things as just there, but they are all donations to support our lives. It's good to remember that "dankas are paying for us" as we breathe and remember not to waste that air. This spirit of gratitude and care is the source of contentment and joy.

Receiving with gratitude and using whatever we receive with care is part of "dana paramita," the perfection of giving, one of the Buddha's most important teachings. In reality there is no giver, receiver and gift. They are all one. In reality, we are all being given life and sustenance in each moment in universal dana paramita. Let us honor the spirits of the "dankas" that contribute to our lives and use their contributions in ways that honor their spirits and their gifts.

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### **Now I've Gone and Done It**

by Brian Reynolds

Well, I'm officially Buddhist now, got my new name "Anko," "tranquil light" or "peaceful light." "Anko" is also a very nice sweet red bean paste used in Japanese pastries. If ever I get too full

of myself I can just think about the jingle, "With a name like Smuckers you've got to be good.."

I got my paper that tells who my spiritual ancestors are - the document of my pedigree.

I sewed my blue rakusu and learned, in the process, how mindful I really am not as each misplacement, each mis-stitch, each wandering moment, was all too real for all to see. Once I finished it, I had to give it up until the ceremony, when I got it back. I said "Yes I will" together with the rest of the sangha when asked if I would abide by the Ten Grave Precepts. I've also found that the bit of dun-lop stomach I've got is actually pretty useful as the rakusu

can be tucked in to prevent it from flopping about when doing full bows.

My wife doesn't really get it, but figures it's cheaper than wine, women and song so if this is a mid-life crisis it could be a lot worse. At least I think that's what she thinks, but then I know for a fact that she doesn't know what I'm thinking so I really shouldn't do her thinking for her.

So, having acknowledged Buddha as a wise and true teacher, the Dharma as his teaching, and the Sangha as those fellow travelers on the path who, like good travelers and not tourists, value the journey as much as the destination, I guess I'm officially not a skeptical Buddhist anymore, if I ever was.

When I was 20 and 30, everything I learned in school was bullshit, old, tired, history, without value in that modern world. Now that I'm seeing 60 roll over on the odometer of life I realize all that is old is new again. I suppose you can call me a fundamentalist, although that has a really bad flavor in these days of the Ten Commandments being dropped on stem cell research labs and the ultimate guided weapons lurking in subways, buses, and under every bed. But for me the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Ten Grave Precepts form an interesting place to stand and see the world, my life and my place in the world.

Our whole life is practice, every step we take is part of our journey on the path of life; standing in line at the check-out counter no less so than sitting in zazen. Harder in the check-out line though, harder still when you get cut off in traffic. I hope, no, I believe, that now I'll walk more steps forward and fewer in confused circles as I've got some good and true markers along this path of life. Our reality is born with us and will die with us but it's up to each of us to make the most out of what we are given, where we are, what choices we get to make. As the ice cream vendor said when he took the monk's money and didn't return any, "Change comes from within."

Ceremonies don't change people, they just mark an event in time. Being purified with a pine branch is symbolic, nothing more. Repenting of past and harmful karma doesn't help, doesn't keep you free from doing bad things to yourself and others in the future. But karma does give a new motivation for mindfulness, awareness of where you are, measured against the mileposts that have been given, and received. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; in accepting the Buddha's precepts, I hear Jesus' words with new meaning. A new job for monkey mind; watch me and tell me where I am and how I'm doing. But now I have a rakusu to hang around my neck, a reminder of a ceremony in which vows were taken, intentions clearly stated, sincere repentance made, the Way made clear. Only a ceremony, nothing more. Only a ceremony, nothing less.

Or so it seems to me, of course.

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SESSHIN

March 17 - 19

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 10 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

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### **Great Sky Sesshin**

Those of you who missed Great Sky sesshin last year may be happy to know that we'll be doing it again this year. This year's dates are August 12 - 19, and it will again be at Hokyoji, the retreat center in southeastern Minnesota owned by Minnesota Zen Center.

The daily schedule will include zazen, dharma talks, services, oryoki meals and work.

Accommodations are very simple, ranging from bunk-beds to the zendo floor to camping on the grounds in one's own tent.. Showers and outdoor toilets are available.

Participation is limited to 24 people. Fees are \$280 for a bunk bed or \$230 for zendo accommodations or camping.

For registration forms and further information, go to [www.milwaukeezencenter.org](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org) or call Milwaukee Zen Center at (414) 963-0526 or Cedar Rapids Zen Center at (319) 247-5986.

### **News Notes**

Annual meeting will be held on Sunday, April 30 at 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon. There will be a potluck afterward. This is the meeting at which we discuss Zen Center's goals and plan for the future. We encourage your attendance.

Buddha's Birthday will be celebrated on Sunday, April 9. There will be a special ceremony followed by cake and tea. Children are especially welcome.

Giving with no expectation of reward, the merit of our generosity to the dharma is vast and subtle. Because of your gifts, people can come to sit each week. If you've been a contributor and your name is not included here, please accept our apology along with our gratitude.

Matthew Alles

Carol Anderson  
Margaret Baldwin  
Deborah Barrett  
Revs. Hogen and Chozen Bays  
Christa Brusen-Gomez  
Robert and Nittaya Burnham  
Alexandra and David Carey  
Martin Carver  
Amy Carr  
Courtney Cook  
Susan Dalton  
Jeff Denburg  
John Denny  
Paula Duvall  
James Eich  
Mary Lou Emery  
Mark Ferrara  
Nancy Footner  
Penny Freeman  
Mark Friedman  
Kristine Shingo Fretheim  
Rev. Dokai Georgesen  
Cleve Gilbert  
Joseph Givvin  
Linda Graves  
Curt and Cynthia Gunther  
Douglas Gustafson  
Marli Haddy  
Leslie Hankins  
David and Beverly Hannon  
Joseph and Miriam Hannon  
Julie Hannon  
Lisa Hannon  
Christopher Heald  
Chimi and Larry Higa  
Jonna and Eric Higgins-Freese  
Carl Hultman and Rev. Susan Nelson  
Ben, Francine & Emmalee Hunnicutt  
Michael Jamosky  
Rachael Kane  
Rev. Hoko Janice Karnegis  
Joel Katcher  
Sandy Kingchan  
Tim Knepper  
Rev. Fudo and Barbara Koppang  
Jack Kroeck

Helen Kudos  
Kim Lapakko  
William Learn  
Rev. Ryoten Mary Lehmann  
Kristin Lenertz  
Thomas Linehan  
Roger Lips  
William Maakestad & Jean Wolf  
Timothy and Theresa Macejak  
Lisa Marr  
Susan Martinelli-Fernandez  
Rhiannon Mayes  
Mary McCulley  
Robert and Louise McMaster  
Lynn Mennenga  
Joe and Linda Michaud  
Jim O'Neal  
Henry Panowitsch  
Donovan and Ikuko Miller  
Yayoi Teramoto Moreland  
Molaan Mosell  
Rev. Tonen O'Connor  
Joey O  
Kyaw Kyaw Oo and Kyi Kyi Aye  
Bob Osterman  
Beth Parker  
Judith Pedersen-Benn & David Benn  
Cathy Penn  
Shirley Pike  
Gregory Plack  
David Ray  
Rev. Eido Phoebe Reinhart  
Daniel J. Retoff  
Brian Reynolds  
Laura Rigal  
Deborah Rogers  
Kathy Schumacher  
Annie Servin & Michael Crowley  
Joanne Shaver  
Richard and Diana Sloan  
Christopher Spinler  
Thomas Miller & Lynne Steiner  
Jim Summers  
Scott Temple  
Ellen Wetzel  
Rev. Shoken Winecoff

Jeff Wright and Tracey Roberts  
Charles and Victoria Zelnick

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