



Weeding

During the morning service a few days ago, just as we began chanting the Heart Sutra with its message of the impermanence of all things, three large crimson petals detached from the poppy in the vase of flowers on the altar and floated down to rest on its surface.

It seemed to me to be a lovely illustration of the message of the sutra. We have just one planting of poppies in our garden and it has taken several years for it to bloom at all, and this year it produced just three gorgeous crimson blooms. I was proud of their beauty, eager to add one to the little vase on the altar, and greatly enamored of its crimson glory.

And then the petals fell.

It was of course a directly graphic illustration of Dōgen's teaching in his great essay, *Genjōkōan*. I went later to Shohaku Okumura's translation in his book, *Realizing Genjōkōan*, and found the phrase: "Therefore flowers fall

even though we love them; weeds grow even though we dislike them."

We may like or dislike the events or conditions of our life, but our liking or disliking of them has little impact on their existence, for the flowers and weeds have their own positions within this life we share with them, growing or fading in response to their individual conditions without regard to our attachment or aversion. Yet without regard to the conditions of their existence we persist in attachment to what we like and to aversion to the things we don't care for, believing somehow that we can keep what we like and get rid of what we don't like..

As all gardeners know, weeding is a constant task. We encourage the plants of our choice and ruthlessly dig up those that crowd and threaten them or that disrupt our master plan for "our" garden, forgetting that ours is not the ultimate choice of what will spring up out of the earth.

Flowers may grow because we planted their seeds, but other seeds and root systems co-exist with our choices and the weeds spring up in abundance.

We think of "flowers" as beautiful and "weeds" as unnecessary and ugly. This viewpoint is challenged each spring when I realize that the burgeoning "weeds" in our garden are violets, present everywhere, hiding beneath the leaves of "flowers", spreading via underground root systems and almost impossible to completely eradicate. And they burst forth with beautiful deep purple blooms.

So I have a quandary: I adore the purple flowers, but dislike the way the violets can choke out everything else. We also grow chives, delicious in taste and also bearing lovely lavender blooms. I caught myself the other day pointing out the chives to someone and saying, "They're as bad as weeds, they spread like wildfire."

This helped me realize

that I make special distinctions between flowers and weeds, not only in my garden, but perhaps also in life itself. These distinctions are not merely based on concepts of beauty or ugliness but, more importantly, on whether the plants in question behave according to my plan or disrupt my idea of how things should be.

The Buddha taught that our dissatisfaction with the nature of our lives, which he called *dukkha*, lies in our attempt to control our lives, clinging to what we like, pushing away what we dislike. This fruitless attempt to halt the inexorable process of impermanence, of the activity of causes and conditions, is the source of our suffering. And the essence of the problem is liking and disliking.

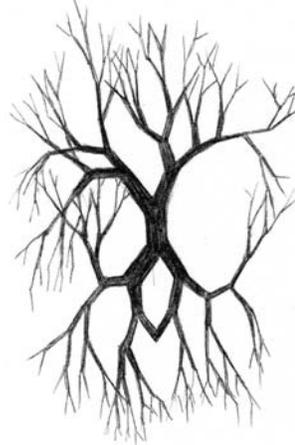
So I need to recognize that all living plants, used here as a metaphor for the conditions of my life, have the capacity to grow and inevitably also will fade. Nothing lasts,

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everything changes. So the challenge here is to love and nurture the things we find beautiful or good, with full knowledge that like the crimson petals of the poppy, they will fall. And to do what we can to curb the growth of what we find ugly or negative, with the full knowledge that like the weeds in the garden, they will spring up again.

To care for a garden also can promote understanding of the Buddhist teaching of “no attainment,” for the things we nurture may or may not flower or produce

delicious vegetables and the weeds, though pulled, return again and again.



We carry on, delighted with what does come to fruition and undiscouraged by the knowledge that weeds are never eradicated. To tend a garden is to participate

in the life process in all its mystery, a mystery that never comes to a full stop with perfect attainment, but rather keeps moving, growing, fading, living, and dying in a rich, unpredictable organic process.

Living life is like gardening. We engage in it fully and willingly, without ever completely vanquishing the weeds or preserving the flowers. After all, without the incessant, organic change, what would there be to do?

– **Tonen O’Connor**

Our thanks to Isabel Kent, whose illustrations grace this article.

Save the date

Rev. Issho Fujita, director of the Soto Zen Buddhism International Center in San Francisco will visit the Milwaukee Zen Center August 23-25. He will give a dharma talk at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, August 24, and sit zazen with us on the mornings of the 24th and 25th. Rev. Fujita was ordained in 1983, trained at Myokoji Monastery 1985-1986, served as resident teacher at Valley Zendo in Massachusetts 1987-2005 and in 2010 was appointed director of the International Center.

Milwaukee Zen Center – Schedule

July

2 - CLOSED for holiday
6 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen

August

3 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
24 - 6:30 p.m.-Dharma talk by Rev. Issho Fujita

September

3 - CLOSED for holiday
7 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen

October

5 - 6:30 p.m.-Introduction to Zen
15 & 16 - Two-day sitting

To see the 2011 Schedule and more information on Two-day sitting, visit our web site at www.milwaukeezencenter.org

THANKS

As Tonen comes to the conclusion of ten years as Resident Priest, she wishes to offer deepest appreciation to sangha members at the MZC and within the prison system for their dedication to the Buddha Way. They have taught her much that she values deeply.

Happenings

Thanks to Alec Schuppel and Maureen McGinn, who have been coming to the MZC on a regular basis to fulfill a requirement for community service for a course they are taking at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. Thanks to them, our lawn and gardens never looked better. We would also like to acknowledge the creative work that Linda Gee puts into our newsletters and Pete Tofte's careful work in keeping the MZC accounting up to date.

Eric Sargent, Saad Akbar Khan and Kevin Kostick have participated in the first of two classes on the precepts with Tonen, in preparation for sewing rakusus with Hoko in the fall, in preparation for receiving the precepts from Tonen.

Tonen gave talks at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Menomonee Falls and St. Joseph's Parish school in Grafton.

Long-time Zen Center member Fred Rappé passed away in mid-June and Tonen officiated at a brief funeral service for him. Fred's steady practice and kindness will long be remembered. For many years it was Fred's clippers that kept our bushes trimmed.

After six years of annual Great Sky Sesshins, this summer's sesshin has been cancelled due to the small number of registrations. Great Sky will be offered again in 2012.

In preparation for stepping down from the MZC in September, Tonen has made final visits to correctional institutions where she has served for many years, though she will continue making visits to Racine Correctional Institution. Fortunately, other fine teachers are taking over where necessary and so the prison program will be maintained.

View with a Grain of Sand –Wislawe Szymborska

*We call it a grain of sand,
but it calls itself neither grain nor sand.
It does just fine without a name,
whether general, particular,
permanent, passing,
incorrect or apt.*

*Our glance, our touch mean nothing to it.
It doesn't feel itself seen and touched.
And that it fell on the windowsill
is only our experience, not its.
For it, it is no different from falling on anything else
with no assurance that it has finished falling
or that it is falling still.*

*The window has a wonderful view of a lake,
but the view doesn't view itself.
It exists in this world
colorless, shapeless,
soundless, odorless, and painless.*

*The lake's floor exists floorlessly
and its shore exists shorelessly.
Its water feels itself neither wet nor dry
and its waves to themselves are neither singular nor plural.
They splash deaf to their own noise
on pebbles neither large nor small.*

*And all this beneath a sky by nature skyless
in which the sun sets without setting at all
and hides without hiding behind an unminding cloud.
The wind ruffles it, its only reason being
that it blows.*

*A second passes.
A second second.
A third.
But they're three seconds only for us.*

*Time has passed like a courier with urgent news.
But that's just our simile.
The character is invented, his haste is make-believe,
his news inhuman.*

(Our thanks to Ihab Hassan, who sent the poem to us.)

milwaukee zen center

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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 Web Sites:

Soto Zen Buddhism: <http://global.sotozen-net.or.jp/>
Soto Zen in America: <http://www.szba.org>

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