



### Jettisoning the Plan

I love to read the stories of those great old Chinese Chan masters, tales of their flexibility and ability to take things as they come. We don't read of the times they felt inadequate, annoyed with their disciples, or unsure of their own understanding of the dharma. Perhaps this is as it should be, since the picture that emerges serves as a pointer toward a life that readily accepts what Shunryu Suzuki Roshi called "things as it is." Taking things as they come, moment by moment.

We have, however, an unfortunate tendency to let "things as I planned" get in the way of "things as it is." I recently had surgery to replace my right knee. This is reasonably major surgery, is intensely painful and debilitating and has an extended recovery period. I entered the process determined to just let things be whatever they were going to be and to simply respond moment by moment. This approach worked exceedingly well in the hospital and in the early

weeks of recovery. I was complimented by the nurses and by my orthopedist upon my rapid recovery and I would purr with pride and point out with false modesty that this was the result of my long Zen practice of "just sitting."

But the weeks dragged on...1.2.3.4.5...and I was scheduled to go to a meeting of Soto Zen priests in Los Angeles. By now I was driving my car again and limping into outpatient physical therapy to try to stretch some flexibility into the new knee. These sessions are quite painful but very necessary and my physical therapist was quite encouraging. Still, the knee remained stiff and painful....and I had to go to L.A. ! I was complaining to the therapist about my lack of progress, when she stopped me cold by saying, "You know, you're actually doing very well. Your only problem is that you have a plan!"

Whuf! A great Zen teaching from a physical therapist. Our only problem with the reality of our moments is that they

don't conform to our plan. And in the tension between reality and plan our appreciation of the moment is lost.

Our plan pulls our mind forward to an imaginary time in which things play out as we intend, and we fear what may not conform to that imagined moment. I had imagined going to L.A. pain-free and striding triumphantly into the meetings. In actual fact, I had to keep pain under control with medication, get a lift to the meetings and use a cane. But the lesson I learned in how to accommodate myself to the reality of the moment without resistance was extraordinarily valuable. To learn to work with our moments as opposed to struggling against them is to learn to live with "things as it is." And to enjoy the moment for what it is.

Does this mean a life with no plan? Do we just drift with the flow? If we were to do this we would no longer be a participant in the matrix of causes and conditions, but a mere outcome. The mystery of my life is that my self is both merely a

construct resulting from the coming together of causes and conditions and at the same time an active agent that affects outcomes.

Of course I should plan to go to that meeting. The hindrance was in how I envisioned the scenario playing out. I got fixed on the way in which I would control events. Dōgen has an admonishment for us in *Only Buddha and Buddha (Yuibutsu Yōbutsu)*.

*Long ago a monk asked an old master, "When hundreds, thousands, or myriads of objects come all at once, what should be done?"*

*The master replied, "Don't try to control them."*

*What he means is that in whatever way objects come, do not try to change them. Whatever comes is the buddha-dharma, not objects at all. Do not understand the master's reply as merely a brilliant admonition, but realize that it is the truth. Even if you try to control what comes, it cannot be controlled."*

This does not mean that we need be passively battered by whatever comes, declaring that we had no hopes in the

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## Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

### March 2008

- 1 Annual Meeting
- 5 Introduction to Zen 6:30 p.m.
- 15 All-day sitting  
Dharma talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 16 All-day sitting

### April 2008

- 2 Introduction to Zen
- 5 Buddha's Birthday service
- 19 All-day sitting  
Dharma talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 20 All-day sitting

### May 2008

- 7 Introduction to Zen
- 10 MZC work day
- 17 All-day sitting  
Dharma talk, 10:20 a.m.
- 18 All-day sitting

To see the entire 2008 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at [www.milwaukeezencenter.org](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org)

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matter. To pretend that I did not desire a different sort of trip to L.A. would have been a mere mouthing of convenient pseudo-Buddhist phrases about “having no desires.” We will have desires. The real issue is whether we can let them go or modify them in the face of the truth of what comes.

We cannot control what comes, but we can be awake to it and respond appropriately. We can realize that our plans are merely a map of the direction that we hope to go, and that this map will be revised by “things as it is.” Our practice moment by moment is to try to see clearly what is and not to distort or reject it because of what we wish it to be.

We've had a hard winter here in Milwaukee and the snow remains piled high as I write this.

Today, for the first time, the temperature neared 40 degrees and is predicted to remain there for at least a few days. Yet the wind is fierce and cold. As I bent my head to it, I had a fleeting thought, “Will spring never come?” And then I had to laugh, for the brilliant blue sky, the mounds of rotting snow, the bitter wind ARE spring. They just don't conform to my idea, my plan, for spring.

I realize that if I am to enjoy spring I must jettison my plan and respond to the moments that are here, remembering Dôgen's admonishment: *Even if you try to control what comes, it cannot be controlled.* But with the plan discarded, it can be enjoyed.

—Tonen O'Connor

*(Quote from Dôgen is a translation by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Ed Brown in Moon in a Dewdrop.)*



## Fourth Annual Great Sky Sesshin

August 9-16, 2008

Hokyoji Zen Community in beautiful southern Minnesota  
Teachers: Susan Myoyu Andersen, Dokai Georgesen, Tonen O'Connor,  
Zuiko Redding, Brad Warner, Rosan Yoshida

Co-sponsored by Cedar Rapids Zen Center and Milwaukee Zen Center

For full information and registrations forms, visit the MZC web site:  
[www.milwaukeezencenter.org](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org)  
or contact the Zen Center via phone or email.

## Happenings

The third floor bathroom has been completely and beautifully renovated. Thanks are due to Bob Balderson, both for selecting the best people to do the work and for contributing much personal effort.

February 13 – 17, Shohaku Okumura led a special study sesshin in which he lectured each morning on Menzan Zuiho's essay on *Jijuyu zanmai* and was available each afternoon for a question and answer period. This special sesshin was extremely well attended, including several guests from out of town. Shohaku's teaching is a rare gift and we hope that he will be able to return again soon.

The Milwaukee Zen Center's Annual Meeting took place on Saturday, March 1, 2008. The meeting was chaired by President Peter Johnson and some of the more significant items on the agenda are summarized below:

--Tori Brundage, Treasurer, noted that the MZC's finances are in good shape, showing a modest surplus. Discussion ensued concerning the Dharma Teacher's Fund, which currently is invested in a Calvert socially responsible

money market fund. The purpose of this fund is to build our resources against the day when Tonen will retire and we may need to provide financial support to a new Resident Priest. At the present time, \$500 per month is being deposited in this fund. A motion was passed that this fund be restricted to this sole use and not be available for other needs. Chuck Eigen raised the possibility of creating a second special purpose fund for maintenance and repairs. This suggestion was forwarded to the new Board for consideration. Formal thanks were tendered to Bob Balderson for bringing the bathroom renovations in on time and under budget.

--Peter Johnson, President, thanked all those involved for their efforts in keeping the Zen Center a vital source of the dharma over the past year.

--Tonen O'Connor, Resident Priest, expressed her gratitude for the year's successful practice events such as the Great Sky Sesshin last August, the ongoing study classes and two-day sittings. She also thanked Tomon for her work as sewing teacher for the four sangha members who are currently sewing rakusus, and Tojun for his

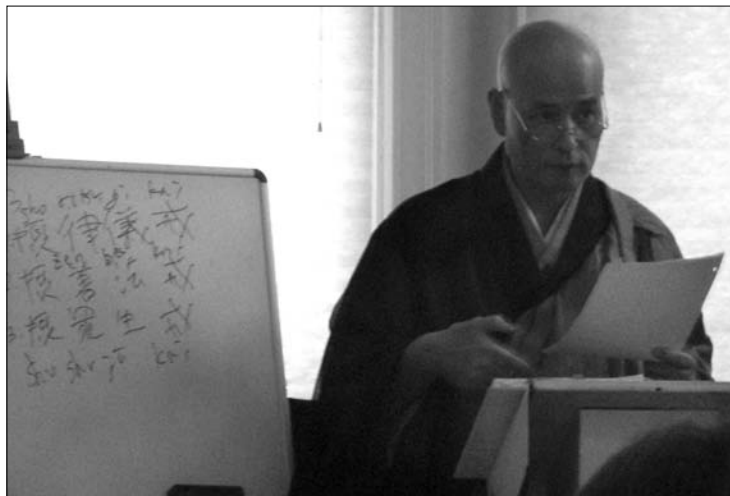
splendid work as Ino. In reporting on the prison ministry she noted her great pleasure that volunteers are now sustaining the program at seven prisons, while she continues to visit three. This work within the prison system has resulted in the honor of being invited to make a presentation on June 19 in Tokyo at a symposium entitled "The World's Soto Zen –The Social Role that Zen Can Play", sponsored by Soto Zen International. Finally, Tonen thanked the sangha for their wonderful support during her recovery from surgery.

--New Business included deciding to hire someone to clean the gutters this spring and to complete work on the back hallway by September. The date for the annual spring Work Day was set for Saturday, May 10.

--The nominating committee was comprised of Board members not seeking further terms: Peter Johnson, Tomon Marr and Tori Brundage. They proposed the following as members of the Board: Pete Tofte, Lorraine McNamara-McGraw, John Rhiel, Jim Gother and Bob Balderson. Chuck Eigen volunteered to also serve and this full slate was approved.

--At a meeting directly following the Annual Meeting, the Board elected the following officers: Lorraine McNamara-McGraw, President; John Rhiel, Vice-President; Jim Gother, Secretary; Pete Tofte, Treasurer; Chuck Eigen and Bob Balderson, Members-at-Large.

Complete minutes of the Annual Meeting and the complete financial report may be obtained by contacting the Milwaukee Zen Center.



Rev. Shohaku Okumura

# **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.

### **MZC 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](http://www.milwaukeezencenter.org)

### **Useful Websites:**

Soto Zen Buddhism: <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/>  
Soto Zen in America: <http://www.szba.org>

## **Membership Information / Order Form**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip+4 \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

### **I am interested in a membership (tax deductible):**

- General -\$25/month
- Supporting – \$30 or more/month
- Out-of-town – \$10/month
- Participating - any amount you can afford \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to make a one-time contribution \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Please add me to your mailing list
- Please remove me from your mailing list
- Please change my mailing address

TITLE	QTY	PRICE	TAX*	TOTAL
Eiheiji Incense — Short 5.5"		\$ 7.00	.39	\$
Long 10"		\$ 7.00	.39	\$
<b>Shipping - \$3.00 first two boxes of incense and 50¢ per item thereafter.</b>				\$

*\*Only Wis. residents need include applicable sales tax.*

**TOTAL \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to Milwaukee Zen Center**

**MILWAUKEE ZEN CENTER 2825 N. STOWELL AVE  
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