



The Contentment of the Bodhisattva

In our last Newsletter we presented Tozen Akiyama's article *Let Us Be Contented With Whatever We Have and Whatever Condition We Are In*. I am in deep agreement with its position that we suffer because we chase after an idealized condition, thinking that we need "more". Yet I hope that this will not be misinterpreted as passive acceptance of a world defiled by the suffering of millions. To be content with my own condition does not imply that I am content with how things are for others or in the world at large. On the contrary, being contented with my own condition frees up my energy for working to reduce suffering among the beings with whom I come into daily contact.

To be content means to expand my vision beyond my concern for myself. One of the best ways to forget about my discontent is to think about someone else.

We say, "Take your mind off it." To take our mind off our own discontent is to place that mind somewhere else. When we do, we are moving beyond "I", "me" and "mine" to acknowledge our interdependence with all beings. That sense of connection can give us a powerful sense of having found our place in this web of life, a place we are contented to be.

Toward the end of his article, Tozen says, "Let us be contented with whatever condition we are in and do our best in that condition." This brings up the image of the bodhisattva, who while knowing that the condition of all existence, including his own, is that it is merely illusory, nevertheless vows to do his best to help beings in this realm of suffering. In Chapter XV, Paragraph 2 of Edward Conze's translation of *The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines*, the Buddha describes the great vow of the bodhisattva: "We will become a shelter for the

world, a refuge, the place of rest, the final relief, islands, lights and leaders of the world. We will win full enlightenment, and become the resort of the world."

Wonderful, we say, but I could never do that! Yet, if not us, then who will be bodhisattvas? Let's not dismiss the idea but instead examine how it might play out in our everyday life. After all, everyday life is for each one of us truly the world, the only world that we will ever inhabit.

"We will become a shelter for the world."

The roof of our home physically shelters us, our family and our friends, yet we must be sure that it also extends over them in the spiritual sense of love and care. Then, too, we can extend our compassion to those homeless both in body and spirit, beginning by understanding that they, too, are human and acknowledging their need, sharing with them what we can. To those

who ask sincerely, we can provide the shelter of the Buddha's teachings that relieve suffering.

"A refuge"

When we listen with attention to our children, our friends, the checker at the supermarket, the person beside us on the bus, our wives and husbands, our co-workers, we offer them a refuge, a repository for their opinions, cares and joys. By truly hearing them we are affirming their existence and thus offering refuge from the dark night of anonymity.

"The place of rest, the final relief."

To be at rest is to be accepted completely for who you are. To be able to let go of the strain of maintaining a facade, of feeding an ego that needs to be reassured, this is to be at rest. If we can be content with ourselves, can we also make an effort to be content with others, rather than judging them for what

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we consider to be shortcomings? The word “shortcoming” is in itself interesting, for it functions as a pointer that someone has fallen short of an idealized condition that we imagine would allow us to be content with them. To quote Tozen again, “Any condition is just as it is. It is neither good nor bad.”

“Islands”

An island is solid earth amid the flux of

the seas. It is a place one can depend on, as we can be depended on if we do what we say, if our words and actions are one.

“Lights”

There are many ways to regard this word, as beacons of hope, as lights illuminating the darkness, but I’d like to suggest also the concept of joy. We can be sources of joy, of laughter, of humor that balances out the darkness and of a lightness that counters the heaviness.

And finally, “leaders of the world.”

Whoa, you say, that’s not for me! But in the context of the world that is our life, we can take responsibility for our actions, we can take out the garbage when it needs taking out. We can lead by acknowledging our weaknesses and our failures to live up to our intentions. We can lead by demonstrating to others the peace of being content with whatever condition we’re in.

To be content with our

own condition means that we need never give up, for what happens is just what is, neither success nor failure. Whatever condition we’re in, it is the place from which we acknowledge our interconnectedness with all beings and act upon this knowledge. We vow with the bodhisattvas, “We will win full enlightenment and become the resort of the world,” knowing that to do so begins with being content with each moment, just as it is.

– Tonen O’Connor

Happenings

Longtime member Rev. Bob Koshin Hanson has moved to Neshkoro, WI, and is beginning his service as minister at St. John’s in Saxeville. We hope to still see him occasionally .

Tim Cobb has moved into the larger room on the third floor of the Zen Center, saving the expense of renting his apartment so that he

can realize his goal of taking a one year unpaid sabbatical from his teaching job beginning in June of 2005 to experience concentrated practice at various places around the U.S. Welcome Tim!

The Center has hosted guests over the recent period: Gregg Wendlandt did a three-day residential retreat prior to his move to Crandon, WI, and Tim O’Connell and his daughter Hannah came

down from Appleton for almost two days. We also were pleased to welcome Amy Frankow of Green Bay and Jim Bowker of DePere for weekend practice and the two-day sitting.

This has been a busy period for Tonen, who performed two weddings and a funeral service, taught meditation for the staff of Walker’s Point Youth and Family Service, and made a presentation to a class at Marquette University.

On September 25, the MZC hosted one of the ongoing series of Buddhist Conversations. The topic for this Conversation was vegetarianism and presentations were made by the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee, the Great Lake Zen Center, Shambala Center and the Milwaukee Zen Center.

We extend our wishes to sangha member Fred Rappe for a successful recovery from recent major surgery and look forward to his cheerful presence once again on Friday evenings.



Soto Zen Buddhist Association

In late September Tonen attended the first national meeting of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association, hosted by Great Vow Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon. The mission statement of the SZBA reads: "SZBA exists to preserve and promote the Buddhadharma through the teachings and practice of Soto Zen Buddhism in North America. It facilitates trust, respect, ethical conduct, communication, and education among teachers and sanghas of Soto Zen Buddhist lineages and in the wider community." The current

membership includes 76 full members (dharma transmitted priests) and an equal number of associate members (their ordained students.) 49 members gathered at this meeting, which included a lecture on "Dharma Transmission in Soto Zen in Japan" by Prof. William Bodiford, discussions concerning training Soto Zen priests in the West, lay teachers and transmission in Soto Zen, and the future direction of the SZBA. The highlight was the first Dharma Heritage Ceremony in which Dharma Heritage Candidates are affirmed by Senior Priests, those

who have previously performed either this ceremony or zuise (haito) in Japan. This first occasion was unique, in that the majority of the participants were candidates, and the Senior Priests only those who had performed zuise (haito) at Eihei and Sojiji in Japan. Tonen was pleased to serve as a Senior Priest. The ceremony is described as follows: "The Dharma Heritage Ceremony brings Soto priests together in a lineage and tradition that is wider than their own personal lineages and temple lines, and it is a way for the body of Soto Zen priests in North America to collectively affirm new

teachers. In these ways it is like zuise. The ceremony also differs from zuise in several significant ways. The Dharma Heritage Ceremony pays honor not only to Dogen and Keizan Zenji, but to all our ancestors and especially those teachers who founded our lineages in the West, and it emphasizes the sangha of priests acknowledging one another. While zuise is performed at official head monasteries by one or two priests at a time, the Dharma Heritage Ceremony will be performed at SZBA meetings, so it will be a collective ceremony performed periodically."

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

November

- 3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 20 & 21 Two-day sitting
- 25 Closed for Thanksgiving

December

- 3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 3, 4 & 5 Rohatsu Sesshin
- 25 Closed for Christmas
- 31 Zazen, renewal of precepts, party for the New Year

January

- 5 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 15 & 16 Two-day sitting

To see the entire 2004 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Save the Date!!

Rohatsu Sesshin

in celebration of the Buddha's Enlightenment will be held Friday, December 3 through Sunday, December 5. The schedule will be similar to that for the monthly two-day sesshins, with a dharma talk on Saturday and the reciting of important Zen texts at various points throughout. In Rohatsu Sesshin we express gratitude to Shakyamuni Buddha for his Great Awakening. Please join

us for any portion of these three days.

Renewal of Vows for the New Year. On December 31, New Year's Eve, following evening zazen we will hold a brief candle lighting ceremony and renewal of our intention to live a life of harmony in the New Year. The ceremony will be followed by a social gathering. Munchies and beverages will be provided, and pot luck contributions are most welcome.

Milwaukee Zen Center

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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:** tsoc@execpc.com

For information and schedules: www.milwaukeezencenter.org

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