

ROOT & BRANCH

Newsletter of the Original Root Zen Center
June 2009



ORZC's spring garden. Photo/Dustin Block

What, it really isn't about me?! *By Tony Somlai*

I often ask Zen students to engage this life with direct action. I might suggest a peace picnic with friends, writing a letter of gratitude and thanks, or a compassionate act that goes unnoticed. The idea is often met with a positive nod of the head but the action is seldom initiated. The mental impression to act like a Buddha often seems more preferable than the physical effort of Buddha action. Days pass and I will ask the student, "How was the peace picnic?" "Oh, I didn't have the time" or "I did have coffee with a friend" are unfortunate responses that protect an ego that refuses to participate. "The letter is a great idea," is as far as gratitude can carry some students. And of course, the lie that "I always act compassionately without being noticed" is a false claim from a lost soul. These selfish, ego-centric, and self-absorbed responses to a simple practice request is not what we teach at the Original Root Zen Center.

Linda and I left previous Buddhist traditions because the teachings and practices ended at self-involved and selfish nonaction. We found these contemplative approaches destructive to the individual students and their community. In these schools of Buddhism, students felt good about themselves and the progress of their practice but cared little about others. When the investigation of self does not break free of ego there is a great danger of increased attachment to mind and self. Zen Buddhist teachers are not replacements for weak parents who praise you for every little thing. ORZC teachers will not overpraise or give you an award for sitting on a cushion. There is no place in this house that holds up a mirror for self-admiration. Self-promotion will not work here. No teacher will fall in the narcissistic trap of telling you how wonderful you are for washing the dishes, giving a dharma talk, or working in the garden. Helping others, caring, and loving-kindness are not a competitive sport. Stop thinking about you and connect with the everyday suchness of this moment.

There really is no need for any more classes on self-esteem because being "special" only creates more suffering. What in reality tells you that you should be awarded for the "ordinary" life of doing what a Buddha does? "Self-importance" may work in the short-term but leads to troubles in the long-term because you will end up suffering alone and separated from those you love. Clever, cynical statements about the short-comings of others may make you feel smug in the false belief that you are better than others. However, this deception masks the incivility and aggression that eventually carries you to a gray land of depression and loneliness. People who withdraw, refuse to take the risk of stepping forward, and hide within a fearful mind also suffer from self-absorption. They also have little respect for others. To withdraw your effort and affection, no matter what the reason, is as aggressive as spitting on the person(s) you disdain. It is also an egoistic strategy of the weak for more power and dominance.

Sitting in the patio garden I jot a few notes for this article. The sun sets in the deep blue sky as the chill off the lake rolls on my skin. The hawk takes a swipe at the bird feeder and leaves empty-taloned. The fox, looking like he has missed one-too-many meals, walks past me focused on the ground-feeding squirrels. He takes a run but they climb to safety in the tamarack. All this, the present moment, and no self to observe. Yellow finches at the thistle and red-wing blackbirds at the black-oiled sunflower seeds take in the last feed before darkness. How beautifully ordinary it all is.

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Living for a Dollar

By Paul Reese

I started collecting a penny for every year I was alive about fifteen years ago. I dug through piles of pennies to get one for every year I was alive up to that point. I will admit that in the last few years I have forgotten and don't have one past 2004. Easy enough to fix and I probably will someday. My goal was to earn one dollar before I died. Seems silly I guess since you always hear it's all about the life in your years and not the years in your life but I still wanted to reach a hundred and make a dollar. I guess it's just a reminder to me that my life is worthless.

Now people will probably read that and say, "Whoa this guy needs some help" but before anyone calls the nut house hear me out. In all honesty if I don't make a dollar and I only live to be sixty what is anyone going to do with the sixty cents I saved up? By that time a can of soda will cost five dollars and grade

schoolers will probably need to bring a fifty dollar bill with them for lunch. So by attaching a value to my life in a sense I do make it worthless and I see people do this kind of thing daily.

I know a few gym buffs. The kind of people that need help putting on their shirts because their arms just don't bend the way they used to. Most of them are nice guys and I have to respect their dedication to their cause but once in a while I hear a comment like "Hey check out my shadow! It's so huge." Just makes me stop, turn my head and wonder if that really just happened. Did he really just admire his shadow cause it's buff? A size. A weight. A value. All attached to themselves and really have no relevant meaning. Why does anyone care that they wear an extra large shirt as opposed to a medium one. What does this title

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First Moment Retreat

By Dustin Block

The Abbot brought us together in the garden a Saturday a few weeks before First Moment Retreat. Kim, Janine and I met with Mathew to walk through the early spring garden to begin looking at this outdoor dharma room in a new way. Mathew encouraged us to imagine sight lines and to consider the garden as a new whole. Extending paths. Creating the illusion of a bridge. Opening space for new energy to appear.

Energy from this "first moment" planning meeting carried forward to the three-day retreat. Kim working as guiding teacher, led community through a series contemplative work practices that built toward a collective plan for the garden.

We started individually. Every retreat participant received a workbook and a pencil to sketch and plot their views of the garden. Individuals then became pairs and ideas were fitted together with dharma brothers and sisters. Pairs then became small groups and small groups built to the community as a whole. Teams were created and schedules were laid out. Retreat itself became a seed for something new to grow. Master Teacher Tony's teaching was evident: We don't work in the garden, the garden works us.

There was space for all community members at retreat. Community members took turns watching babies and talked honestly about the time they could bring to garden jobs this year. The open dialogue created jobs and schedules for community to follow.

In the weeks following retreat, Master Teacher Linda and community members built a spiral path through the garden, Kim led the "special ops" team in moving a large trellis and building a kids' garden, and an herb garden was planted. "First moment" planted a seed. It's now community's to tend and help grow.



(Top-left) Marie and Henry take a walk. (Lower-left) Dustin points out plants in the garden. (Lower-right) Abbot Mathew with the community in the dharma room.

Photos/
Darin Zimpel

PEACE GRUB Soup Recipe

EVERY THURSDAY NIGHT (5:30 PM) WE CELEBRATE PEACE BY SHARING A MEAL TOGETHER. IT ISN'T DIFFICULT TO DO AND COSTS LESS THAN \$20.00 TO FEED 12-15 PEOPLE (INCLUDING 3 LITTLE BUDDHAS).

HERE IS A VEGGIE SOUP RECIPE LINDA AND I HAVE MADE A FEW TIMES.

- 2 VIDALIA ONIONS (CHOPPED)
- 4-6 STALKS CELERY (CHOPPED)
- 2-3 SWEET POTATOES (CHOPPED)
- 1/2 lb. FRESH GREEN BEANS (CHOPPED)
- 1 LARGE CAN CRUSHED TOMATOES
- 3 BOXES OF VEGGIE SOUP STOCK

TO TASTE: SALT, BASIL, PARSLEY, GARLIC, RUBBED SAGE, SMOKED PAPRIKA

SAUTE ONIONS, CELERY, AND POTATOES IN A BIT OF VIRGIN OIL. BUILD THE STOCK WITH WATER AND THEN ADD REST. A LITTLE RICE AND BREAD ON THE SIDE WOULD BE NICE!

7 SIGNS I AM A BUDDHA

1. BIG EAR LOBES ARE COOL
2. I HAVE A DIAMOND IN THE MIDDLE OF MY FOREHEAD.
3. I NEVER GET LOST BECAUSE ALL MY MAPS HAVE THE TEN DIRECTIONS.
4. THE 4 GREAT VOWS MAKE SENSE BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT THEM.
5. BREAKFAST ALWAYS FOLLOWS MORNING PRACTICE.
6. I HAVE A FRIEND WHO REMEMBERS EVERYTHING I SAY AND HER NICKNAME IS ANANDA.
7. MY FRIENDS THINK THE DEATH BUNO LOOKS LIKE HI!

A HOPEFUL STORY

ALL BEINGS HAVE A STORY. EACH STORY IS DIFFERENT AND THE SAME. THE FORM IS UNIQUE AND THE ESSENCE IS LOVE. THE MOST INTERESTING SERIES CREATIVELY MIX FORM AND ESSENCE TOGETHER. THE FOLLOWING STORY IS TRUE AND FILLED WITH HOPE. ONE DAY, A LONG TIME AGO YOU APPEARED IN THIS HUMAN FORM. SOON THIS FORM WILL DISAPPEAR WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO WITH THIS LIFE? THE STORY IS ABOUT HOPE. NOW, YOU HAVE TO WRITE THE ENDING.

Beginning

MIDDLE

End

Appearing

Smiling

Disappearing

A NICE LIFE

PEACE

specificity

1-0-2-7 1-0-5-1-4-1

YEAH! GREAT LOVE, GREAT COMPASSION, ONLY HELPING!

The Other Side

By Laura Hilbrand

I never thought I would say this, but I am grateful for busting my knee and having the opportunity to put into action teachings and being able to experience things I never would have experienced if I was less of a hack on the soccer field.

On March 4, 2009, I was starting a new season of indoor soccer. I have played for 8 years and have only experienced minor sprains and strains. I had the cliché thought that I would not be the one that gets “seriously” injured and sustain a “career ending” injury. Well, guess what, with 30 seconds left in the game I found myself rolling on the ground in pain and unable to walk without my knee buckling. When I received the MRI results later that week it revealed I completely tore my anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). I understood the implications that diagnoses came with from a medical/rehab stand point, but I had no idea what emotions and revelations I would experience first hand.

There were difficult times during my recovery. The pain was intense at times. Imagine having holes drilled in your bones and then leaving the hospital two hours later. Imagine feeling so nauseous, anxious, and dizzy from pain meds that walking from the bed to the bathroom was almost enough to give you an anxiety attack.

The frustration was intense at times. Imagine being confined to the second floor of your house. Bedroom to the bathroom. Repeat. Imagine not being able to put socks on by yourself. Relying on your husband to “pack a lunch” for you before he went to work since you couldn’t walk down stairs to prepare a simple meal. Imagine not being able to use your hands for anything, carrying, holding, etc. Crutches occupy your hands while standing, walking, climbing stairs. You must carry a backpack around to do the holding and carrying for you.

The economic hardship was intense at times. Imagine being off of work on medical leave for four months. Living off of tax

returns. Having your husband apply for a second job.

But as craptastic as it was I am still here. I still have my left leg. I can walk and I will eventually even be able to play soccer again. Don’t worry Brie I won’t. The practice in particular has helped me come to this conclusion. There is one teaching I learned early on that has truly been influential. Finding the positives in each situation. It actually took me by surprise how many positive examples I could come up with. I have had the great opportunity to experience things I wouldn’t have if I was working full time. Like feeling the joy of watching Adi play at a park. Becoming closer to a new friend by chatting during the day on facebook. Being able to spend time in my home and zen garden. Finally completing projects I have put off for months.

I have also had the unique circumstance of experiencing rehab first hand and understanding just a little bit more of what my clients go through. Feeling pain and different sensations. How it feels to need to ask for help for most tasks. Performing exercises when you have poor strength and command over your body. I feel like I can empathize and connect to my clients a little more. Something I would only be able to know if I was injured and going through rehab myself.

Accepting help from my husband, friends and sangha. Accepting help at first was something new and difficult for me. I am usually on the other side, the helper not the helpee. I had to quickly learn what sincere humility is and keep my ego in check. I am not going to lie. It is easier to learn when you have to wear white TED stockings, a big, bulky brace, and need assistance for the most mundane tasks. It is a beautiful thing to share a vulnerable moment with someone close. I think it makes you closer with that person.

“Jim, can you please help me get out of bed” was a sentence I didn’t think I would have to utter at least for 40 years. Fortunately, I did have to utter these words prematurely. I have learned a lot about myself during this difficult time and have had the opportunity to use the new teachings I have learned during my short time as a member of the ORZC.

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do for them or anyone else?

I see it in class too. People get wrapped up in their grades and G.P.A. Now of course having a good G.P.A is important for progressing further and I have no issues with people that do very well. Once again I admire these people for their hard work. The issues arrive when they get upset that they got a 99% instead of a 100% because they punched in a number wrong on the calculator and were off by point three. A percentage. More values. More worthlessness. Isn’t it more important that they learned a new skill? How about the mistake itself? Did nothing get learned from that mistake?

I was talking with the Abbot a little while ago and he told me something he shared with his class. He told them “Knowledge without helping is just a

Falling short of your goals is not the worst thing in the world. Attaching yourself to something abstract in that goal is where you can become blinded.

parlor trick.” Is it better to be remembered as the person that has a gigantic shadow or the person that knows how to work out and is helpful in the gym. How about the person that cried to the teacher and wasted a half hour of class to get a hundred on an exam or the person that knew what they were doing and helped those that didn’t.

I know it happens everywhere. I’m sure as you are reading this you can think of someone who has attached meaningless values to something that

could be wonderful. A planned birthday gift surprise for a coworker but that one guy thinks no one should contribute more than a dollar so *he* doesn’t look bad. Or someone at a restaurant complaining because the person at the table next to him got a bigger steak. It’s when you attach those values that things become a mess.

Falling short of your goals is not the worst thing in the world. Attaching yourself to something abstract in that goal is where you can become blinded. Then it is hard to see what you can do with what you have attained. We all know our job is helping others and that should be what comes first. Taking what you learned even if you haven’t been to the gym in years or just an average student and sharing that with another is the best thing you can do. We aren’t here to do parlor tricks but we can collect our pennies and make them into something priceless.

The Bare Bones

ORZC's upcoming classes, ceremonies and community events

14th Annual Women's Retreat – Lotus Warrior: Gratitude Heart Opens

Thursday, June 11-noon Sunday, June 14

What is woman? What is my strength? How can I connect with my intuitive and joyous self? How can I do this during times of suffering and confusion? Explore these questions and more through creative practices, movement, meditation, rest and ceremony. All women are welcome to attend part or all of the retreat. Retreat begins at 5 p.m. Thursday with opening ceremony and dinner. Call Holly at 262-930-1901 to reserve your spot.

Compassion Fest Planning Meeting, 6 p.m. Wednesday, June 24

Bring your energy and ideas for this year's celebration of compassion! Compassion Fest is scheduled for Sunday, Oct. 4. Call Holly at 262-930-1901 if you would like to help but can't make it to the meeting.

Creative Asylum, Thursday, June 25 from 6:45 to 8 pm

Given the times we live in we need even greater use of our imagination to create new ways of helping each other with limited resources. Here, at ORZC, we have a place where inspiration and imagination find innovative approaches to sharing our creative outlets together in a safe and nonjudgmental environment. Participate in the fun-art-fest called Creative Asylum. We will meet every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month right after Peace Grub (which starts at 5:30 and is open to the ORZC Community). So, you can eat and create all in the same night!! Master Teachers Linda and Tony Somlai will be leading Creative Asylum and look forward to a large turnout for this no-cost-2-u event. Please note, there will be no Peace Grub or Creative Asylum on Thursday, June 11, due to Women's Retreat.

Garden Buddha's Retreat Friday, July 17-Sunday, July 19

This weekend retreat is an opportunity to practice in ORZC's "outdoor dharma room" – the gardens at the DeKoven Center. No gardening experience is required, just an intention to help all beings (and garden tools if you have any.)

Compassion Fest Planning Meeting, 6 p.m. Wednesday, July 22

Sangha picnic 4 p.m. Saturday, July 25

Celebrate summer with the community! An afternoon of fun and food on the DeKoven grounds. Visit the gardens, play games and share in a famous ORZC potluck. Call or sign up in advance so cooks know how much to bring!

Camp Bodhi Root Children's Camp, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 8.

Join us for laughter, creativity, and fun at ORZC's 2nd annual Camp Bodhi Root! Last year children composed earth music, created a living statue, and painted "The Biggest Story Ever Told." This year will see plenty of new surprises! Children of all ages are welcome. Contact Marie at 262-308-4881 or Mat/Brie at 262-822-2258 for more information.

Summer evening intensive, 8 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 22

Live for one night only! Come rock-n-roll at this late-night retreat from 8 p.m. to midnight! This heavy metal practice will include sitting, chanting and walking meditation. It's an opportunity to quiet your punk rock mind (and rock star ego!) and let the deep resonance of your true nature sing out. This meditation concert is a free, all-ages show. No cover charge!

Breakfast in the Garden, 9 a.m., Saturday, Aug. 29

ORZC's third annual fundraiser breakfast is held in the Zen Center garden. Join us for a breakfast, and walk the garden's new spiral path. Cost is \$7 for adults, \$4 for children. All proceeds benefit the Zen Center.

Daily Schedule

Meditation practices last about one hour and are held at ORZC, 600 21st St., unless otherwise noted.

Monday: Practice from 6:20-7 a.m.; Dharma talk at 7 p.m. at ORZC.

Tuesday: Practice from 6:20-7 a.m.; 10 Direction Energy Helix, Sitting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday: Practice from 6:20-7 a.m.; Chanting, 6:30 p.m.; Sitting meditation at 7 p.m.

Thursday: Practice from 6:20-7 a.m.; Peace Grub at 5:30 p.m.

Friday: Morning Peace Practice from 6:20-7 a.m.

Saturday: Bows at 6:20 a.m. practice at 7 a.m. followed by breakfast out with the community; Garden Crew 9:30-11:30 a.m.

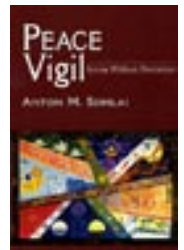
Sunday: Class at 7 p.m.

Monthly Schedule

Community dinner: 6 p.m. on the first Friday of each month at a Racine-area restaurant. Sign up at the Zen center.

Practice dialogues: Practice dialogues with senior teachers are held on Tuesday and Thursday morning, Wednesday nights and the last Saturday morning of the month. Dialogues are also available upon request. Five minutes notice before practice is often all that is needed.

Original Root Zen Center
600 21st St.
Racine, WI 53403



New Book from ORZC!
Peace Vigil - Living Without Hesitation
by Anton M. Somlai
Available now at:
www.dragonmountainpress.com

June 2009

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Original Root Zen Center

Sunday Night Class Schedule

The Original Root Zen Center offers classes for the community on Sunday nights. See the schedule below. All classes begin at 7 p.m. and last about an hour. Beginners welcome!

June

7 - Zen Cooking, part 4
14 - No class (Women's Retreat)
21 - No class (Father's Day)
28 - Fourth Great Vow

Garden Scenes



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