



Alert for the Eagle

by Cori Faklaris, Dharma Teacher

Recently, I was huffing and puffing on my bike along the Monon Trail between 11th and 16th streets. I've had a bad habit of obliviousness to people who try to speak to me during my cycling workouts. So, it took me a minute to realize the man ahead of me was trying to get my attention, and stop.

"Pardon me, the what?" I asked.

"The eagle!" he said.

I peered in the direction he was pointing in. At first I didn't see anything but brush and a chain-link fence between us and the interstate above.



But my eyes adjusted, and the eagle was there. He was perched on top of the fence and had brownish-gray feathers that blended in well with the hillside and brush. He was majestic in bearing, about as tall as my bike seat's height above the ground.

"In all my years living here, I've never seen a bird like that," the man told me.

I was grateful to my new friend on the trail for calling the bird to my attention. Lost in my fatigue fog, I would have ridden right past it!

How many times do we miss the chance to be aware and attentive to the eagle in our midst?

There's an old Zen story: a student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: "Attention." The student said, "Is that all?" The master wrote, "Attention. Attention." The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me." In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, "Attention. Attention. Attention." In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word 'attention' mean?" Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention."

The above is one of my favorite Zen stories. The retelling is by Charlotte Joko Beck, who used it to lead off an essay included in her 1993 book "Nothing Special: Living Zen." Beck (who passed away in June), went on to comment, "Attention, or awareness, is the secret of life and the heart of practice."

Attentiveness is a constant struggle for me. I can be careless with some details of life that I personally don't find important, but I also tend to obsess about what I do care about, and it can be hard for me to strike a mentally healthy balance. Also, I tend to "space out," as a teacher once observed. She gave me a neat tool for meditation focus: fast mantra, or the technique of repeating a mantra in your mind much faster than you could ever speak it out loud.

Nowadays, I often have enough focus to simply be in the present moment while I sit formal meditation. I listen to the air conditioner, the shifts of people's clothes as they fidget, the skateboarders outside. I keep my back straight. I breathe.

But in other modes, it can be a struggle. My complaints and my anxieties often crowd out my attention to the present: "Can I get up this hill?" "I'll never get faster!" "What was that noise in my gears?" "I want a mocha shake after this." "Who's that ahead?" "I'm too tired, I should turn back." "I'm running late." "Who does this rider think he is anyway, Lance Armstrong?"

Getting wrapped up in my own self like this, I literally ride past my life. That's not good: every moment is precious. I try to recognize it so that I can come back to the present. Again and again, I remind myself to be here now.

(Continued on page 3)

Abbot's letter

Robert Blender

Part of our teaching in Buddhism is about the inter-connectedness of existence; another way to talk about it is non-self—that no one and nothing is a separate, distinct entity, but that we are all dependent upon each other and everything. We are in this together. What separates us is our thinking and clinging to concepts. The natural result of insight into non-self or inter-connectedness is that we have a responsibility to take care of each other and this world.

The impulse to jump in and help when we identify a need is a beautiful one. There is the story of Buddhist visions of Heaven and Hell: In Hell, the Hungry Ghosts with their long snouts, small mouths and short arms are at a buffet, but, try as they might they cannot get the delicious food to their mouths. In Heaven, the situation is the same, but the Hungry Ghosts are feeding each other. This type of story portrays our inter-connectedness and the poor results of not recognizing it. It also points up a value of being helpful and taking care of one another.

But, does being helpful always mean doing for another or providing for another? In my profession, as a psychotherapist and social worker, I see many people with many needs. The opportunities to do things for other people are endless. But, it soon becomes clear that providing for others is not always equivalent with being helpful. If I provide a hospital-funded taxi ride for a patient that could have called a friend or family member for a ride home from the hospital, I have taken away the opportunity for that patient to develop the skill of asking those in their own support system for help when they need it. I have also deprived them of the lesson of taking responsibility for meeting their own needs. I have done something for them, but I have not been as helpful as I could have been.



In addition to helping others and not giving that person the opportunity to develop a skill, there is also the concern of the effect on the helper. If I were to meet every need that was presented in my work environment—an inpatient psychiatric facility—then I myself would be left depleted and exhausted. I would become resentful. This is colloquially known as “burn out” or “compassion fatigue”. In the process of doing for others, we have left out ourselves.

This process occurs in Zen practice and in volunteering at a Zen Center. Many people come to the Zen Center very inspired to do hard practice; they are “on fire” and aspire to be a Bodhidharma, sitting in a cave unmoving for nine years, breaking through the wall of the Self, having body and mind drop away, seeing Nirvana unfold before them. This motivation is admirable, but it lacks wisdom. It is a path that often leads to a relatively short period of intense practice and then, “burn out”. Volunteering is the same; an individual cannot sustainably volunteer for everything. Sometimes saying “No” is the most compassionate thing to do for ourselves and others.

Our Four Great Vows that we recite every morning say, “Sentient beings are numberless, we vow to save them all.” In this vow, we commit to an impossible project; we take responsibility for everything and everyone. In the process, we must have wisdom to discern when we are actually being helpful (and when we are just doing for others to make ourselves feel good). And, we must include ourselves among those that need nurturance, help, and rest; the Bodhisattva must have compassion for themselves.

Calendar of Events

Nov 12, Saturday
Foundations of
Zen Class
1 PM to 4:30 PM
\$20, registration req'd

Dec 5 - 11
7-Day Retreat with
Linc Rhodes, JDPSN
*morning and evening
practice open to all:*
6 AM and 6:30 PM

Dec 11, Sunday
Buddha's
Enlightenment
Day Ceremony
12:00 PM

Jan 7, Saturday
Foundations of
Zen Class
1 PM to 4:30 PM
\$20, lunch provided,
registration required

Disclaimer: All events are subject to change. Please contact the Zen Center at 317-921-9902 or by email at director@indyzen.org before coming to an event. All events take place at the Indianapolis Zen Center, unless otherwise noted.

Please Note

There will be no
Sunday practice
December 25th or
January 1st.

Foundations of Zen Class Offerings

Saturday November 12th and January 7th, 1 pm to 4:30 pm

This class is for those with an interest in knowing more about Zen Buddhism. Topics covered include the origins of Zen Buddhism, the life and teachings of the Buddha, stories from Korean Buddhism, and how to incorporate Zen practice into every day life.

Join us to explore what the practice of Zen offers

To reserve your spot, use the registration form at www.indyzen.org or email director@indyzen.org. A \$20 donation is requested for this class.

One-Week YMJJ Retreat

The upcoming Yong Maeng Jong Jin (YMJJ), "to leap like a tiger while sitting", is a 7-day intensive meditation retreat, with a weekend retreat option. It is a silent retreat with formal four-bowl meals and Kong-an (koan) interviews with our guiding teacher, Linc Rhodes JDPSN.

Fees for Weekend Retreat

Non-members: \$100

Members: \$80

DT/DTIT: \$65

Fees for One-Week Retreat

Non-members: \$250

Members: \$200

DT/DTIT: \$165

Alert for the Eagle (Continued from page 1)

Emotional and physical pains are important facets of ourselves, but they can be fatal distractions to living. For years, I avoided heavy exercise because of my fear of aggravating a health condition. Now I see how silly and exaggerated that fear was (although my doctor and I are keeping an eye on my body's reactions to the workouts!). And it's taken me a while to comprehend that exercise is supposed to hurt a little – that's what builds muscle and burns fat for the next time. If my knee complains, I try to ride through it. I commit to longer rides with other people in part to force myself to stay the course; as a practical matter, I can't just quit when I'm tired or bored if I'm 10 miles from my car.

Similarly, with persistent workouts, and maybe especially the most difficult ones, our attentiveness muscles get stronger. As a meditation practice, it's not very exciting. But what's even more boring is our bull- ... well, let's say, self-centeredness. Who cares about today's excuses? Your life becomes a constant stream of complaints if you let it. In the words of Nike and Zen Master Seung Sahn, just do it!

When I ride, it gets easier to stay present for the complete journey. I smile at people and return their greetings. I notice when a woman and her child are walking alone and need an eye kept on them. I haven't seen the eagle again, but I'm looking.

Practice Schedule

Monday

6:30 p.m.

Special chanting

7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

Evening bell, chanting, sitting

Tuesday

Source Yoga, Fishers

8:15 p.m.-9:15 p.m.

Sitting, walking meditation, chanting

Wednesday

6:30 p.m.

Orientation to practice

7:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m.

Evening bell, chanting, sitting

Sunday

8:30 a.m.

Orientation to practice

9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

*Bows, morning bell, chanting, sitting,
Dharma talk, discussion & socializing*

No practice Dec 25th or Jan 1st



*Kwan Seum
Bosal
at Indianapolis
Zen Center*

Also known as
Avalokitesvara in
Sanskrit,
the bodhisattva of
compassion

About the Zen Center

The Indianapolis Zen Center offers authentic Zen practice in the lineage of Zen Master Seung Sahn and is a member of the Kwan Um School of Zen. Membership is \$25/month for individuals and \$35/month for families. Becoming a member supports both the center and Zen practice in the community. Members receive a monthly calendar, the local and Kwan Um newsletters, discounts on retreat fees, and have the right to vote at the annual meeting.

For more information, call 317-921-9902, email director@indyzen.org or access our Web site at www.indyzen.org

