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Blue Dragon: \$100/mo and up
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White Tiger: \$30/mo and up
Black Tortoise: \$10/mo and up

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Item	Qty.	Price	Tax*	Total
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* Only Wisconsin residents need include applicable sales tax.

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milwaukee zen center

2825 N. Stowell Ave. Milwaukee WI 53211-3775

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Weekly practice schedule

Friday 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
9:10 work period
10:00 book discussion
11:00 end

Wednesday evening

6:30 zazen
7:10 kinhin
7:20 zazen
8:00 end

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

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The Mirror

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A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE

Tonen O'Connor, Resident Priest Emerita

Gertrude Stein's famous phrase, written in 1913 as part of her poem "Sacred Emily," has become a familiar way of evoking the self-identity of something. A rose is a rose is a rose and not a lily.

The first thing we notice about this sentence is the repetition of the simple assertion that a rose is a rose. It doesn't say that a rose is beautiful, lovely, smells delightful, is growing in our yard, or any other sort of added-on description. No, a rose is a rose, unembellished by any of our descriptions of it. The miracle is that it is a rose.



Image credit: http://www.123rf.com/profile_dinna

In Zen terms, we might speak of the "thusness" of the rose, that is to say, the rose in its roseness, regardless of the mantle of responses in which we may drape it. Another way of saying "thusness" is "as it is." Rose, as it is.

In a fascicle in Shōbōgenzō, "The Reality of All Things" (Shohō Jissō), Dōgen helps us see the importance of experiencing all things in their thusness: "Actualizing Buddha ancestors is reality thoroughly experienced."

The Buddha ancestors knew how to directly encounter reality and when we can do the same, we actualize those ancestors as well.

Dōgen goes further: "Reality is all things. All things are reality thusness; original nature thusness; body thusness; mind thusness; world thusness; cloud and rain thusness; walking, standing, sitting, and lying down thusness; sadness, joy, motion and stillness thusness; staff and whisk thusness; taking up the flower and smiling thusness; inheriting dharma and giving predictions thusness; studying and endeavor of the way thusness; pine purity and bamboo joints thusness."

But how are we to encounter thusness? Dōgen speaks of taking up the flower and smiling and so gives us a hint. This is the story involving Mahakasyapa that expresses an underlying principle of Zen. The Buddha entered the great assembly one morning, ascended his seat and sat for a moment, saying nothing. I'm sure there was a sense of anticipation among those in attendance. What was he going to say? Would it be a great teaching to be remembered and quoted often? After the initial pause, the Buddha held up a flower. The assembly was struck dumb, wondering what they should say, how they should respond. But upon seeing the flower, Mahakasyapa immediately smiled. And, to the consternation of the assembly, the Buddha said, "I have the True Treasury of the Dharma Eye and I have given it to Mahakasyapa."

A flower is a flower is a flower is a flower. And with a smile Mahakasyapa encountered it directly in its thusness. The other disciples were too busy analyzing the Buddha's gesture, deciding what it meant and how

they should respond. What did it describe? What should they say? Mahasyakapa did none of this; he met the flower with a smile. And the Buddha said he had transmitted the Treasury of the True Dharma Eye to him or, as Dōgen would say, “Actualizing Buddha ancestors is reality thoroughly experienced.”

To experience is to meet directly, rather than to describe. Our mental description of its beauty is irrelevant to the thusness of the rose. Our experience of the rose is prior to our labeling of it as beautiful.

In the Shōbōgenzō fascicle, “Buddha Nature,” Dogen redefines a statement from the Nirvana Sutra to read: “All sentient beings ARE buddha nature” and goes on to define “sentient beings” as “all beings.” If all beings are buddha nature we can now make sense of the famous quote from the Lotus Sutra: “Only a buddha and a buddha can thoroughly experience the reality of all things.” The reality of things and the reality of things come together in mutual recognition of the complete reality of all things.

Dōgen describes this process beautifully: “..to encounter all things that are reality means that spring enters blossoms and a person encounters spring. The moon illuminates the moon and a person meets the self.”

But this is hard for us, for we must pass through the barrier of our labels, our responses of like and dislike, if we are to encounter the thusness of the rose. There is quite a step between understanding “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” as merely an overstatement of a mundane reality, to understanding it as an affirmation of the miraculous thusness of the rose.

Each moment is complete and each thing in each moment is complete. My teacher, Tozen Akiyama, use to say, “A broken chair is a perfect broken chair.” Yes, a broken chair “as it is.” We may later decide to repair the chair for our own use, but in that

moment of recognition it is complete in its thusness as a broken chair.

What does it mean within my daily life to be able to experience the thusness of things? It means that I can encounter them, appreciate them, and experience them unencumbered by the wish that they be other, or my habit of attributing emotive character to the thing rather than to my response to it. Each thing is “thus”; it is I who find it beautiful or ugly.

This does not suggest that we should not find exquisite joy upon encountering something we feel is beautiful, but rather suggests that we will have wider composure in encountering all things if first and foremost we accept them in their thusness. It is not the beauty of the pine that is mentioned in Dōgen’s essay, but its purity. Another translation speaks of the constancy of the pine. The marvel, the wonder, is at the completeness of everything as it is.

And while we know that in the ultimate sense nothing has a permanent or fixed nature, there is a wonder in experiencing things within this very moment, when a rose is a rose is a rose. And each of us is complete, just as we are.

---Tonen O’Connor

Note: Dogen translation quoted is by Kazuaki Tanahashi and Lewis Richmond



Image credit: http://www.123rf.com/profile_dinna

THE STORY OF HOW I GREW AS TALL AS I AM *

Married then, we lived in a tiny town in Northern Wisconsin, on the edge of a great forest. I was happy there. Days were spent poking around the long limbs of giant trees with umbrella tops. But a storm brewing inside my marriage - broke. Bolts of lightning severed the bond which held us hostage. My feet carried my wounded, wailing, clouded by tears self into the forest for refuge when suddenly one of the giant trees stood before me pulled me toward it, fiercely, like a magnet with an iron filing. I leaned my wet face into its rough bark. It pulled my arms and legs around its long, muscled middle til I was groundless, all of me wound around the tree like a baby chimp on its mother’s breast. It held me to itself while wave after wave of life renewing sap pulsed through my dry river bed, plumping the parched cells and tissues until the transfusion was complete. Tree released me then straightened, strengthened, lengthened. I stepped down onto earth with bark-scarred skin and will to live. I walked to my car, no longer doubting the story of Lazarus rising from the dead.

--- Susan Winecki 8/13

*6 feet tall



Image credit: http://www.123rf.com/profile_dimaz266f

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www.milwaukeezencenter.org



Little toy bird
Swinging in the window
As much “thus”
As any eagle.

Photo Credit: Kevin Schroeter