



Dreaming the Dream

I recently had a strange dream, in which I was working with some Zen practitioners who were asked to move into another dream-space where I was to demonstrate Zen questions. The room was arranged with a central open space and a crowded audience on all sides. I stepped into the space and said, "My name is Tonen O'Connor and I'm with the Milwaukee Zen Center." No sooner were the words out of my mouth than a man standing at the side sneered loudly, "So who are you?" Deciding to confront him directly, I said, "Step around front, please, I like to face my hecklers head on." At this, the space was suddenly invaded by people shouting, "What right have you to be here?" I stood as tall as my 5'2" would allow and recited the litany of my experience: lay ordination 1988, priest ordination 1994, dharma transmission 1999, zuike 2000, dendokyoshi 2003. As I shouted this, an ominous silence fell and

I knew I'd made a horrible mistake. Then it hit me: everything that I said was me was in the past! There was no way to say who I was at that very moment. Attempting to describe the present turned it immediately into the past. So in my dream I stood rooted to the spot, shouted "I DON'T KNOW!!!"... and woke up.

Rushing back into the reality of bed sheets, I thought thankfully, "It was only a dream." Then I realized that everything I know in my waking life is also a dream. My naming of things, from bed sheets to geraniums, removes them from their basic suchness, relocating them within the dream of my life.

There is a sentence in Dōgen's Genjōkōan that I have usually hurried past because I didn't really get it. Of course, I cannot begin to pretend to be a Dōgen scholar. Shohaku Okumura said when he was here that it takes years and years of study, a knowledge of both Chinese and medieval Japanese, a deep knowledge of the entirety

of Buddhist philosophy and long practice of zazen to fully understand Dōgen. This is certainly true for Rev. Okumura as a brilliant translator and interpreter of Dōgen. Nevertheless, while it is true that most of us have at best an inadequate foundation and know Dōgen's teachings only in translation, they are the wellspring of Soto Zen and we must seek to find meaning in them for our practice and our life.

To return to the sentence in Genjōkōan, it reads in Kazuaki Tanahashi's translation: "Those who have great realization of delusion are buddhas, those who are greatly deluded about realization are sentient beings." When we realize the dream-like delusion of our manufactured reality, we have seen truth. When we believe that this dream of our life is reality, we are living in the deluded world of sentient beings who name things. Genjōkōan also says: "To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come

forth and experience themselves is awakening." This is the difference between naming and suchness.

So each morning I come from my dreams to the daily life that is itself a dream. Dreaming my life, I yearn toward awakening to that moment of "I don't know" in which the suchness of each thing is revealed. A friend of mine who is fluent in Italian, English and Russian described to me recently that odd moment when the effort of switching languages left him momentarily without any words at all, so that "there is only this thing before you." That is suchness, being awake to the thing itself before our words rush in to once again manufacture the dream, be it Italian, English or Russian.

Realizing the delusion of our dream, let us embrace our lives with what Seung Sahn called "don't know mind," the mind open to all possibilities.

-Tonen O'Connor

Awakened Quietude, Noisy Ego

On February 21 and 22, the MZC welcomed Rev. Shohaku Okumura to our monthly sesshin. Together, we sat zazen, participated in services, prepared meals, practiced oryoki and listened to two Dharma talks on Dogen's "Treasury of the Eye of the True Dharma, Book 28: Getting the Marrow by Doing Obeisance", given by Rev. Okumura.

As a trained orchestral conductor, I make my living as a musician and teacher. Sound is my business. A conductor prepares an orchestra through a series of rehearsals, tending to various aspects of sound including attacks, qualities of sustaining, releases, as well as balance in and between the families of instruments that

comprise an orchestra. The conductor's challenge is to bring the printed musical page to life, using gestures that at once communicate to the musicians information they need to play well together, and which define the leader's personal interpretation of the work. In essence, moving sound around.

There is no more powerful an experience in music than that of the "grand pause": a moment when the composer dictates that all sound cease. Silence can be sublime, even deafening in a way.

Many practitioners, having been exposed to a pop culture view, believe that Zen is both quiet and slow; that if we could just be still and silent enough, long enough, we would bring peace and harmony into

our lives. Perhaps so, but waking to the reality of how things are is a completely different matter.

Zen practice is activity. Our practice together is comprised of many activities: zazen, services, sutra chanting, cooking, meals with oryoki, Dharma talks, private interviews, work periods, all of which require physical motion in space and time. All of these activities produce sound. What of the quality of our relationships with these sounds? Are we awake with them?

For me, one of the most striking elements of practicing with Rev. Okumura was his awakened quietude, his deep personal experience of the interdependence of all things, his ability to let go of body and mind, the selfless way he engaged whole heartedly from the beginning to end of each of his tasks. As he said, this allowed "Shohaku to disappear". What was left was simply the prostrating, eating, walking, entering, departing, opening and closing doors and of course, sitting; all with little or no sound!

Quietude is cultivated when we awaken to the sounds we create. We awaken, moments at a

time, when we do something whole heartedly from the beginning to end, without "I" and "me." In our activities, are we engaging selflessly? Have we let go of self when we open and close doors, enter our practice space with groceries and fetch pots for our delicious food? Or are we rushing through doors thinking "I" have to hurry because "I" have to cook, or "I" have to serve, or "I" have to...? Suddenly it is "I" who is opening the door rather than the door simply opening. The interconnectedness of door and opener goes unrealized. We are separated from the activity and fail to notice the sounds our noisy ego makes.

While bringing zazen into our activities, we can aspire to realize the interconnectedness of all things, applying right effort to keep from disturbing the delicate balance. Are we muting the noise of our egos when we move about our lives, both inside and outside of the zendo, continually observing how, like the conductor, we are moving sound around?

-Tim Cobb



On February 14, Tim Cobb received lay ordination and was given the name Tojun. "To" means "cave" or "deepest site of one's being" and "jun" means "pure, straight-forward."

In Silence

(The following excerpt is the concluding portion of an essay written by Ian Greaves, currently a senior at University High School, for a junior year English project last spring.)

The next time I returned to the Zen Center I was in a horrible mood. I had just come back from a short trip, which caused me to miss two days of school. On top of being bombarded by make-up work, I was having the typical rift with friends. Even though I was required to go for the observation, my real reason for going to zazen that morning was to attempt to “start over” and approach my problems from an illuminated perspective. That morning’s sitting went quit smoothly. I did not feel uncomfortable until about one minute before the end of the sitting, and I had only one authentic thought the entire time: “How can I put this peace into practice in my life?” Contemplating this question helped me to define what Zen means for me, as well as what it means for the rest of the world. Because I was in experienced in the Zen way of life, I recalled Tonen’s recommendation to today’s youth, “simply learn to be doing.” That is to say that the goal-obsessed, high-stress, do-or-die type “A” personalities need to simply learn to live in the here and now, and stop considering the past and future so much,

for neither is real. The past and the future are not real things, yet we treat them as if they are when they are simply figments of our cognition – we have created them. Too many youths today, Tonen confirmed, focus on the future and let it rule their lives, as in, “What college am I going to get into? Does he/she like me? Will I ever get a good grade in this class? “Stop racing,” Tonen said, “And learn to do well what you are doing now, and not sometime later.” As if we were chasing the horizon, we are inevitably doomed to a stressful, hectic life with little satisfaction.

Perhaps the most convincing advice I took from Tonen, though, was her explanation to me of the well-known Zen proverb, “Before enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water. After enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water.” In her extremely quiet, calm explanation of the proverb, she regaled me with the beautiful Zen philosophy of life. “Not only is it saying that enlightenment is not the heaven it is perceived to be, but



Shohaku Okumura delivering dharma talk.

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

March

- 3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 13 Annual Meeting
(no study class)
- 20 & 21 Two-day sitting

April

- 3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 10 Buddha’s Birthday Celebration
(Hanamatsuri)
- 17 & 18 Two-day sitting

May

- 3 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 8 & 9 Two-day sitting

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

that enlightenment opens our eyes to the true beauty in many of the daily activities we take for granted. It is a miracle that we can chop wood, it is a miracle that we can carry water,” she said. “Every move we make is a miracle.”

The bell rang. I slowly opened my eyes, and stood up to walk into my miracle.

–Ian Greaves

Thanks

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milwaukee zen center

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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.

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