



Capturing the complete essence of this moment

Hoko Karnegis, interim practice director

There's a fun dharma game I like to play with the universe. I think of it as attempting to distill the entirety of this moment, the complete reality of it all, into one thing—a flower arrangement, a haiku, a photograph. Can I completely experience the vastness of this moment and then convey it by reducing its expression to one image, or a few words?

It seems counterintuitive, this expressing infinity by concentrating on only a few elements. You'd think that this moment contains so much that the only way to completely express it is to add more and more things.

The other day, a practitioner asked what it meant to go more deeply into practice. My response was that the more deeply I went into practice, the less I carried. The better we are at setting aside all the extra stuff we usually carry around, the better we are able to penetrate beyond the surface to the essential nature of reality. The deeper we go, the more we slough off, or put down along the side of the road. We can go back for it when we need it. It will still be there. But for now, it's OK to leave it there and continue on our way.

Tonen has kindly allowed us to continue to use the slate ikebana container she was given at her ordination.



It remains in the front hall, home to an ever-changing stream of flowers, leaves, branches or grasses that greet practitioners as they arrive. When it's time to create a new arrangement, I don't have any idea what the finished look will be. I just collect available materials from the grounds, the houseplants, the store, or donations, and see what goes together. A few pieces are all that's necessary—more is too much. Somehow, the sizes, shapes and colors suggest an appealing and interesting design, and when the arrangement is done, I can immediately see in it a complete story. There is something in this one collection of stone and sprigs that entirely captures the season.

Haiku is also an exercise in distillation. You've only got seventeen syllables in which to completely convey an experience. To me, the best haiku spring to mind almost fully formed. The more you work at it, trying to force it into shape, the less likely you are to end up with an effective haiku. Haiku practice is about training the mind to see the bare bones of this moment and use them to express everything, including the empty spaces in between. To read a really good haiku is to enter into the writer's own experience of the completeness and vastness of right here and now. There is nothing outside of the moment being expressed. Notice that this is not a moment being "described." Haiku does not describe. That would be creating separation. Haiku invites us into that shared moment, even if the poem was written centuries ago. It's the same moment!

Photography practice can also be training in seeing the bare bones. I think of it as the visual equivalent of haiku, an entire unlimited moment distilled into a two-dimensional bounded image. It doesn't have to portray every element that is visible to the photographer at the time. One or two striking shapes are all

Why don't I recognize my true self?

Tonen O'Connor, resident priest emerita

When I look in the mirror in the morning, who do I see? Is the mirror reflecting my true self?

When I look in the mirror, I see an older woman with white hair and white skin. But if someone makes sweeping generalizations about old people, women or white people, I bristle instinctively, because I know I'm more complicated than that. My self is more complicated than that.

Yet when, as Dogen says, we "study the self," most of us don't go beyond the bubble of a description of perceived experiences within which I am the star. I am my memories, my education, my likes and dislikes, my fears. Yet the Buddha asks me to go further—to examine the *source* of the memories, fears, etc. If I do this honestly and accurately, I realize they



Complete essence from page 1

that's needed to open the portal to us and allow us to slip into the space with him or her.

Seeing in this way is not about interpretation or personal expression. Direct seeing and direct expression are not the mental gymnastics of the small self. They require setting aside the small self and engaging wholeheartedly and fearlessly in this moment, without the slightest barrier.

The first challenge is to make possible pure experiencing. The second is to make possible pure expressing. For this reason, practice is endless. Even when we have some insight into the nature of reality, we can't necessarily express that understanding. Until we can fully offer it back to the universe as bodhisattvas, we have further training and practice to do.

When a few well-chosen words or shapes come together, they have the power to make us see things in new ways. In their simplicity, they compel us to see deeply because there's nowhere else to go.

all exist because of other things: people, events, times, contexts. In short, although I certainly have a sense of "self," it turns out to be primarily a response to what is happening around it. It is the result of its response to those things with which it comes into contact. Different response, different person. And although I have the illusion that I live in a state of isolated self-determination, this is just that—an illusion. My "self" is both the result of and a participant in the goings-on of a world that is inextricably connected to this "me."

So to follow the Buddha Way, we discard this limited self and allow our self to be verified by all things, dropping off the illusion of our distinction from the bodies and minds of others. Sounds pretty grand, doesn't it? We are all ONE! But wait a minute—we're so different. You don't look like me, don't think like me, don't live where I do. I don't know you, and I fear you.

From a Buddhist perspective, this is the great conundrum of our lives: we are simultaneously one vast living organism and one distinct living person. And we are vastly more comfortable with those whom we perceive to be, in at least a surface way, like ourselves.

There are powerful barriers to recognizing that we and others share the same universal "self." It can be hard work to overcome our instinctive reactions to those who don't look, speak or live like we do and, let's face it—we're lazy. We talk passionately about the need to overcome racism, but we know almost no one who is not of our race. We talk about "reaching out to others" without understanding that this very phrase implies a huge gap between the "me" who is reaching out and the "you" over there. It is this gap that Buddhist teachings say is an illusion, because the perceived gap itself influences who we are. Our sense of separation creates our mode of being.

The vital question is: can we learn to enjoy rather than fear our differences and face the astonishing fullness of a life together? Our teachings say that we are "not one, not two," our oneness decorated, made interesting by our twoness. Our lives are richer when we let go of our illusory little self and become verified by all things. To be verified, we must lose our fear of the "other," the one who is in actuality the completion of our true self.

From the President

Kevin Kostick

As the new Board President, I would like to thank you for your support as I assume this new role. And on behalf of the whole Board, we would like to extend our gratitude to the sangha for allowing us to take on the leadership here at Milwaukee Zen Center. We are grateful for the help received from the previous Board during our transition.

I am seeing more of what systems are in place as we move into a time where succession of the position of priest/teacher is quite important. There are several other concerns we will be addressing as well.

Let's consider the workings of the sangha and that of a watch. Where each gear performs its role, it acts upon other components and, in turn, causes other parts to respond. Can the membership part influence the financial aspect of sustainability? What effect would it have on the facilities? On communication and frequency of the newsletter? On practice? And will this turning of various parts be created by more sangha members volunteering?

These are the overlapping systems at which we are looking. Inner workings are not always seen—just the result of knowing what time it is. Yet, the dynamic is that it all happens simultaneously with the outward signs and internal movement. Let's see if we can, as your new Board, evaluate these parts and influence them to work efficiently to ensure we all are good stewards of our practice.

Board of Directors

— 2013-2014 fiscal year —

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Registration is now open!

Great Sky Sesshin, August 10-17

Hokyoji Zen Practice Community

This popular annual Soto Zen style sesshin draws together teachers and practitioners for seven days of deepening their understanding of the dharma under the extraordinary great sky of Hokyoji.

Teachers this year include Tonen and Hoko from MZC, Hoko's dharma brother Shoryu Bradley from Gyobutsuji in Arkansas, Zuiko Redding from Cedar Rapids Zen Center, and Dokai Georganesen from Hokyoji.

The text and theme for this year's sesshin is the *Jijuyû Zanmai* (Samadhi of Self Receiving Its Function) section of Dôgen's *Bendôwa* (The Wholehearted Way). For complete information or to register, visit our website.

This newsletter does look a little different . . .

In an effort to make the best use of our limited resources, we've gone to a black and white publication. But while we've taken out the colored ink, we've added more dharma content. These days, many folks are visiting our website for the events calendar, and our Facebook page for the latest information about happenings at MZC. That means this "newsletter" can begin to carry less news and more teachings. With a new name, a bit of a new look, and a new focus for its content, it will also become a quarterly, rather than bi-monthly, publication. Look for it in your mailbox in January, April, July, and October of each year.

If you do find that this publication is a useful part of your practice life, please help us continue to make it available with your financial support. It will keep coming to you regardless of your ability to give . . . but your help in defraying the costs of printing and mailing will be most appreciated. You may donate online at our website, or put your check in the mail.

Thank you!

Weekly practice schedule

Wed-Fri morning

6:15 zazen
6:55 kinhin
7:05 zazen
7:45 service
8:00 end

Saturday morning

7:30 zazen
8:10 kinhin
8:20 zazen
9:00 service
9:30 dharma book
discussion
10:30 end

Wed-Fri evening

6:30 zazen
7:10 kinhin
7:20 zazen

Sunday morning

8:20 *Introduction
to Zazen*
9:30 zazen
10:10 kinhin
10:20 dharma talk
11:00 informal tea

Stay in touch with MZC

Online:

- See our complete schedule of practice and activities at www.milwaukeezencenter.org
- For the latest news and events, visit us on Facebook
- E-mail us at kokyo-an@att.net

Street address:

2825 N. Stowell Ave, Milwaukee, WI 53211-3775

Phone: (414) 963-0526

Fax: (414) 963-0517

milwaukee zen center

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