



OF CATS AND COMICS

I've been thinking a good deal of late about the Buddha's Second Noble Truth. You know, the one that says we suffer due to our propensity to cling (to what we have) and crave (what we don't have). Both of these tendencies bring us into conflict with the impermanence of the world and our inability to possess either the things of this world or life itself.

If the Buddha's teachings of impermanence and interdependence and the absence of permanent self-being represent a true vision of the world, why do we continue to cling and crave? What is it we



don't see? The Buddha would say that we can't see beyond our own delusory thinking, beyond that insistent whisper in our head that suggests that if we only hang on tightly enough or want fiercely enough, our desires to have and to hold will be answered. It is the great barrier of our own illusions that stands between us and our release from the Noble Truth of Clinging and Craving.

As some of you may know, I have a cat. Actually, two cats, but the cat in question here is a sweet tabby named Annie. She is affectionate and very smart and we've lived together for ten years now. Recently, Annie became prey to a delusion to which she clings fiercely. It began when she noticed that the sunlight on my wrist watch throws little moving circles of light onto the wall. This was fun and she became enamored of the game. Then I got new glasses and moved into a new spot on the couch to be

closer to both the radiator and the lamp. The new glasses also throw a brief, scintillating flash of light on the couch to my right, where it appears to dance over the cream-colored surface.

Annie reacted immediately. Perched on the coffee table with the glare of one obsessed, she regarded the light and shadow with fixation. Before I realized the source of her obsession I was inclined to think she'd gone nuts. Finally she worked up the courage to move to the couch and attempt to catch the moving light and shadow. You can't catch light and shadow, but Annie doesn't know that. She pounces again and again, rucking up the couch cover in her frustration. No matter how still I sit or how I hold my book, I cannot help throwing a reflection. And there we are, bound up in her illusion that there is something menacing which must be caught and my determination that she

learn that it's nothing.

And what has she learned? That her nemesis only appears on the couch when I sit down to read. Otherwise she sleeps contentedly on the very spot sometimes inhabited by her demon. But when I approach the couch to sit down, she comes running from wherever she may be to leap to attention beside me, positive that this time she'll capture it. As I become frustrated with her behavior, I become noisier and noisier in my attempts to dissuade her and to chase her from the couch. But she perseveres, knowing that I am wrong and she is right.

Her ultimate cat happiness depends on catching what she believes is there. Just so, we develop powerful beliefs that our happiness will result from things just as illusory as her spot of light. The problem of course lies with the impermanence of things in contrast to our fierce illusion that they

can bring long-lasting happiness, and our refusal to understand that we cannot keep them.

There is another side to this, as well. We are influenced by the delusive thinking of others, of our friends, our cohorts, and the advertising media. The story of the Buddha's encounter with the Kalamas is instructive. When he encountered these villagers they asked him to explain what was so wonderful about his teachings and he instructed them to live in clarity, not embracing something as true because others said so; in fact, not even if he said so. He instructed them to examine things

deeply in their own hearts before embracing them. But poor Annie, like the rest of us, is not examining the situation deeply, merely impulsively responding. To act in genuine accord with the Buddha's admonition, we must look more closely than is generally our habit.

And we need to persevere in the face of mass delusions, to realize that the emperor is wearing no clothes even when others say he's bedecked with finery. A recent strip in the Doonesbury comics series thrusts this dilemma before the character whose recovery

we have been following since his injury in Iraq. In this strip, we see him facing a military doctor for evaluation of his progress. The doctor asks him to handle some wooden blocks and then exclaims delightedly about both his amazing fine motor skills and the lifelike nature of his prosthetic hand. The response is: "That's because I'm missing my LEG, not my hand." "No, no. It says here that you're missing your hand." "But I'm obviously NOT!" (accompanied by desperate waving of hands.) And the response is, "Who am I to going to believe? – You or

the Army?"

My cat is slowly coming to realize that catching a spot of light is an exercise in futility and liberating herself from that delusion. The question for us is: do we believe only what we wish to believe or can we see the hands waving at us?

In this New Year, let us resolve to look very, very closely at our most cherished illusions, remembering that the clenched fist can receive nothing, whereas the open hand may fill with surprising happiness.

–Tonen O'Connor

*Naked tree-branches
painting the evening moon red*

Ah! cicadas sing!

–Alex Carlson



THE CLARITY OF DUALISM

While sitting in my room one clear morning, I was enjoying the sunlight coming into the room. In the sun's ray I saw dust flying across it. After the dust passed through the sunlight, it disappeared. I couldn't see the dust unless it was passing through the light. Then it hit me: the dust needed the light in order for me to see it. The light and the dust at that very moment were one in the same, no light, no dust. We go through life giving everything a label

without realizing the impact of the separation that we are assigning to these objects. For example, without up and down, we could never climb to the top of a cliff, or see its bottom. A bowl of soup cannot exist without the bowl or the soup. A shadow would never be without the light, thus the light is not separate from the shadow. We can also take two opposites like a man and a woman: when they wed, they are united as one, but they are still a man and a woman.

I hope that I didn't lose you in all this.

I'm not sure if I made my point or missed it completely. But my understanding is that dualism is really one thing and can't be anything but that.

–Raul Toun Jimenez

Oshkosh Correctional Institution

Editor's Comment:
Interdependence is the most basic teaching of the Buddha. This means that while each thing has its distinctive individuality, each thing is also "not two," but rather together with all things in interdependence. Thanks for the perception, Raul.

HAPPENINGS

Buddhist Conversations: the next event in this ongoing series will take place at the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee, 2126 E. Locust St. from 4:00-6:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 29. The topic will be "Foundations of our Buddhist Practice." Representatives of the Mindfulness Community, Shambala Center, Great Lake Zen Center, Phouc Hau Buddhist Temple, Milwaukee Zen Center and the Tender Shoot of Joy Sangha will discuss the origins of their practice tradition, how it came to the U.S. and what it is today. A social time will follow with tea and cookies. Pot luck contributions are welcome.

Two-day Sittings:

Saturday, January 15 and Sunday, January 16
Saturday, February 19 and Sunday, February 20
Everyone is welcome at these days, joining us for any portion of the practice. For details of the schedule, see our web site: www.milwaukeezencenter.org or call the Zen Center at (414)963-0526.

Our prison sangha is expanding. This month Peter Johnson will begin visits to New Lisbon Correctional Institution, adding the practice there to the ongoing monthly visits that Tonen makes to Green Bay Correctional, Oshkosh Correctional, Waupun Correctional, Dodge Correctional, Fox Lake Correctional, Redgranite Correctional, Racine Correctional and the Wisconsin Secure Program Facility in Boscobel. Note: Since New Lisbon is a new facility, they are in desperate need of books of all kinds for their library. Contributions of books (no magazines, nudity or martial arts materials) may be sent directly to Library, New Lisbon Correctional Institution, 2000 Progress Rd. New Lisbon, WI 53950. Please DO NOT send the books to the Zen Center, but ship them directly to the prison, with a note stating that they are a contribution. Anything you can do will be deeply appreciated.

The **New Year** was welcomed in with our traditional renewal of vows following zazen on New Year's eve, as well as a social gathering, and on

New Year's Day with the annual Meditation for Peace, sponsored by the local Buddhist Peace Fellowship and this year hosted by Phouc Hau Buddhist Temple.

A special thank you to **Ben Ellingson** for helping dig the Zen Center out after the first snowstorm of the winter.

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

January

15 & 16 Two-day sitting
29 Buddhist conversations series 4:00-6:00 p.m. Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee 1611 E. Locust St.

February

2 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
19 & 20 Two-day sitting

March

2 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
12 Annual Meeting, no study class
19 & 20 Two-day sitting

April

6 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
9 Buddha's Birthday celebration during morning service
16 & 17 Two-day sitting
30 Buddhist conversations series 4:00-6:00 p.m. Great Lake Zen Center 826 E. Locust St.

To see the entire 2005 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Milwaukee Zen Center

2825 N. Stowell Ave. Milwaukee WI 53211-3775

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Wed., Thurs., Fri.

6:15 am Zazen
(Zen sitting)
6:55 am Kinhin
(Zen walking)
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 end of practice

6:30 pm Zazen
7:10 pm Kinhin
7:20 pm Zazen

Saturday

6:15 am Zazen
6:55 am Kinhin
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 breakfast, oryoki
8:25 work period
9:15 break, coffee & tea
9:30 study class*
10:30 end of practice
**except on all-day sitting days*

Introduction to Zen

An informal presentation on Buddhism and Zen, followed by instruction in zen sitting, tea and discussion.
6:30-8:30 p.m.–first Wednesday each month.

Zen sitting instruction and private interview available by appointment. Call 963-0526.

Contact information

For messages: **Phone:** (414) 963-0526
Fax: (414) 963-0517 **E-mail:** kokyo-an@earthlink.net

For information and schedules: www.milwaukeezencenter.org

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