

# hokyoji highlights

Spring 2009

## Listening

by Zuiko Redding

I've just returned from sesshin at Hokyoji. Though it was really hot and humid, I was happy to hear Hokyoji's sounds. I enjoy the squeals of the children on our street in the Cedar Rapids summer, but the very different sounds of Hokyoji were also welcome. In the morning there were birds waking up among the green hills and bats jostling each other as they bedded down in the eaves of the zendo. At sunset, I heard a whippoorwill for the first time in many years. There were midnight coyote songs as I made my way through the mist to the outhouse.

If we listen, we can hear the life of this moment. But mostly we're not listening. We're too busy with our ideas and judgments. We let the chatter of our minds drown out reality and limit us to the "reality" inside our heads. Sometimes only the song of a motorcycle on the road or a chainsaw somewhere will penetrate our fog. Are we grateful to be returned to reality by this buzz? No, we're irritated.

I don't remember the Buddha saying much of anything about listening, though he said a great deal about right speech. I suspect, though, that right speech includes right listening. If there's no wholehearted listening, wise and compassionate speech is difficult. If we don't put aside our self-referential ideas and judgments and simply pay attention to another person, we often create suffering even though we may be trying to relieve suffering. To listen to life just as it is with a wholehearted mind is the Buddha's path.

How to listen? First of all, be quiet. We don't learn anything by talking. Second, ask questions. We can discover a lot by asking about things we don't quite get. Third, rephrase what we're hearing, asking the speaker to affirm or deny our perception or to clarify it. If we have the Buddha's heart, the heart that is awake, we will naturally want to hear and understand the other person's point of view.

PHOTO: CAROL KARO ANDERSON



*Sitting in front of Hokyoji's tea house, Zuiko Redding, right, listens carefully as Sheryll Coulter shares her thoughts.*

This attention makes the speaker feel genuinely respected and honored as a human being. I remember Katagiri Roshi's listening with his whole being to what I was saying. I felt I had been heard as I'd never been heard before and I was ready to listen just as wholeheartedly to him. Feeling heard, we become less attached to our feelings and views. For the speaker, simply being listened to lightens the heart and gives the confidence and reassurance needed to make changes that were formerly pretty frightening. Listening with no self-referentialness, no judgment, opens the listener up. It gives her or him new ideas, a more flexible, harmonious way of being.

To develop good listening skills is to develop an inquisitive, concerned heart. It's not a heart that judges, and it's not a heart that always agrees. We might think someone misguided, but we can still listen and acknowledge their perspective – "Ah – that hurt you."

"Please tell me more about. . ." "You think perhaps that . . ." Developing listening skills is a long, difficult process with many fiascoes along the way. Let's be kind to our defeats and embarrassments and get up and try again when the next opportunity arises.

*continued next page*

## Listening *from page 1*

This is difficult practice. The hardest thing is to stop our mind, give up ego, and only pay attention. It's important, though. If we don't really understand another's ideas, we can't work with them to form our two points of view into useful action. Not seeing the fears and the desire for happiness behind their words and actions, we can't help find constructive solutions.

We don't listen as a strategy for changing others or because we expect some other reward. We just take care of our own practice, our hearing. We're likely to learn things we didn't even suspect by just putting aside our agendas and judgments and simply listening. We drop our prejudicial questions and judgmental remarks. We don't burden the other person with our point of view. Even if we disagree strongly or feel the speaker has wrong information, we save our remarks for later and continue listening. We're not trying to prove something here – we are trying to understand.

When we truly listen, our response comes up naturally. It's like the story of Ananda who asked Kasyapa whether he'd received something other than the gold-thread robe from the Buddha. Kasyapa called out, "Ananda!" and Ananda immediately replied. This was Ananda's moment of waking up. He heard Kasyapa and responded with his full body and mind, beyond his self-referential thoughts - those thoughts about the gold-thread robe and how he, Ananda, could find awakening by figuring out what his mentor *really* had received from the Buddha.

The Japanese have a term, *kannō dokō*, "mutual simultaneous response." This call and response comes up out of the vastness of the universe. When someone tells of their misfortune and we immediately say, "I'm so sorry." - that is *kannō dokō*. It's what happens when we listen completely to the world. Our response rises simultaneously with hearing the life of the moment. Hearing the request, our full body and mind simultaneously do what's needed without reference to thoughts, ideas and rewards. This action is naturally wise and compassionate.

At first, trying to listen wholeheartedly seems like imitating listening. We may feel stiff and our responses may feel contrived. If we continue our effort, we find ourselves naturally acknowledging others' ideas and feelings without trying to change them, and with some understanding of why they have precisely those ideas and feelings. We find ourselves taking others' notions and weaving them together with our own to create something new, rather than discarding them and simply relying on our own agendas. It is no longer us listening and another speaking - we become both listener and speaker, the words spoken and the silence into which they are given. This kind of listening is the Buddha's life. It is being awake.

Right now we can hear the sounds of late summer. Here, the cicadas are calling. In response, I add "get weatherstripping" to the list of tasks to do on my afternoon errands.

*Zuiko Redding is a member of Hokyoji's board of directors and the resident teacher at Cedar Rapids (IA) Zen Center.*

### hokyoji highlights

### hōkyōji

Zen Practice Community

#### **Hokyoji Zen Practice Community**

2459 County Road 5, Eitzen, MN 55931  
(507) 542-4968 • [hokyoji@lycos.com](mailto:hokyoji@lycos.com)

Visit us online at [www.hokyoji.com](http://www.hokyoji.com)

#### **Directors:**

Ken Keiyu Ford, *Chair*  
Carol Karo Anderson, *Vice Chair*  
Jim Summers, *Treasurer*  
Hōkō Jan Karnegis, *Secretary*  
Jeff Ekō Kelley  
Raisei Marc Anderson  
Zuikō Redding

Dōkai Georgesen, *Resident Teacher*  
and *Executive Director*

*Hokyoji Zen Practice Community offers the experience of community, providing supportive and nurturing opportunities to develop and deepen a steadfast practice of mindful living, grounded in the Zen Buddhist tradition.*

*Hokyoji is located in southeastern Minnesota 45 miles south of La Crosse WI and about two miles from the Mississippi River.*



*Practitioners gather for Clouds in Water's retreat: (l to r) Jessie Page, Laura Kennedy, Dan Ryan, Byakuren Ragir, Katy Whiting, Steve Wilson, Paul Windberg, Raisei Marc Anderson, and Matt Simonsen*



*Jim Summers led the effort to get a fresh coat of stain and paint onto Hokyoji's buildings.*

## Hokyoji hosts ceremony for Ekyo Susan Nelson

Hokyoji played host to a June 7 *hossenshiki*, a ceremony of dharma combat that demonstrates the leadership and understanding of the shuso, or head practitioner. Ekyo Susan Nelson of the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis was the shuso for MZMC's spring practice period, which culminated in a four-day retreat and the ceremony at Hokyoji.

Thirty people attended the event, including Hokyoji resident teacher Dokai Georgesen. Tim Burkett, Ekyo Susan's teacher and MZMC's abbot, presided. On completion of the *hossenshiki*, Ekyo Susan is now considered a "senior student" at MZMC.

The ceremony included the reading of a case from the Blue Cliff Record, "Master Ma is Unwell", followed by a lively question-and-answer session in which Ekyo Susan fielded dharma inquiries from the audience. Each answer was punctuated by a thump of the five-foot dharma staff on the zendo floor.

PHOTO: MANOJ SARANATHAN



*Ekyo Susan Nelson, center, reads the case while (l to r) Bonnie Versboncoeur, Rosemary Taylor, Susan Hagler and Ted Tuel look on.*

Ekyo Susan is a former member of Hokyoji's board of directors, and began her practice with the founder of Hokyoji and MZMC, Dainin Katagiri, in 1978.

# Photo gallery: A look at our practice



*Some of Hokyoji's members and friends came together in April for our first annual meeting. Back row, l to r: Cat Gornet, Eko Jeff Kelley, Carol Karo Anderson, Bill Tresch, Hoko Jan Karnegis, Jim Summers. Front row: Ekyo Susan Nelson, Zuiko Redding, Ken Keiyu Ford, Corey Hobbes, Howard Hobbes, Duane Peterson, Dokai Georgesen.*



*Participants in Compassionate Ocean's Memorial Day retreat were (l to r) Luke Mueller, Page Appelbaum, Dokai Georgesen, Michael O'Neal, Joen Snyder O'Neal, Sosan Flynn, Kristin Scroggs, and Andy Jones*



*Cindy Wetzell delivers food from the kitchen to the teahouse.*



*Practitioners hold a dharma discussion during the Compassionate Ocean retreat. L to r: Michael O'Neal, Joen Snyder O'Neal, Sosan Flynn, Luke Mueller, Page Appelbaum.*





Twenty-eight practitioners gathered for the annual Great Sky Sesshin. Teachers were (front row l to r) Rosan Yoshida, Missouri Zen Center; Myoyu Anderson, Great Plains Zen Center (Des Plaines, IL); Tonen O'Connor, Milwaukee Zen Center; Brad Warner, Dogen Zen Sangha (Santa Monica, CA); Hokyoji's resident teacher, Dokai Georgesen; and Zuiko Redding, Cedar Rapids (IA) Zen Center.



Celebrating the Fourth of July at Hokyoji were (l to r) Sally Peterson, Carl Hultman, Dokai Georgesen, Ann Hobbes, Howard Hobbes, Ekyo Susan Nelson, Myo-On Susan Hagler, and Duane Peterson.



Henry Panowitsch makes an incense offering at the hilltop stupa of Hokyoji founder Dainin Katagiri.



Longtime practitioners from several sanghas, l to r: Eido Phoebe Reinhart, Myo-O Habermas-Scher, Ryoten Mary Lehmann, Rosemary Taylor, Ekyo Susan Nelson, Bonnie Versboncoeur, Myo-On Susan Hagler.



Dokai and Shoken Winecuff (taking photo) visit dharma sister Emyo Nakayama at her home in Japan.



Ruth Windberg cuts the grass in Hokyoji's meadow.

## upcoming events

Complete event descriptions are listed at [www.hokyoji.com](http://www.hokyoji.com).  
For more information or to register, please e-mail  
[hokyoji@lycos.com](mailto:hokyoji@lycos.com).

### **Fall work retreat** — September 30 – October 5

Morning zazen, service and breakfast precede a full day of work.  
Evening activities might include zazen, a dharma talk or just sitting  
around the campfire if the weather permits.

### **Weekend sesshin** — November 13 – 15

This weekend of intensive practice kicks off the fall practice period.  
(Participants need not attend the practice period itself.)

### **Fall practice period** — November 13 – December 6

A time of zazen and study to help participants focus on their everyday  
practice. Its schedule of sitting, daily ritual, work, study and personal  
time encourage mindfulness throughout the day.

### **Rohatsu sesshin** — November 29 – December 6

Quietly entering the darkest period of the year, we settle ourselves in  
Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment along with many other Buddhist  
practitioners in the world.

### **Winter Break**—December 12 – January 16, 2010

No practice.



PHOTO: CAROL KARO ANDERSON

*Tonen O'Connor, Ryan Brown (hidden), Saad Akbar Khan and Katy  
Whiting listen to a dharma talk from resident teacher Dokai Georges.*

## A big thank you to our members and friends!

To all who have responded so generously to  
our annual membership appeal: thank you!  
We're glad to have you on board as a member  
or friend of Hokyoji.

If you haven't yet sent in your membership  
gift, please do it today. You can become  
a member by donating \$100 annually or by  
contributing one day's work at Hokyoji.  
Members receive reduced fees for Hokyoji  
events and they can vote at membership  
meetings. To become a member or make a  
donation, please visit our website or contact us.

## 2010

### **Winter Practice Period**—January 24 – February 20

A time of zazen and study to help participants focus on their everyday  
practice. Its schedule of sitting, daily ritual, work, study and personal  
time encourage mindfulness throughout the day.

### **Spring Break**—February 21 – April 15

No practice.

### **Annual Membership Meeting**—April 17

Hokyoji's members and board gather to share updates and ideas on  
practice, facilities, administration and other topics.