

ROOT & BRANCH

Newsletter of the Original Root Zen Center
November 2009

What happens next?

By Anton Somlai, Master Teacher

The first time I sat a Zen Buddhist meditation practice I paid attention to only one breath in the 45-minute sitting period. During the following 10-minute walking and 45-minute sitting period I couldn't let go of that one-breath moment of clarity. It was truly unfortunate to miss all the other breaths. A flash of awakening, followed by 55 minutes of trying to capture an experience was a feeble attempt at enlightenment. Becoming a Buddha was relegated to the mind junk pile along side the Mickey Mantle Topps baseball card, buying a jock and cup for freshman football (wearing the jock and cup for the first time is somewhere else in repressed memories), and throwing an egg at a really nasty neighborhood boy in eighth grade (my parents were not impressed that I hit him square in the forehead when his mother brought the yoke-drenched spiteful lad to our front door). One moment, one breath, enlightenment - ho hum - off to the next experience. And for some time, my contemplative practice stayed trapped in "What happens next?"

I read and write because I don't know what else to do. I keep notebooks to track the words and sentences that filter through mind habit. The writing seldom knows what will follow. Even with an outline the next few words, while unintended, appear from nowhere. How was I to know he had a gun? This is Starbucks for crying out loud (a cliché that needs to be dropped). He wore Bozo-the-clown makeup, his red nose quivering each time he pointed the Dirty Harry 357 Magnum. I wondered, "What happens next?" Will he shoot me with a real bullet, ending my life in the middle of a French tragic comedy as a mime looks into the camera wiping away pretend tears while sipping an imaginary cup of mocha latte served on a silver platter by a midget dressed as Batman? Or will he wet my face with the realistic looking squirt gun while holding a fake tulip that explodes into confetti as soon as it touches my hand? That's the beauty of writing - and life - not knowing what comes next.

What happens next presents us with a bit of a problem since it can be serious and humorous, good and bad, all at the same time. I was inside. The darkness held an opaque subtle light reminding me of a late autumn sunset. The longer I stayed, the stronger the illumination. The fear of arriving drifted away into the mist across the horizon. My body felt

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Celebrating Buddha's Enlightenment: Q&A with Master Teacher Linda Somlai

Graceful. Joyous. How can I help you?

These three phrases are how Master Teacher Linda Somlai described Buddha's Enlightenment, which the Original Root Zen Center will celebrate on Sunday, Dec. 13. Here are her answers to several questions about the tradition, and how we celebrate it. (Questions asked by Janine Anderson)

Q: What is Buddha's Enlightenment?

A: It is when we Buddhists celebrate the traditional and historic Buddha's moment of awakening. When he has been sitting for six years and looked up at the morning star and had a realization.

It's not so much that we celebrate his realization, but the face that he taught and pointed that we all have the ability to wake up.

That really true connection is what brings us to such joy and happiness in wanting to celebrate this. As humans, that connects us to our biggest hope, the ability to wake up and function as loving beings.



Master Teacher
Linda Somlai

Q: Why are precepts taken at this time?

A: It isn't particularly traditional, since precepts may be taken any time of year. It seems like a natural connection when someone steps forward and says I'm willing to share this practice path. They publicly vow to "just try." It's an incredible thing to celebrate.

Q: Each preceptor gets a pin, with a Chinese character on it – for example, Love for Pathfinders, Peace for Peacekeeper Teachers, Effort for Teachers in Training, Truth for Reverend Teachers. What do those words point to?

A: When we were looking at the different ways people could become a member of our community, we wanted to have it be as wide as the places the members came from.

We wanted to pick a word that could possibly guide their effort if they got confused, which we all get. You could look back to your vows, back to the promise, and let that word guide your practice. There are practice medicines for each of us in difficult times. We wanted to stay with the Chinese character so we wouldn't think too much, just use it as a guide.

Q: Why do we give gifts?

A: We come from a culture that so wants to fix things that are wrong. Our practice says we are complete and perfect just as we are. It's much better to give a gift than try to fix somebody. Complete and perfect means that we can always try. And I think that's what we're celebrating in each other on Enlightenment Day. That's why usually some kind of practice present for the Zen Center. Two new crescent cushions appeared from the

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What Happens Next? *from page 1*

like a tree trunk; crossed legs holding branched arms and nested hands. Observing the quiet was like looking into a tomb of dead memories - each one filed away by category. Air molecules moved in and out of my skin's pores. I watched the breath settle gently in my hara. Light flowed through each breath, each moment. There was no next thing.

Three unsatisfactory results happen when waiting for the next thing. First, you miss the "thing" that appears in this moment. Missing "this" moment makes you pretty useless to help anyone. Next, you grasp for the last thing. The last thing no longer exists. You become eternally stuck chasing illusions. Finally, you agonize about the next thing. Wanting something better than the last thing is not hope, it is fear. All three ways of "waiting" keeps the suffering dream alive. These "waiting" tactics delay the action of helping. Waiting for the next thing is selfishness at it's worst. The lack of respect for beings suffering in this moment always leads to a disappointing life.

"What is so bad about not living in the moment? After all, I've missed lots of moments and here I am." This is exactly what a narcissist would say. A big ego believes that each moment revolves around the self. This selfish thinking misses the point as to why we are here. I write these words at an outdoor café on October 19, 2009. The sky is clear and the air registers a comfortable temperature of 60 degrees. I love this kind of autumn day. The sun warms my back and the breeze is cool on my face. It is late afternoon and the long shadows have appeared. This beautiful weather reminds me that some people are not present for the sun, sky, and color-changing leaves. I make a concerted effort to value the things around me by working them into this writing. I want you the reader to be as fully alive in this moment as I am. If this story connects with your story we both have an "AHA" moment. And then we can - together - help others who "miss this thing."

"Hey, I have had some wonderful experiences in my life

and see nothing wrong with thinking about them." While this has some truth, the reverse would also be true in your belief system. You must have had some terrible events in your life and can't stop thinking about them. Either way, the yearning to hold or push those moments away creates the suffering of wanting. You want the past or you want the past to change leaves you hungry for another experience that is not present in this moment. Grasping never holds more than the emptiness of an illusion. I once sat at an outdoor patio in Amsterdam and wrote the introduction to the book "Peace Vigil." The words danced with the Euro rhythms flowing from the outdoor speakers. That experience is contained in the writing of this present moment. The patio story could only appear in this moment by letting it go. Without thinking - there it is. Without a next moment - this moment is already enough for the story to continue.

"Well, you have to worry about the future or bad things will happen because you didn't plan for them." If you make the energy of "bad" things, the only possible outcome from a worried mind is more worry. In the next several weeks, as the air turns cold, snow will cover this patio table at Stone Creek café on the corner of Kinnikinnic and Allis streets in Bay View. Oh no! What can I do? The beautiful autumn day that awakened the dead muse within this suffering mind will be gone. Should I start planning? Will I freeze out here? Could global warming help me? Does the young couple playing Scrabble at the next table realize their eventual demise in a winter storm? The malaise of worrying about the next thing has no value. Worrying about the past or future is the primary reason people stop writing - they worry about the finished piece before committing the first word to paper. Without any worry the first words to this story were "What happens next?"

Master Teacher Tony Somlai co-founded ORZC in 1990 with Master Teacher Linda Somlai.

Master Teacher Q&A *from page 1*

Do-Gam. We were all so excited about those two new cushions. I get very happy seeing that energy in the community. And (giving gifts) brings such joy to each other.

Q: Each year we have a Buddha's Enlightenment poem. Why is that?

A: When the community gathers for celebrating events, there's always a teaching from Master Teachers, Senior Teachers, the Abbot, and particularly for our more traditional celebrations, it's done in the form of a poem. And here at ORZC, that word "poem" is used very loosely and widely.

Q: Preceptors, and members of the community who wish to join in, receive a small burn on the inside of their arm. Why is that?

A: It goes way back in our history and it's now the very smallest touch of the end of an incense stick that has been lit and burned out. In that moment of incense touching your skin, your mind is

completely burn and ouch. It brings you completely into the present. We can use this experience to reflect that we are moment-to-moment beings.

We do not need to be pulled and tossed about by the attachment to our own thinking. We can let it go just as easily as that moment of skin burn.

Q: Why do we come together to celebrate Buddha's Enlightenment?

A: This is our most natural way of functioning. We just think we are individual and separate beings. And of course, we are, otherwise we'd be landing in each others' laps all the time. At our most sparkling best we realize if you hurt, I hurt, if you're joyous, I'm joyous. That transcends even the physicality of being in the same room and the same place.

Plus, we have good potluck.

Janine Anderson is a Teacher-in-training at ORZC.

The Last Leaf

By Susan Jaimes, Elder Senior Rev. Teacher

If it were up to me

I'd rather be the last leaf to fall.

Not the first
prematurely rushing down
amid the grass still green
and the sun still warm
missing so much
just to be the prettiest
and the first.

No. I'd hold on for dear life
clinging to the canopy of barren trees
so as to smell Winter coming.
I'd like to feel the swish
of the goose's wings
as she calls to her mate

and tells him that she's cold
and wants to head south.

From my vantage point high in the sky
like a silent voyeur
I'd look out over the landscape
and watch nature prepare for her fiercest show.

Withered and shriveled
I'd fight to survive
those gusty Winter winds
that say, "it's time."
Then, and only then
I'd float down silently and effortlessly
to my final resting spot
on top of all those other leaves
that didn't quite have the guts enough
to stick it out.

(circa 1994)

But it's not up to me.

(2009)

Today

By Paul Reese

Today I woke up angry.
Today I woke up sad.
Today the world
Just feels really bad.

Today is just ugly.
Today I wore plaid.
Today everything
Makes me so mad.

Today I regressed.
Today I was had.
Today everyone
Labeled me "lad."

Today is almost over.
Today is just a fad.
Tomorrow is a new day.
For that, I am glad.

Paul Reese is a pathfinder at ORZC. He wrote this poem from Iraq, where he is serving in the Army Reserves.

Web of Light: Shining for others

By Dustin Block, Reverend Teacher

Reflect on happiness and you'll see times of laughter, joy and love. Light connects them all.

The Buddha realized this over 2,500 years ago when he saw the morning star and realized he had to help his friends and family attain their true nature. The Buddha's effort reverberates to this day. All Buddhist traditions celebrate the Buddha's enlightenment as one its major holidays of the year. The Original Root Zen Center will celebrate this sacred day on Dec. 13 with a ceremony at 4 p.m.

But the historic Buddha is not the only being to celebrate in this wonderful enlightenment tale. The Wednesday before Buddha's Enlightenment the ORZC community holds a Web of Light Retreat and Ceremony to honor the morning star that patiently shined for millennia before the Buddha ever looked up from beneath the bodhi tree. Like this star, the ORZC community practices to be a source of light and hope for all beings.

The ORZC community created the Web of Light Ceremony based on the story of Indra's net. The story describes a net that's infinite in size with a beautiful jewel at each knot. Within each jewel is the reflection of every other jewel in the net. The entire net is located within any one jewel, and each jewel is part of the infinite net. Much the same way, we are all a source of light, and we are part of the web of light. If our true nature is cloudy with the confused direction of "for me," then all are confused. If our

true nature shines with the simple direction, "for others," then all shine.

Share and connect with light on Wednesday, Dec. 9 by participating in the **Web of Light Retreat and Ceremony**. Retreat begins at 8 a.m. with bows, chanting and sitting meditation, followed by a special work practice to light the way at ORZC. Lunch will be served at noon, followed by meditation and work practices in the afternoon. A community dinner prepared by those at retreat will be held at 5:30 p.m. The Web of Light

Ceremony begins at 7 p.m. and is a wonderful opportunity to honor the web of light that has helped you wake up to the needs of others. You may even win a prize! Children are welcome at both the retreat and ceremony.

To attend, contact Dustin at (262) 488-3419 or dustin.block@gmail.com

Web of Light Retreat and Ceremony

Wednesday, Dec. 9

Retreat: 8am to 5pm
Community Dinner: 5:30pm
Ceremony: 7pm

Spooky Halloween '09

By Holly Johnson, Senior Reverend Teacher

The ORZC community celebrated Halloween with a costume party again this year, kindly hosted by Abbot Mathew Somlai, Peacekeeper Brie Somlai and Debie Allen at their home. We trick-or-treated in the neighborhood and had great, chilly fun! The 3-year-old girls were dressed as witches, complete with magic wands and broomsticks, and the almost-2-year-old was dressed as an adorable skeleton. The adults dressed up as their favorite superhero with many inventing their own.

The teachers-in-training, Janine Anderson and Marie Block, organized games for us to play, including pin the nose on the pumpkin and wrap the mummy where we had to cover a buddy with an entire roll of toilet paper. Not as easy as it sounds! We voted on the funniest and best costumes. And, of course, we all brought food for the potluck to share. It was another chance for the community to be together, celebrate and laugh.



(Top left) Janine with her skeleton son, Henry. (Middle left) Bethany dressed up as a compassion cow. (Lower left) Two princess witches, Ami and Adi. (Above left) Abbot Mathew dressed as Teenwolf. (Above right) Elder Teacher Sue as a fairy godmother.

Photos by Darin Zimpel

Love Is Like

(For Suzanne and Joshua)

By *Darin Zimpel*

Fall day in the garden
Clouds drift past sun
With same movement of air
That makes flower shadows dance
With rhythm of all moments

Before and after today
Soil freezes and thaws
In cycles secretive yet common
Like wisdom never questioning
What is next to be done

Remember today in the garden
And the October bee landing
Between two unlit candles
A pause before beginning
A breath before the next

Autumn At Sand Bay (9/18/09)

By *Darin Zimpel*

September wind moves
In all directions at once
Making buoys dance
With pulse of bay's waves
Beating like now now now

Further down the beach
Wooden sculpture matures
By slowly but continually
Becoming part of the sand
Holding it in place

Darin Zimpel is a pathfinder at ORZC. He lives in Racine with his wife, Bethany, who is a peacekeeper at ORZC.

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 6:30 p.m. (No classes at ORZC in December.)

The Bare Bones

ORZC's upcoming classes, ceremonies and community events

Web of Light Ceremony 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 9

Held each year in the heart of the week leading up to Buddha's Enlightenment, this ceremony was created by the ORZC community to celebrate our inter-connected nature. You are light connecting with light. Join us at the Web of Light Ceremony and let your true nature light shine! Sign up at ORZC. (See details on page 4.)

Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 13

Over 2,500 years ago the historic Buddha looked up, saw the morning story and realized his true nature of only helping. You are Buddha. Join us to celebrate your enlightened nature, and to support ORZC members taking precepts - spiritual commitments to live a life of loving-kindness. Open to all. Activities will be available for children, and one of ORZC's famous potlucks will follow. Bring a dish to share! Please let us know if you can make it so that we can plan the meal and seating. (Read Master Teacher Linda Somlai's teachings on Buddha's Enlightenment on page 1).

New Year's Eve Celebration 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 31

Come celebrate the New Year with ORZC. We will eat together, welcome the new year and play games, with midnight meditation. Begin the year by practicing loving-kindness with your Buddha buddies! Sign-up at the Zen Center!

Monthly Schedule

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.

New Book from ORZC!



Peace Vigil - Living Without Hesitation
by Anton M. Somlai

Available now at:

www.dragonmountainpress.com

Root & Branch

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The Original Root Zen Center's 2010 Calendar

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Plan your year with ORZC *today!*



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