

milwaukee zen center
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The Mirror

湖鏡庵
milwaukee zen center

volume 32, no. 1

February 2018

MZC provides a place for meditation, study and reflection, leading to inner awakening and mindful, compassionate action through traditional Soto Zen Practice.

How Rare the Dharma

*By Reirin Gumbel,
Resident priest*

*The unsurpassed, profound and wondrous Dharma is rarely met with, even in a hundred thousand million kalpas. Now we can see and hear it, accept and maintain it. May we unfold the meaning of the Tathagata’s truth.*1*

A bird flies over a mountain once every one hundred years, swiping the top with its wing. When the mountain is completely worn down, one kalpa has passed. Even one kalpa is unimaginable: How much more so a hundred thousand million!

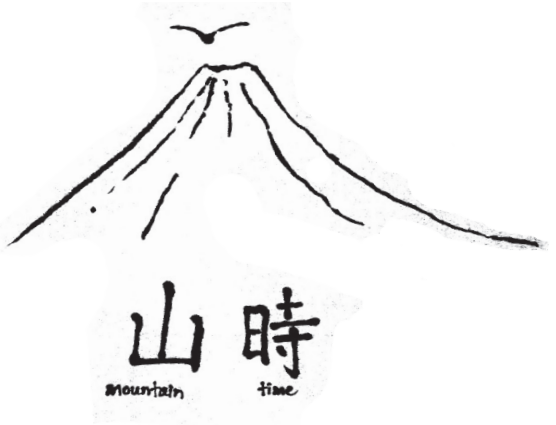
The universe is unfathomably vast, and time is beyond concepts. How amazing that we find ourselves here on the Earth, in Shakyamuni’s saha world, where we are able to meet the Dharma! Humans are born into the world of samsara, ignorant of reality. Actions are followed by consciousness, name and form appear, and quickly we are caught in habits of grasping and clinging. Greed develops, because we feel we may not have enough; hatred arises for others who may be threatening our wellbeing; and existential fear rules our lives.

At some point, there may be a voice that says: Stop! Suddenly we can see and hear the truth of impermanence and interconnectedness, and the links of the chain are shattered. There is nothing to hold onto, nothing to cling to, no others to be afraid of – we are free!

The price of the ticket for the train to freedom is suffering. Only in the world of endurance (saha) is transformation possible. A deep look into the self is required in order to see its true nature. Eihei Dogen instructs the practitioner to “learn the backward step that turns your light inward to illuminate your self.” *2

James Baldwin urges the artist in us to do the same: “The conquest of the physical world is not man’s

only duty. He is also enjoined to conquer the great wilderness of himself. The precise role of the artist, then, is to illuminate that darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lose sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place.” *3



Shakyamuni Buddha’s mission was to free sentient beings from suffering, and bring peace and joy to the world. Luckily, we are now in the position to see and hear the Dharma. Let us accept it and maintain it, so we may unfold the Tathagata’s truth!

*1 Kaikyo-ge (Sutra-Opening Verse) from Soto School Scripture for Daily Practice

*2 Fukanzazengi of Eihei Dogen

*3 James Baldwin, The Creative Process, in: The Price of the Ticket, Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985

On Sewing the Rakusu

By Anne Johnson

*Great robe of liberation
Field far beyond form and emptiness
Wearing the Tathagata’s teaching
Saving all beings*

(continued)

Weekly Practice Schedule

Sunday Morning

9:30 zazen
10:05 kinhin
10:15 dharma talk
11:00 informal tea

Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday Mornings

6:15 zazen
6:50 kinhin
7:00 zazen
7:30 service

Thursdays

6 to 7:30 informal zazen
12:00 zazen
12:30 kinhin
12:40 zazen
1:10 service

Wednesday Evenings

6:30 zazen
7:00 kinhin
7:10 zazen

Saturdays (unless there is a longer sitting that day)

7:30 zazen
8:00 kinhin
8:10 zazen
8:40 service
8:50 work
9:15 reading and discussion

First Saturday in the Month

7:30 am - 4:30 pm One-Day Sitting

Third Saturday in the Month

7:30 am - 1:30 pm Half-Day Sitting



Stay in touch with MZC

See our complete schedule of practice and activities at mkzen.org. Subscribe on that website to our monthly email newsletter. Visit us on Facebook, and contact us at kokyoan@gmail.com

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*For a complete schedule of Zen Center
Practice, please visit mkzen.org*

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On Sewing the Rakusu (continued)

Many of us come to practice looking for relief from personal suffering. Eventually, the practices awake in us the realization that most of our suffering is self-inflicted by habits of the mind: clinging, aversion and confusion. Over time, sitting zazen begins to relax the grip of those habits. Our suffering begins to diminish. Out of pure gratitude our primary motivation for practice often starts to shift from that of personal concern to a concern for all beings.

Beings are numberless; I vow to save them.

Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them.

Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.

Buddha’s Way is unsurpassable; I vow to become it.

Realizing the enormity of the task to “save all beings” and that it is a task that cannot be accomplished alone, at a certain point some of us feel the need for an infusion of strength to carry out our vow. The Jukai ceremony offers practitioners just that. We publicly commit to the precepts we’ve have been studying. The precepts are in turn given to us as a precious gift from our Buddha ancestors along with the promise of their love and support, the love and support of our teachers, the dharma and the sangha. We are given a new name, lineage papers tracing our heritage back to the Buddha and a new garment to wear called a *rakusu*.

The rakusu that is given to us is one we ourselves sewed with the help of a teacher. Even though we sewed it, the rakusu is not ours—just as our life is not ours, just as our possessions are not ours because there is no separate “us” to possess anything. And just like all of the practices, sewing a rakusu is done in relationship with others—a teacher passing the tradition down “warm hand to warm hand”— and fellow students also preparing for Jukai. Silently we sew together reciting “namu kia butsu” with each stitch, infusing the cloth with our vow, “I take refuge in Buddha.” Threading together all Buddhas past, present and future who aspire to relieve the suffering of this world.

The rakusu sewn for Jukai, or “lay ordination” is traditionally blue. It is fashioned after the okesa, or robe worn by Buddhist priests since ancient times. It is said that one of Buddha’s followers, King Bimbisara, asked the Buddha if he and his disciples would wear a distinct robe to make them easily distinguishable from other

sects. The Buddha agreed and one day while out walking asked his cousin and disciple Ananda to design a robe inspired by the patterns of the rice fields they were passing by. Since that time, Zen Buddhist priests and lay practitioners wear robes and rakusus that remind us that the dharma, like rice growing in the fields watered by rain falling from the sky, is that which sustains our life.

In the time of the Buddha nuns and monks had to gather discarded rags and even clothes off of corpses in the charnel grounds to construct their garments. Today we purchase one piece of cloth and cut it into many pieces and then sew the pieces back together to make a rakusu. The One contains the many; the many are One. Though made from “scraps,” a rakusu is sacred and we treat it with great respect and reverence. Yet we do not wear it with pride. We wear it with great humility. We understand that it is the Great robe of liberation. It reminds us of our need to be freed from all our ancient tangled karma, from beginningless greed, hate and delusion. It is beyond both form and emptiness. It is the Tathagata’s teaching, saving all beings.

Five members of MZC sangha have been studying the precepts this past year and are sewing rakusus. Together with MZC resident teacher Reirin Gumbel they are traveling to California this June where they will go through Jukai with Reirin and her teacher Furu Nancy Schroeder, abiding abbess at Green Gulch Farm. We celebrate their vow.

A life led by vow is a life animated or inspired by vow, not one that is watched, scolded, or consoled by vow. These verbs create a separation between the person and the vow. The simple phrase, “living by vow” emphasizes that the person and the vow are one. Our life is itself a vow.

From [Living by Vow](#) by Shohaku Okumura



back row from left to right: Eric Vogel, Anne Johnson, Reirin Gumbel
front: Michael Meyers, Mary Bernau-Eigen, Isabel Kent, Susan Winecki

A letter from the MZC Member Liaison

I would like to thank the people who are members at MZC! This includes long-time supporters and those that have recently joined.

Your regular monetary contributions support the existence of MZC in Milwaukee. Without you, there literally would be no building to house our collective Sangha practice.

The physical facility requires maintenance, repairs and remodeling as needed, all of which requires reliable financial resources.

We are fortunate to have a resident priest, Reirin, who is dedicated to the development and support of the sangha here at MZC. She has expanded offerings such as classes, opportunities for ritual and practice, and MZC’s presence to the wider spiritual community.

The Board and membership are committed to providing a stipend for her as well as support her services in any way we can; this requires the Sangha’s financial support.

Some of you have asked me “what else is required of members?” There isn’t a specific requirement, however, Reirin and the Board would be delighted if you would like to share any skills you have that you think would benefit our center. You might consider volunteering time to help out with mailings, or learn new skills, such as serving as Tenzo, Doan or serving on the Board.

We are most grateful for your regular financial support.

Everybody is invited to attend the **Annual Members’ Meeting at 11:00 am on March 25, 2018.**

Contributing members will vote on the slated board members for the coming year.

Mary Bernau-Eigen

Zen Center Activities

In October, a practice period was held at MZC, with 10 practitioners making commitments for six weeks of practice, which included ceremonies, longer sittings, a study group, Dharma talks -- and sewing practice for

five students, who are preparing to receive the precepts. At the beginning of December, four sangha members went to Hokyoji in Minnesota for rohatsu sesshin. The New Year was launched with zazen from 8:30 p.m. until midnight, Japanese noodle snack, 108 bells and a fire ceremony. In January, MZC was lucky to have Carl Jerome and Andy Cohen for a workshop on Nagarjuna and Resident Priest Emerita Tonen O’Connor on Kodo Sawaki’s teaching. All events were well-attended. A koan study group will continue to meet until the end of February.

Inter-Sangha Events

On January 1, members from several Buddhist sanghas met at Shambala Center for the annual Peace Gathering. A group has been coming together for “Civil conversations,” and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship presented specially selected films for awareness of white privilege. Meals for homeless men at the Milwaukee Guesthouse are being offered monthly.

Future Plans

Thursday, March 1, 6:00 p.m.: **Marc Anderson**, Zen priest and internationally recognized percussionist: Dharma Songs, a collage of music, storytelling, and personal insight

Sunday, March 25, 11:00 a.m.: **Annual Members’ Meeting**

Sunday, April 15, 10:15 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.: **Ben Connelly**, Zen priest and author of *Inside Vasubandhu’s Yogacara*: Dharma talk, discussion and book signing

June 21-26: Sangha visit at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center, Jukai ceremony on Saturday, 6/24.

