

## Embarrassments

by Chris Wilcox, Dharma Teacher

The dictionary defines embarrassments as things or events that make one uncomfortable or self-conscious. They can be more or less painful and often memorable. In practicing Zen, though, I have found them to be helpful reminders for paying attention. Over the years, I have had a long string of embarrassments that I came to treat as just part of the life experience. I spent a lot of time trying to avoid them, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Professional embarrassments can be career-threatening. Avoiding embarrassments, however, makes for a fairly cautious life. It encourages a reluctance to jump in and “just do it.” In the avoidance mode, I missed a lot of worthwhile experiences. Best seek a balance, though.

Not surprisingly, more embarrassments followed from getting into Zen. Beginning with membership at a center I had concerns about not measuring up. There were lots of opportunities for embarrassment in learning the procedures and chants, in trying to stay mindful, and conducting myself during interviews. At retreats and ceremonies in particular—stumbling through Moktak duties, forgetting to bow, mishandling bowls, fumbling with kong-ans, falling asleep, and the like. And afterward, the mind in its regret replayed and agonized over perceived mistakes and blunders. Like wearing my Kasa during morning bows. Putting water in the wrong bowl. Where was my attention? Did anyone notice? Drat!

Embarrassing is it not? But to whom? Embarrassments make me self-conscious, by definition. But, is that bad? Aren't we seeking to be more conscious? I would like to make better use of my embarrassments.

There are some guidelines that help. The Temple Rules say “Attend only to yourself”. A simple enough rule, but I've been schooled to attend to what others think, or more accurately, attend to what I imagine others think. I do that mechanically, sometimes to avoid embarrassments and harsher difficulties, sometimes to be liked, and sometimes to help. Lifetime habit. “Attend only to yourself” helps to weaken the habit.

The Temple Rules also tell us not to cling to our opinions. That helps too. I have a zillion opinions, a few are easy to drop, many others not. My embarrassments stem in part from opinions of myself and opinions of what others might be thinking. For example, just when I think I am being adroit (opinion), I stumble (observation) and expose the myth. Not clinging to opinions seems to squelch embarrassments. It feels liberating just to let some of the opinions go.

One day at a retreat during a formal meal, I caught myself rising to serve water without first spreading my bowls. Drat! Most embarrassing. How many saw that? Most of the retreatants, possibly. But I could clearly see in that moment that it was my mistake, mine alone, my lesson in attention. And I could learn from the lesson. It didn't matter who saw it; it was a reminder to drop the embarrassment, get back to the moment and just attend to serving the water. A relief actually. Hopefully, others may have learned from my mistake also, but the lesson was mine primarily. And rather than a cause for internal regret, it was liberating.

Putting it all down, as we are taught to do, ...

***there are no embarrassments and nobody to embarrass.***

***Avoiding  
embarrassments  
makes for a fairly  
cautious life.***

# Abbot's letter

Robert Blender

Bright sunshine and warm weather are marking the change of seasons. Forsythias and redbuds are blooming adding color to the Indianapolis landscape. A well-known Zen teaching phrase says, "Spring comes, the grass grows by itself." Things appear in their own time, according to their own nature. Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Everything is always changing, changing, changing—Never stop changing!"

At the Indianapolis Zen Center, many things have changed in the course of our eighteen-year history. At one time, we practiced together only once a week; now we practice together four times a week. In the past, we only sat, no chanting, no bowing; now we do the full Kwan Um-style practice with chanting, bowing and sitting. The physical place where we practice used to be a member's living room, then it was a Unitarian Church, then it was a member's basement, then an office suite, and now, our own free-standing building with residential capacity. When I took over as treasurer twelve years ago, we kept financial records in a spiral bound notebook; now we have computer-generated spread sheets. And, the people have changed, "Coming and going, this is the human route."



Our Guiding Teacher, Linc Rhodes, JDPSN, often speaks of how different our school has become from the time he began practicing with Zen Master Seung Sahn in the 1970s. "There used to be a guy who brought a cup of coffee to meditation practice every day!", Linc will inform us when we get too stuck on the formality of practice. "There was no Dharma Mirror (our manual of practice forms), and Zen Master Seung Sahn didn't speak much English", Linc will say when someone is keen on knowing why we do a practice form in a particular way. Obviously, over the course of the more than thirty-year history of the Kwan Um School of Zen, things have changed.

One thing that has not changed is that the essence of Zen is practice—Zen is something that you do, not something that you know about. From Shakyamuni Buddha to Bodhidharma to Hui-Neng to our present day practitioners: practice, practice, practice. As the Indianapolis Zen Center has changed over the years, we have continually expanded the opportunities for practice. Now, there are four weekly practice periods, four retreats every year, and one of the retreats is a week-long Buddha's Enlightenment retreat. Practice will always be what Zen is.

Another thing that has not changed is Great Question. The Buddha sat down under the Bodhi tree to inquire into "What am I?" New students arrive at orientation sessions at the Indianapolis Zen Center, and, although they may not verbalize it in those particular words, their impetus to practice is the same question. Human beings will always need to inquire into "What am I?" "What is this?"

Sangha will also always be crucial to Zen practice. The support of dharma friends helps us to continue practicing, and helps us to get through the suffering that is the First Noble Truth (another thing that does not change). The faces of the practice community are different over the years, but somehow the endeavor of human beings gathering to sincerely inquire into their deepest questions always creates a similar flavor. Affection arises as well as strife, and all of that processed in the crucible of practice. "We are all learning together," our Guiding Teacher often says. We hope that you will join us in this endeavor.

# Calendar of Events

May 7  
Open House  
6:00 PM

May 10  
Foundations of  
Zen Class  
1 PM to 5 PM  
*no charge,  
registration required*

June 4  
Open House  
6:00 PM

June 5  
Public Dharma  
Talk 7:30 PM with  
Linc Rhodes, JDPSN

June 6, 7 and 8  
3-Day Retreat with  
Linc Rhodes, JDPSN

July 5  
Foundations of  
Zen Class  
1 PM to 5 PM  
*no charge,  
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](mailto:director@indyzen.org) before coming to an event. All events take place at the Indianapolis Zen Center, unless otherwise noted.*

## Foundations of Zen Class

No charge

Do you want to know more about meditation and Zen practice? Are you interested in knowing more about the history and philosophy of Zen? Do you want to start a daily personal practice or refresh your practice? The Foundations of Zen class addresses all of this and more.

Join us on Saturday May 10th or Saturday July 5th from 1 pm to 5pm for the Foundations of Zen class. There is no charge, but pre-registration is required. Use the registration form at [www.indyzen.org](http://www.indyzen.org) or email [director@indyzen.org](mailto:director@indyzen.org) to reserve your spot.

## What is Zen?

Zen is very simple... **What are you?**

In this whole world everyone searches for happiness outside, but nobody understands their true self inside.

Everybody says, "I" -- "I want this, I am like that..." But nobody understands this "I." Before you were born, where did your "I" come from? When you die, where will your "I" go? If you sincerely ask, "What am I?" sooner or later you will run into a wall where all thinking is cut off. We call this "don't know."

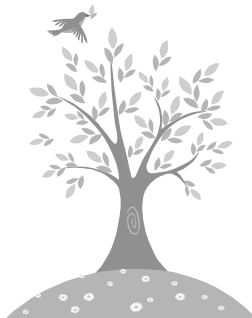
Zen is keeping this "don't know" mind always and everywhere.

*When walking, standing, sitting,  
lying down, speaking, being  
silent, moving, being still.*

*At all times, in all places, without  
interruption -- what is this?*

*One mind is infinite kalpas.*

Meditation in Zen means keeping don't-know mind when bowing, chanting and sitting Zen. This is formal Zen practice. And when doing something, just do it. When driving, just drive; when eating, just eat; when working, just work.



Finally, your don't-know mind will become clear. Then you can see the sky, only blue. You can see the tree, only green. Your mind is like a clear mirror. Red comes, the mirror is red; white comes the mirror is white. A hungry person comes, you can give him food; a thirsty person comes, you can give her something to drink. There is no desire for myself, only for all beings. That mind is already enlightenment, what we call Great Love, Great Compassion, the Great Bodhisattva Way. It's very simple, not difficult!

So Buddha said that all beings have Buddha-nature (enlightenment nature). But Zen Master Joju said that a dog has no Buddha-nature. Which one is right? Which one is wrong? If you find that, you find the true way.

## Sitting schedule

### Monday

6:30 p.m.

*Special chanting*

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

*Evening bell, chanting, sitting*

### Wednesday

6:30 p.m.

*Orientation to practice*

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

*Evening bell, chanting, sitting*

### Saturday

6:00 a.m.-8:30 a.m.

*Sitting & walking meditation*

9:00 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

*108 bows, Morning bell, chanting, sitting*

### Sunday

8:30 a.m.

*Orientation to practice*

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

*108 bows, Morning bell, chanting, sitting, Dharma talk, discussion and socializing*



*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 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 on us and our programs, call 1-317-921-9902, or access our Web site at [www.indyzen.org](http://www.indyzen.org)

