



Peace, plates and programs

Folks sure can have a lot of interesting ideas about what Zen is.

It used to be that the products that used “Zen” as a way to position themselves in the marketplace were mainly things like bath salts and perfumed candles. You can still find spas and massage studios that have adopted a “Zen” theme. Apparently, “Zen” is about being relaxed and peaceful.

Then “Zen” restaurants appeared, offering a variety of takes on Japanese, Chinese, Korean or Thai cuisine. Some even used the kanji for Zen (禪) in their visual identities. Apparently, “Zen” is about having a brief and entertaining experience of exotic Asian culture.

More recently, “Zen” has become a powerful idea in the world of software development. “Zen” provides a marketing identity for software related to gaming, commodity trading, MP3 players, shopping carts, photo management, project management, and search engines. Apparently, “Zen” is about acquiring and having control over vast quantities of information and being able to use it immediately on demand.

For those of us who actually practice Zen, this co-opting of our religion can be exasperating. Our practice is not about achieving a state of stress-free quietude, or being a tourist in a mysterious land. Neither will Zen make us wizards of the workplace. Try to use it for any of those things, and you’ll be one dissatisfied customer.

Yet interestingly, these three marketing identities can help us consider something our Zen practice seeks to help us dissolve: the three poisonous minds of greed, anger and ignorance.

Greed makes us want what we don’t have. We may give up our whole lives to the search for the perfect bowl of kitsune udon or the best agedashi tofu. If this

restaurant doesn’t quite measure up, we’re off to the next one, and the next. Never mind that the meal we just ate was perfectly adequate, and perhaps even delicious. There has to be something better out there somewhere.

Greed also keeps us from wanting what we do have. Ordinary cheese sandwiches or leftover casserole aren’t nearly interesting enough. Our daily lives filled with our usual activities just can’t hold our interest. We’re bored, bored, bored, and we’ve got to get away.



Both the Buddha and Dogen Zenji taught that having few desires is an important way to head off suffering. Being in perpetual search of the ultimate plate of curry rice means we run into trouble, becoming preoccupied with worrying about not having it and trying to figure out how to get it. The sense of lack is draining and demoralizing, and while we’re spending all our resources on the search, we’re starving to death.

Anger, according to Bodhidharma, is the result of “contriving reality for the self.” As long as we hold to the idea that there is an abiding thing called “me,” we can surround ourselves with candles and soak in hot perfumed water until we pickle without dispelling the real source of our anger and stress. For a little while, we’ll feel better, but as soon as the self feels threatened, we’re right back where we started—defending and

Upcoming events

November 4: Sunday guest speaker Bhante Sila
10:20 am

Bhante Sila of Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist monk for 39 of his 55 years, and now leads two meditation groups in Milwaukee.

November 5: MZC Board of Directors meeting
6:30 pm

The board meets on a monthly basis to discuss issues of stewardship, policy, and supervision. The meetings are open, and the public is welcome to observe.

November 11: Sunday guest speaker Paul Brodwin on
History, Poetics, and Engaged Buddhism
10:20 am

Paul Brodwin has been a member of the Mindfulness Community of Milwaukee for 12 years. He is a medical anthropologist whose work explores the cultural aspects of bioethics and psychiatric services.

November 18: Sunday guest speaker Koshin Hanson
10:20 am

Koshin Bob Hanson has practiced with MZC's resident priest emerita Tonen O'Connor since moving to the Milwaukee area seven years ago. A retired Lutheran pastor, Koshin is active in MZC's prison ministry program

December 7—9: Rohatsu Sesshin

Within our tradition of Soto Zen, we celebrate the Buddha's Great Awakening each year on December 8. In honor and memory of his long seated meditation under the Bodhi Tree, we schedule a three-day sesshin on the weekend closest to December 8th. Rohatsu Sesshin is a time of re-dedication to our practice and of gratitude for the deep wisdom and compassion of the Buddha.

Please note that there will be no open sittings or two-day sittings in November, and that we will be closed November 22-25 for the Thanksgiving holiday.

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

Happenings

On September 23 we were joined in our Sunday practice by Sister Therese of the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland. She staying with board president Susan Winecke as part of a multistate tour during which she offered reiki and podiatry care to other sisters around the midwest. During teatime conversation, we learned about Irish history and current life.

Tonen and Hoko participated in the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee's *Know Your Neighbors* event on September 24. The Oak Creek United Methodist Church was packed for an evening that included a live performance of Sikh hymns, as well as brief presentations about Sikhism, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Tonen served as event moderator, while Hoko outlined Buddhist basics. The audience included MZC practitioner Kevin Kostick and his wife Cynthia.

Our October 7 work afternoon saw activity inside and outside of the building. Ted Egan tackled groundskeeping cleanup, clearing the alley and walkways of overhanging leaves and branches. Inside, the sangha kitchen was the focus of attention, with bleach and hot water liberally applied to drawers and cupboards.

In October, Tonen participated in the 2012 meeting of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA), hosted by Great Vow Monastery in Oregon and attended by 91 full and associate members from across the United States. Next year she will be coordinating the SZBA Nominating Committee and serving on the Standards Committee.

This meeting was directly followed by a meeting of 34 members of the Association of Soto Zen Buddhists (ASZB), a subset of the larger group composed of those certified as teachers by the Japanese Sotoshu. One item of note from this latter meeting is that a training temple modeled after the Japanese 8th century temple complex Toshodaiji is being built in northern California. Tempyozan takes its name from the name of that era, as well as the meaning of the words: heaven, peace. A 2015 opening is planned.

This month Tonen accompanies her student, Tomon Marr, to Japan, where she will participate in the ceremony of *zuise* at Eiheji and Sojiji, the head temples of Sotoshu. The ceremonies signify completion of authorization as a priest. Also performing *zuise* at that time will be Hoko Karnegis and Shodo Spring, who have received dharma transmission from Shohaku Okumura.

The joy of practicing with others

It seems that there is a good reason why sangha is one of the Three Treasures. Research released this year as part of the Gallup-Healthways Wellbeing Index indicates that Americans who attend a church, synagogue, mosque or temple regularly experience more positive emotions and fewer negative ones than those who attend rarely or not at all. And, they get an extra boost to their emotional state on Sundays, even though the rest of America seems to experience a decline in mood compared to Saturdays.

According to the study, most Americans feel happier on the weekend—particularly Saturdays—than they do during the week, since there is more leisure time and a greater opportunity to spend time with family and friends. After the Saturday high point, emotional states tend to shift on Sundays. People experience more negative emotions and fewer positive ones, perhaps because they're dreading the return to work on Monday or lessening their social or leisure activities on Sunday to prepare for the start of the workweek.

The exceptions are those who attend religious practice on Sundays (the day most often devoted to spiritual activities in this culture). Socializing with fellow practitioners seems to have a particularly positive effect on mood and emotional state, and those who attend services don't experience that emotional Sunday slump. Additional research suggests that the more close friends one has in one's faith tradition, the higher one's general life satisfaction.

In the *Itivuttaka*, a collection of short discourses, the Buddha said, "A practitioner with admirable people as

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shoring up an idea of who we are and who we ought to be, and bathing our bodies and minds in stress hormones and ill will. Peace cannot come solely from physical relaxation (although it certainly doesn't hurt). It comes from relaxing our hold on our convictions about our place in this dharma world and our expectations about how things will turn out.

In this Age of Busyness, it may seem impossible to maintain control over all the things we feel compelled to keep track of. No one wants to seem ignorant of the latest trends in finance, entertainment or departmental progress, and these things indeed can be important to our daily functioning in the world. Yet we can use them to distract ourselves from a much more fundamental ignorance: ignorance of the true nature of reality and the self. Instead of sitting at a console with our hands on

friends—who's reverential, respectful, doing what his friends advise—mindful and alert, attains step by step the ending of all fetters."

Here at MZC, we offer the opportunity to practice together on both Saturdays and Sundays because that's when sangha members are most available. Coming together with other practitioners not only offers support and guidance on the path, it's just more fun than practicing alone.

In our Sunday *Introduction to Zazen* sessions, participants often say that they've read something about Buddhism, and maybe even tried practicing on their own, but they've come to the center now because they've realized that they need to practice with others. If they stay for zazen, the dharma talk, and informal teatime, they're soon chatting happily with other sangha members. They often comment on how much they've enjoyed their first experience at MZC and how warmly they feel received. Perhaps it's a surprise in a center devoted to the practice of sitting silently, facing a wall.

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the controls, operating our empire by acquiring information about the world and fitting the modules together into great systems of knowledge, our Zen practice is to sit on a cushion, open our hands of thought, and for a little while let go of everything we've collected.

My dharma great-grandfather Kodo Sawaki used to say, "Zazen is good for nothing." My teacher Shohaku Okumura added, "It's difficult to sell something that is good for nothing. It's like selling you the air." "Zen" might be turned into a marketing device, but Zen itself can't be bought and sold, and ultimately can't be used for anything. As Tonen once wrote, "Shikantaza is the dharma gate of great repose and bliss—but only if we don't try to use it to get there."

—Hoko

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

Sunday morning

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

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

Contact MZC

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

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