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milwaukee zen center newsletter

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Buddha and Me

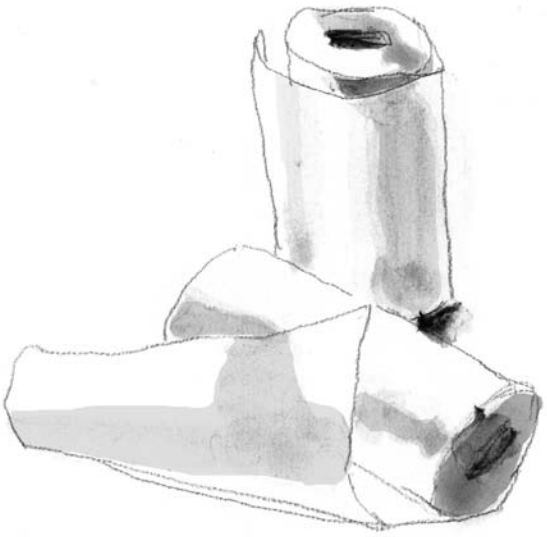
In her introduction to the splendid new *Zen Sourcebook*, [1] Paula Arai mentions an encounter between the great Chinese Zen Master, Chao-chou (778-897) and a student:

"A monk asked, 'What is Buddha?'

The Master said, 'Who are you?' "

I'm pretty sure the monk was startled. He quite probably was expecting some sort of apparently outrageous statement that compared Buddha to a known "thing", such as "Buddha is the sky," or "Buddha is a paper towel." (Both true, but only partially so.)

I would guess that the monk was struggling to grasp what we call in our meal chant "Vairochana Buddha, pure *Dharmakaya*." What is that? Unlike the poor monk, I can turn to The Shambala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen for assistance: "*Dharmakaya* (body of the great order): the true nature of the Buddha, which is identical with transcendental reality, the essence of the universe…It is timeless, permanent, devoid of characteristics, free from all duality."



Still, when I think about it, these are vast generalities and if Buddha is devoid of characteristics, how can Buddha be known? What exactly can we even call Buddha?

So the monk had a serious question, to which Chao-chou gave a serious answer: "Who are you?"

Chao-chou is pointing out the path to understanding the nature of Buddha. The Shambala dictionary also notes that the *dharmakaya* is the unity of the Buddha with everything existing (including the sky and paper towels). So Buddha can be found by carefully examining the existence closest to me and asking "Who am I?"

Delving deeper than the outward marks of my dualistic existence such as age, gender, or occupation, I realize that "I" am merely the continuing activities of the five aggregates of form, sensation, perception, formation and consciousness. Furthermore, as Avalokiteshvara reminds Sariputra in The Heart Sutra, all five aggregates are themselves only collections of changing impulses and therefore empty of own-being. In addition, "I" am largely a series of responses to various stimuli that I encounter, ranging from chilly air to the screech of the cat whose tail I've stepped on. So "I" put on a sweater and "I" leap back and apologize to the cat. But without the chilly air and the cat none of this would have happened. And now that I've put on a sweater I am too warm, and the cat has gone to sleep in my favorite chair. Everything changes moment to moment.

What emerges in answer to "Who are you?" is that I am part and parcel of this endlessly functioning universe, that is to say, of the *dharmakaya*. It is not a thing at all, but the endless process of impermanence, causes and conditions, dependent origination and no fixed selfness expressed by all things, which therefore are in some sense Buddha. Chao-chou has pointed the monk toward direct apprehension of Buddha.

The *dharmakaya* is the name we give to Buddha as all-encompassing living process. But of course more than that is implied when we use the word "Buddha." Mahayana Buddhist thought has developed three ways of regarding Buddha :

– *dharmakaya* (body of the great order) – the pure non-dualistic essence of the universe, a unified existence beyond all concepts.

– *sambhogakaya* (body of delight) – the body of enlightenment, of bodhisattvas realized as buddhas who, perceiving

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Fifth Annual Great Sky Sesshin

August 8-15, 2009

At Hokyoji in beautiful southern Minnesota
Deep practice in the Soto tradition with zazen, services, work, dharma talks by 6 teachers

Co-sponsored by Cedar Rapids Zen Center and Milwaukee Zen Center

For information and registration, email the MZC at kokyo-an@earthlink.net or phone 414-963-0526.

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

May 2009

6 Introduction to Zen
9 All-day sitting
Dharma Talk 10:20 a.m.
10 All-day sitting
Dharma Talk 10:20 a.m.

June 2009

3 Introduction to Zen

July 2009

1 Introduction to Zen
3 & 4 Closed for Fourth of July holiday

To see the 2009 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at **www.milwaukeezencenter.org**

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the suffering of beings, generate great compassion.

– *nirmanakaya* (body of transformation) - the earthly buddhas and bodhisattvas projected into this dualistic world through the compassion of the *sambhogakaya* in order to teach the dharma and thus guide human beings to liberation.

Shakyamuni Buddha, our *nirmanakaya* Buddha, set out to resolve the question of human suffering and in his wisdom identified its source as our ignorance of the true nature of being and our desperate attempts to bend the process of life to meet our ego desires. Awakening, he felt deep compassion for all beings and set out to show us a path leading to release from suffering.

Chao-chou asked, "Who are you?" and it is helpful to remember that in our meal chant we refer to "Shakyamuni Buddha, myriad *Nirmanakaya*." Myriad means innumerable. There are countless Nirmanakaya Buddhas in this world of dualism.

In his Dharma Hall Discourse #286 Dôgen suggests how this comes about: *This very body and mind are not merely the five skandhas. Our wondrous existence is most excellent, and should not be an object of desire. Whether coming or going, we simply respond to sounds and colors. Further, we turn around from our center, and move out in the eight directions. Negating all dualities, our feet are on the ground. How could there be arising and perishing, as our magnanimous energy pierces the heavens? Although it is like this, do not say that killing Buddha after all has no results. The genuine cause of attaining buddhahood is zazen.* (Note: "killing Buddha" means letting go of our concepts about Buddha and enlightenment. Ed.) [2]

Another encounter took place between Chao-chou and a student:

"A monk asked, 'What is Buddha?'

The Master said, 'Aren't you Buddha?" [3]

I like to think that the awakened monk replied:

"Ah! Buddha and me – wisdom and compassion pour forth from this illusory being."

– Tonen O'Connor

[1] *Zen Sourcebook*, edited by Stephen Addis, with Stanley Lombardo and Judith Roitman
[2] *Dôgen's Extensive Record*, translated by Taigen Dan Leighton & Shohaku Okumura
[3] *The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu*, translated by James Green

We gratefully acknowledge the following supporters of our practice of the Dharma. If we have omitted anyone, please know that though your name may be missing, our gratitude is not.

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Happenings

Tori Brundage has relinquished her status as a novice Soto Zen priest and moved to Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. The sangha wishes her well. **Tonen** visited **Tomon Marr** in Albuquerque to catch up on practice and training.

The **Annual Meeting** of the Milwaukee Zen Center took place on March 14, 2009. President **Larraine McNamara-McGraw** thanked the membership for their participation and noted some highlights: Good attendance for two-day sittings, the 2008 Great Sky Sesshin, and contributions made to the Dharma Teacher's Fund. Larraine is enjoying teaching at Taycheedah Correctional Institution. Treasurer **Pete Tofte** reported that the MZC had a cash net worth of $18,483, down somewhat from the previous year due to falling stock values. After transferring $4,003 to the Dharma Teacher's Fund, our expenses exceeded remaining income by $261. **Chuck Eigen** reported that the front hall ceiling was repaired and both front and back halls painted.

Following their election at the membership meeting, the new Board elected: President – Chuck Eigen, Vice-President – Tojun Cobb, Treasurer – Pete Tofte, Secretary – Jim Gother, Members-at-Large – Linda Gee, Peter Johnson, Larraine McNamara-McGraw.

We thank out-going President Larraine McNamara-McGraw and Bob Balderson and John Rhiel for their service on the Board. Complete Minutes and Financial Report are available at the MZC.

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Wed., Thurs., Fri.

6:15 am Zazen
(Zen sitting)
6:55 am Kinhin
(Zen walking)
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 end of practice

6:30 pm Zazen
7:10 pm Kinhin
7:20 pm Zazen

Saturday

6:15 am Zazen
6:55 am Kinhin
7:05 am Zazen
7:45 am Service
8:00 breakfast, oryoki
8:25 work period
9:15 break, coffee & tea
9:30 study class*
10:30 end of practice
**except on all-day sitting days*

Introduction to Zen

An informal presentation on Buddhism and Zen, followed by instruction in zen sitting, tea and discussion. 6:30-8:30 p.m.–first Wednesday of each month.

Zen sitting instruction and private interview available by appointment. Call 963-0526.

MZC Contact Information

For messages: Phone: (414) 963-0526
Fax: (414) 963-0517 **E-mail:** kokyo-an@earthlink.net
For information and schedules:www.milwaukeezencenter.org

Useful Websites:

Soto Zen Buddhism: http//global.sotozen-net.or.jp/
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