



Giving Up Ego...for Everyone's Sake

It was time for *chosan* (formal morning tea) at Shogoji in southern Japan, where I was practicing a few months ago. The drum was sounding every twenty seconds, calling us into the room. It had been going on longer than usual that morning, because while most of us were standing there in our robes, facing the altar, two people were missing. Finally they arrived and took their places at the back, and without turning around, one of our teachers asked, "What time was *chosan*?"



Stone image keeps watch at Shogoji near Kumamoto, Japan.

"Eight fifteen," they replied.
"What time is it now?"
"Eight twenty."
"But," one of them added quickly, "we had to change clothes after *nitten soji* (temple cleaning)." The teacher turned and pointed to each of the rest of us in turn. "So did he, and she, and he, and so did I." Then we all faced the altar again, unfolded our bowing cloths, made our prostrations, and sat down to tea.

Afterward, that teacher gave us a few more thoughts about practicing with others. Everything we do affects the rest of the sangha, he reminded us, and sometimes we make mistakes. If we're late for something and other people are waiting, we need to take responsibility and apologize, rather than defending ourselves with excuses. The ego wants to protect itself, so we try to give reasons for the things we do, but the whole point of this practice is to abandon the ego as the driving force in our lives, or at

least to loosen its grip. "Refusing to let go of your ego is one of the most uncompassionate things you can do," he concluded.

That last statement really took hold of me. This whole ego-abandonment thing was not just about completely manifesting the buddha-dharma for my own sake, or in some abstract theoretical way. Without setting aside ego, we're not much good to other people. If we refuse to give up our attachment to the idea that there is something called "I" that needs constant feeding and defending and promoting, we can't help but put our needs ahead of the needs of others. The ego is a demanding thing, and we can spend every waking moment working on getting what it says we want, avoiding what it says we don't want, and creating and shoring up identity. If we let it run the show, inevitably we become self-centered and selfish. There's no way around it.

That means that the practice of zazen and letting go of ego is true bodhisattva activity. If we're really doing zazen, really concentrating on the posture and putting our trust in it, we are doing what my dharma grandfather Uchiyama Kosho called "opening the hand of thought." We are loosening our hold on the stories we tell ourselves in order to maintain some idea about who we are. Those stories are fiction, creations of our minds, and without any kind of substance, and yet they can come to control our actions—including our interactions with others. If I write myself a screenplay in which I cast you as my competition—whether for love, power, or that last piece of chocolate cake on the kitchen counter—I will have a very hard time putting your needs ahead of my own. Yet, that is exactly bodhisattva action in the world, and we are capable of carrying out our bodhisattva vows only when we set aside

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the tales our ego spins.

By nature the ego is self-centered. It has a hard time looking beyond itself. We're so used to living with this ego,

however, that often we aren't even aware of it and the control it has over us. We forget that the small self is only a fabrication, and while it's not separate from the

larger Self that functions through it, it can keep us from seeing that greater reality. How to begin to loosen the ego's hold? Try letting the next opportunity for ego-

gratification pass you by. As Uchiyama roshi said, "For breaking the ego's grip, nothing is more effective than giving something up."

—Hoko Jan Karnegis

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

October

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

November

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

December

7 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
9, 10, 11 - Rohatsu Sesshin
23 & 24 - CLOSED for holiday

To see the 2011 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org



"Takuhatsu hats from Daeiji, near Niigata, Japan, where MZC's first resident priest, Tozen Akiyama practiced from 1977 to 1978.

Happenings

On July 31, Tonen served as a guest teacher at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, giving a dharma talk in the morning and conducting a seminar on some writings of Dogen in the afternoon.

Sangha member Lorraine McNamara-McGraw has returned from a six-week work practice stay at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery. Lorraine has participated in other work practice periods and a three-month ango at this splendid practice place.

August 23-25, Rev. Issho Fujita, Director of the International Center of Soto Zen Buddhism in San Francisco, California, visited the MZC and gave an evening talk on "Zazen, Beyond Manual and Technique." He also shared dinner with sangha members and a visit to the China Exhibit at the Milwaukee Art Museum.

Hoko Jan Karnegis, the new MZC Interim Practice Director, attended the Board Meeting on August 20 and remained through August 25 to assist Tonen in packing for her move and in hosting Rev. Fujita. She returned to the Twin Cities on August 25 and made her final move to take up residency at the Zen Center on September 3.

Tonen moved from the Zen Center on August 30 and into her new and more relaxed life in the Bay View area of the city. She looks forward to a continuing modest relationship with the MZC as Resident Priest Emeritus, though she will no longer be involved in the day to day affairs of the Center and will be away a good deal, traveling in Japan September 23-October 10.

Zazen is not Shuzen

from a talk at MZC by
Isso Fujita, Director of
the International Center
of Soto Zen Buddhism,
San Francisco.

Zazen is not a method which we can learn or master by studying it or following a manual. In his “Universal Recommendation for Zazen,” Dogen writes that zazen is not *shuzen*, and he repeats the statement in some of his other writings. *Shu* means “learning” and *zen* means Zen, Chan or dhyana. Together, *shuzen* means “learning zen.” Shohaku Okumura translated *shuzen* as “step by step meditation.” It’s about some special state of mind which we can attain by applying some method to the mind and body.

We are very familiar with *shuzen*-style learning. In areas like sports, we learn from instructions, and there may be a teacher or a judge that decides whether we got it. In language learning, there are beginning and intermediate levels, and if we take a test and pass, we can go on to the next level. Dogen clearly said that zazen is different from *shuzen*. If so, how should we

practice zazen?

In *Shobogenzo Shoji* (*Birth and Death*), Dogen writes that the way to become buddha is not by using force nor expending the mind. Just making simple, naive effort is not good in this context. The more we make naive effort, the farther we are away from the right track.

For example, in zazen, we take it for granted that an instructor says, “Straighten the back. Cross your legs. Eyes at 45-degrees.” We are like an operator operating a machine, like a human merged with a robot. We have this model behind us when we interpret instructions for zazen. This is *shuzen*, isn’t it?

This became my koan six or seven years ago. I was working very hard to do zazen, but I realized that I was just doing *shuzen*. Effort is necessary, but somehow it’s a different kind of effort. One day I had a thought: what about the Buddha under the bodhi tree? When Buddha first sat under the bodhi tree, there was no manual. We have to think about what brought him to the bodhi tree. What did he do before that? According to legend, there was an episode

right after he left the palace where he tried yogic meditation under a master. He learned the technique and quickly attained the goal of stopping the mind, but it wasn’t what he was looking for. Then he shifted his practice to the body, and did ascetic practice. He did it very thoroughly, almost dying, but he realized this was not the right way to nirvana. He did all the ready-made methods available in those days, learning them from the teachers, but he was not satisfied with those things and he didn’t solve his fundamental questions. He had nothing any more.

When he sat down under the tree, he did something very new, not based on a method or manual—something more spontaneous, more natural. By trial and error, he gradually learned how to sit in a stable way by paying attention to how he felt in the sitting posture. He learned how to be with the body and mind, without doing anything artificial or intentional. He gave up and surrendered, and that’s the origin of our zazen. There’s a big difference between what he did before and what he did under the bodhi tree. He tried all

the *shuzen* types of practice and saw their futility; from this, zazen emerged.

When we do zazen as *shuzen*, we try to order mind and body to obey instructions from outside—usually without getting agreement from the body and mind. Without any negotiation or permission from the mind and body, no wonder they go against our instructions.

For instance, in order to make the back straight, we usually try to do it by moving the back itself, but that often results in a bad shape or posture. The shape of the back should be a result, not a cause. How do we make the back naturally straight? We have to pay attention to the body part below the back: the pelvis. Based on the feeling of the pelvis on the cushion, the back naturally becomes straight. The *shuzen* approach is to always try to accomplish something directly, but for zazen it should be an indirect procedure.

Look for the audio recording of the complete presentation soon at milwaukeezencenter.org.

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 of 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

Useful Web Sites:

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