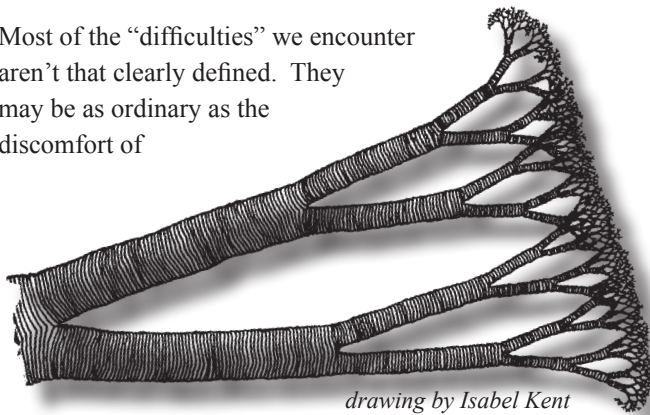




Fight or flight

Nature has wired human beings such that, upon encountering some difficulty, we either want to struggle with it or run away from it. If the difficulty is a large fallen branch blocking the road, it makes sense to wrestle it out of the way. If the difficulty is a half-ton grizzly bear, the reasonable course of action is a quick and quiet retreat to a place of safety.

Most of the “difficulties” we encounter aren’t that clearly defined. They may be as ordinary as the discomfort of



learning a new skill or anxiety about an overdue report. Nonetheless, our primitive fight or flight response can be depended upon to kick in, and it seems that there are only two options—avoidance and denial, or forcibly controlling our environment.

Some things really are worth struggling with. Many are not. The root of the struggle is often a perceived threat to the small self, and once we realize that there is no abiding self, it stops making sense to expend energy and resources defending it.

One of the most important lessons I learned during my training in Japan was to check my ingenuity at the door. During my first experience in a training temple, I was often confronted with new roles to learn that required seemingly impossible feats of memory and precision. We were shown how to do something exactly once, and expected from then on to be able to replicate it perfectly. Excuses like “But I’m new here!” or “But I’m a foreigner!” were met with blank looks. These things were completely irrelevant.

The logical part of my mind, the part that was routinely called into service when I was confronted with a problem, went to work to “fix the system.” Clearly, if I perceived that I couldn’t do what was being asked of me, the system must be broken. Never mind that the system had been in place for 800 years and thousands upon thousands of other practitioners had learned and survived. I would find a more efficient, more reliable, more comfortable, better way.

In a training temple, change is not seen as innovation. It is seen as a mistake. There is no such thing as continuous improvement when it comes to the structure of daily life and work in a training temple. In the eyes of my superiors, if I wasn’t doing things the way they had always been done, then obviously I hadn’t understood the instructions. The system wasn’t broken, and it certainly didn’t need me and my ego tinkering with it.

Unable to use my ingenuity to solve my problems, my small self took refuge in afternoon naps as a means of escape. I wasn’t the only one; during the post-lunch break, complete silence fell across the compound as everyone took advantage of the chance to get away from the constant rain and their own daily challenges for a little while. Sure, we’re all tired, one practitioner pointed out, but it’s also a chance to be somewhere other than here.

Engaging wholeheartedly with challenging circumstances, while remaining free from expectations about them, is not easy. Yet holding ideas about how things “should” be is the source of the struggle in the first place. I realized I didn’t need to make things OK. They were already OK, no matter what I thought of them. I could put a lot of energy into fighting or fleeing, or I could just get on with it. What a relief to discover that I didn’t have to like my circumstances, and I didn’t have to struggle to make them acceptable. In the end, simply standing up in the middle of my life was the only real option anyway.



Upcoming events

■ March

4 Work Day 12-4 pm

After a pot luck lunch, we'll set to work on maintenance and administrative projects around the building.

9 Buddha and the Box Office:

Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring 7:15 pm

Under the vigilant eyes of Old Monk, Child Monk learns a hard lesson about the nature of sorrow when his childish games turn cruel.

10 Annual Membership Meeting 9:30 am

Sangha members will gather to hear reports from the board of directors, discuss opportunities and initiatives, and elect the board for the next year.

17 & 18 Two-day sitting for O-higan

O-higan is a time of concentration on the six virtuous practices (paramitas) of almsgiving, observing the precepts, forbearance, diligence, zazen and wisdom. We'll spend these two days considering how these paramitas are at work in our lives.

26 Dinner at Serenity Inn, 5:45 - 7 pm

Bodhisattvas from MZC will prepare and offer dinner at Serenity Inn, a comprehensive, seven month transitional living program for homeless men who choose recovery from drug and/or alcohol addictions. For more information, or to sign up, please contact MZC's president, Peter Johnson, at panddjohnson@sbcglobal.net.

■ April

1 Work day 12-4 pm

See March 4 workday above.

8 Buddha's Birthday Celebration

Check our website for the latest information.

14 Tonen's 80th birthday open house, 10:30 - noon

21 & 22 Two day sitting

Here's a chance to really dig into zazen practice by sitting for an extended time.

For complete and current information about our practice and events schedule, please visit us online at www.milwaukeezencenter.org.

cosponsored with Woodland Pattern Book Center

An evening with Firethroat Press

March 14, 7 pm



Join us for an evening with Firethroat Press founders Dale and Barbara Verkuilen. The new press, based in Madison, focuses on dharma studies and has already released several titles related to Dogen's teachings, as well as an illustrated Zen fable. Barbara Verkuilen will read from *The Tale of Zen Master Bho Li* and be available to sign copies of the book.

Woodland Pattern Book Center
720 Locust Street, Milwaukee
www.woodlandpattern.org/

 Firethroat Press
www.firethroatpress.com

Special opportunity

Sangha field trip to Toshoji in Okayama, Japan

May 30—June 10

Experience Soto Zen practice in its traditional setting by living in a training temple. It's a terrific opportunity to gain understanding of the context in which our practice arose and get a taste of Japanese Buddhist culture.

For more information, please contact MZC.

Great Sky Sesshin

at Hokyoji Zen Practice Community

August 11—18

This 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. Our theme and text for this year's sesshin is Dogen's Shôji (Birth and Death) fascicle of the Shôbôgenzô. For details, please visit our website at www.milwaukeezencenter.org.

Visit our online gift shop



Shirts, totes, mugs, mousepads and more! MZC hoodies and T-shirts available in black or white.

NEW! Order our popular Eiheiji incense online!

Go to www.milwaukeezencenter.org and click on **Gift Shop**.

New Thursday zazen opportunities

Southwest Zazenkai to begin March 8

Sangha members who live across town from MZC now have the weekly chance to sit zazen with others a little closer to home. Quality Therapeutic Massage, operated by Tracie Nichols, will host our Thursday night zazenkai (sitting group) at its newly-remodeled Hale's Corners facility. Mirroring the regular MZC schedule, zazen will begin at 6:30 and 7:20 pm with 10 minutes of kinhin (walking) between periods.

MZC began a search for a satellite venue for zazen when a sangha survey indicated that some practitioners were interested in sitting with others but lived too far from the center to attend regularly. The Southwest Zazenkai will replace Thursday evening sitting at MZC.

Everyone is welcome at the Southwest Zazenkai, regardless of experience level, and there is no cost (although donations will be accepted). Quality Therapeutic Massage is at 10555 W. Parnell Street, Suite 3. The building is just off Highway 45 and has ample parking.

Doors open at MZC for noon sitting

In an effort to make zazen available to busy students and faculty on the University of Wisconsin campus, MZC now offers an hour of open sitting on Thursdays. There are no bells or designated periods of walking or sitting; participants are encouraged to simply arrive when their schedules permit and leave when they must. Letting practitioners set their own schedules allows them to adapt to the various start times of classes, jobs and other campus activities. Sangha member and grad student Andrew Dicks took on the job of posting MZC's invitational flyers around the campus.

While promotion has been aimed primarily at the University community, everyone is welcome at the open sitting. Retired folks, those working at home, or anyone who can take a lunchtime zazen break may find this noon sitting a welcome addition to their weekly practice.

Happenings

With Hoko facilitating and Tonen taking notes, the **Buddhist Peace Fellowship** met in January at the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee. BPF is made up of practitioners from several different Buddhist traditions. The group discussed connecting sanghas, raising awareness of Buddhist practice, providing a Buddhist perspective on issues, and acting as a resource for the community on social issues.

Reversing the roles, Tonen presided over the January meeting of the **Milwaukee Area Interfaith Relations** group, of which she is the chair, while Hoko took the notes. MAIR is planning a major June speaker event at the local Hindu temple.

MZC's **board of directors** met in January and February to review financial updates, discuss membership policy, and prepare for the March 10 annual membership meeting. The nominating committee is searching for those interested in being candidates for election to the board. Contact MZC

to be put in touch with the committee, which will explain board service and answer questions.

Tonen made a two-week trip to **Cape Town, South Africa** in February to visit a friend. While there she enjoyed warm weather and family-style hospitality.

Hoko was a panelist at **Ripon College's Women in Religion** event February 14. She joined representatives of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and paganism.

On February 20, Tonen made a pastoral visit to **Rogers Memorial Hospital**. On the 28th, she and Hoko participated in an *Amazing Faith* dinner at the home of interfaith workers Katie and Tom Heinen. The **Dinner Dialogues** provide an opportunity to meet people of other faith traditions, share experiences, listen to the sharing of others, and converse about matters of faith and spirituality in a safe, controlled environment.

milwaukee zen center

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What's new at MZC?

Find out on the *What's New* page of our website.
Events, visitors, photos, activities, and more.
Go to www.milwaukeezencenter.org and
click on *What's New*.

Weekly practice schedule

Complete activity schedule: www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Wed-Fri morning

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

Wed-Fri evening*

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

Saturday morning

6:15 zazen
6:55 kinhin
7:05 zazen
7:45 service
8:00 breakfast
8:25 work period
9:15 break
9:30 dharma
discussion
10:30 end

*Thursday evening zazen is held at *Quality Therapeutic
Massage, 10555 W. Parnell Street, Suite 3 in Hale's Corners.*

Sunday morning

8:20 *Introduction to Zazen*
9:40 zazen
10:20 dharma talk
11:00 informal tea

Contact MZC

2825 N. Stowell Ave • Milwaukee, WI 53211-3775
www.milwaukeezencenter.org • kokyo-an@att.net
Phone: (414) 963-0526 • Fax: (414) 963-0517

I want to be a member of MZC!

- Sustaining: \$30 or more per month
- Supporting: \$25 or more per month
- Maintaining: \$10 per month
- Contributing: any affordable monthly amount: \$_____

Eiheiji incense for sale

NEW: buy online!

<i>Item</i>	<i>Qty.</i>	<i>Price</i>	<i>Tax*</i>	<i>Total</i>
Short (5.5")		\$8.00	.45	
Long (10")		\$8.00	.45	

Shipping:
\$4.00 for first two boxes of incense,
plus .50 per box thereafter.

- I'd like to make a one-time contribution of \$_____.
- Please remove me from your mailing list.
- Please change my mailing address.
- Please send this newsletter by e-mail instead of on paper.

Membership _____
Contribution _____
Incense and shipping _____
Total funds enclosed _____
*Please make checks payable
to Milwaukee Zen Center.*

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