

## Unfolding Sangha

By Sensei Bodhin Kjolhede

(Editor's note: This article is reprinted by permission. It first appeared in *Zen Bow Newsletter*, a publication of the Rochester Zen Center, Spring 1988 issue.)

Over the course of two weeks recently, three Sangha members, independently of one another, expressed disappointment that the Zen Center does not have more family activities. "Our children's friends have so much they can do with their churches and synagogues. It's too bad our children can't involve themselves more with the Zen center as a religious community." The need for a more family-centered, communal expression of Zen practice has become increasingly felt by the Sangha, as it matures into the responsibilities of family like, careers, and community obligations. Hundreds of Center members who seldom, if ever, attend daily sittings or sesshins retain their membership year after year, paying dues all the while. Why? Surely not just for the community activities, which have been scarce. If they wanted nothing more than social involvements for their children or themselves,

they would have traded Center membership for membership in other groups. Rather, their karmic links to Buddhism have persisted even without their getting to the Center. Clearly, they are still attracted to the Buddha's Way and those who practice it and want to support Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

It is time for the Zen Center to open up and develop itself as a center of family and other community functions. Ours is an entirely lay Sangha, and we must accept that and make ourselves far more responsive to the needs of lay people. This is by no means a new thought at the Center; in the last couple of years we have taken some baby steps in the direction of a more widely embracing community. What is new is the full conviction that this is an idea whose time has come. Until now we have resisted the temptation to diversify out of concern that to do so would undermine the training. That fear, I believe, is no longer valid.

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Bob Genthner, JDPSN, with Maggie and Sam

## The Adventures of Frog and Duck

By Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

"What is real?" asked Frog of the floating rubber duck. He had obviously mistaken a bath tub for a pond.

"Seriously," said Frog as Duck laughed until its little air hole blew bubbles. Frog was sitting on a face cloth he had mistaken for a lily pad.

"What kind of questions are you asking?" asked Duck. Duck was a practical sort. "You don't know the difference between a bath tub and a pond and you want to know what is real? Duck was irritated and as he swam away he had to avoid the plastic fish floating on its side.

Frog jumped in hot pursuit. "Please don't go."

Duck saw the jump out of the corner of his eye.

There was something about Frog he liked. Perhaps, it was his greenness or the warts he didn't seem to know he had, but he was likable thought Duck.

Perhaps, it was his persistence. It was hard to say, but Duck definitely liked Frog although he would never admit this to anyone, especially Frog.

"What is real?" Frog asked again, this time to himself as much as to anyone. Duck heard the question, but was losing interest. Frog was losing interest in pursuing Duck. The question seemed to be the only thing he could keep on his mind.

"What is real?" Frog sat on a bar of soap.

Duck was long gone now. Perhaps, he had joined the flock of beautiful white swans that Frog vaguely remembered hearing flying overhead.

Frog sat and sat determined—half crazy, but unable to let go. "What is real? What is real? What is real?" The question deepened.

When all of a sudden...Splash!

A voice called out, "Dad...day, could you give me a wipe?"

It wasn't long before Frog emerged soapy, wet and a little dazed. He towed off, helped his son finish, put on his shirt and tie, and went to work.



## Family and Zen?— Just Do It!

By Bruce Sturgeon

I don't know if it's simply a characteristic of the times we live in, if I'm lazy or if I am just poorly organized, but more and more I feel like there aren't enough hours in the day to get it all done.

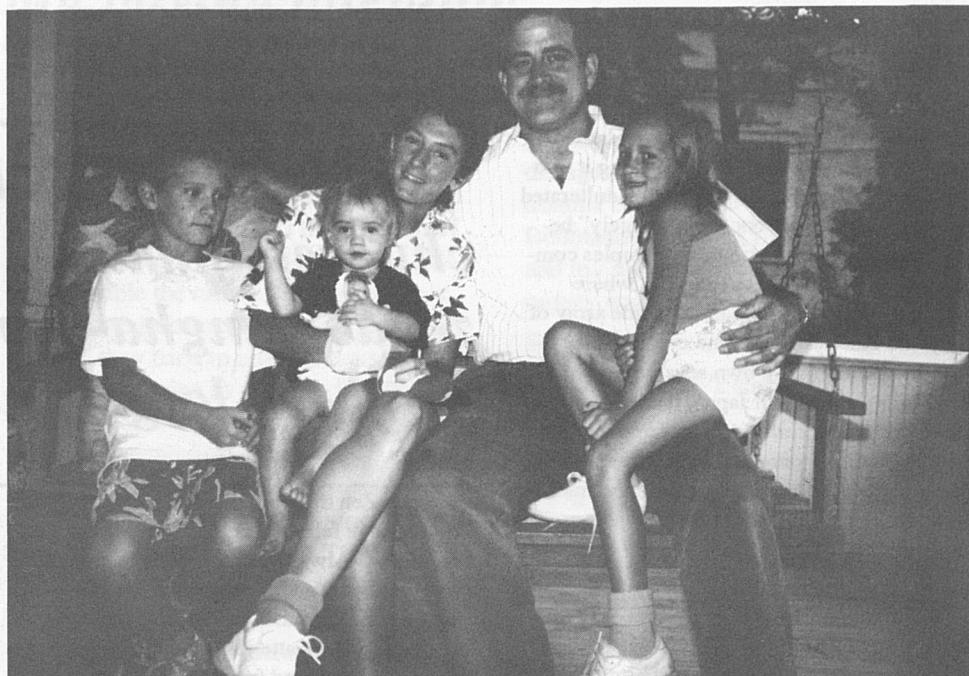
A few weeks ago, while on a plane flight to the West Coast, I was musing on my career, my family, my health, my Zen practice—What is my true direction? After reaching the usual, inevitable state of overwhelm, I decided to zone out and

preparation. Three days a week, I prepare dinner—add 1 hour, I don't skimp.

**Commuting—30 minutes.** Asheville is a small town. I know how lucky I am.

**Work—9 hours.** I know the 60 hour work week is the norm for "those who get ahead", but I'm so far behind already. Besides, I'm not as young as I used to be. Who is?

**General Time with Spouse—2 hours.** This is a broad category including



Bruce with his wife Cathy, Leon, Megan, & Michaela

read *USA Today*. There was an article which assured me that indeed, there aren't enough hours to lead a quality life; that the acceleration of time is the order of the day.

The article went on to itemize the activities composing a typical day for a typical person. I decided this might be a fruitful exercise for me to do. This is what I came up with—I might add my total time was less than the typical *USA Today* person.

**Sleep—8.0 hours.** This is first on my list because it seems that, as a relatively new father, having children is basically an experiment in sleep deprivation. What with bad dreams, drinks of water, sounds in the night, falling out of bed, changing diapers, making bottles, etc., I feel like a POW. Honestly, I would tell them what they wanted to know, if they would just ask. In fact, if I awaken for the first time since I went to bed the night before and it's morning, I have a sense of alarm that something must have happened to the kids. Usually all it means is that I was so dead to the world that I slept through my wife's getting up. So, sleep time occupies 8 hours but in truth, I don't get that much rest. Besides, all of us have tried to get more done by sleeping less. In the long run, it doesn't work.

**Zen Practice—1 hour.** This includes 15 minutes for bowing, the same for chanting and 30 minutes for sitting, settling in the right position, stretching, yawning, etc.

**Tai Chi Chuan—20 minutes.** An inherited chronic lung disorder requires my doing Tai Chi.

**Personal Grooming—45 minutes.** The basic S,S, & S plus dental care and getting dressed. Take a few minutes to take a good look at the beast in the mirror. Who am I?

**Eating—1.5 hours.** This represents three meals and a snack plus meal

scheduling, exchanging news, talking, asking ourselves how it is that people like us have three children, etc.

Let me say, that at this point, 24 hours have already been used.

**Intimacy/Sex—45 minutes.** Not necessarily what you think. This also includes hugging, kissing, snuggling and just being there for each other. Let me say that *USA Today* points out that most hugs last less than 15 seconds, and sex perhaps 10 minutes. True intimacy is difficult and most people would rather tolerate mediocre sex than have to deal with intense intimacy.

**Children—2 hours.** We have three children ages 10, 7, and two. The two hours includes about 15 minutes each one-on-one. The rest is "together" time which could be group play, sitting on the porch, watching TV, or a bedtime story.

**Kitchen Patrol and Housekeeping—1.5 hours.** Don't yell at me, I try to do my share and we have a cleaning service come once a week. Besides, I'm getting used to toys, dolls and children's clothes decorating my home.

**Errands—30 minutes.** Taking the kids to school, going to the cleaners, the post office, the filling station, etc. There's always something.

**Grocery shopping—15 minutes.** Women take longer than men, it's a fact.

**Exercise—30 minutes.** Everyone knows that you need at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise each day plus 10 minutes for a "cool down".

**Pets—10 minutes.** Through attrition we've weeded our pets and we only have fish left. They do not require as much care as pets such as cats or dogs. Of course, fish are not quite as responsive or loving, either.

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In the Buddhist temples of both China and Korea, there was much more going on than formal meditation. Commonly the monks were divided into those who focused on study and those who devoted themselves primarily to sitting. The latter usually kept to their own compound, the better to maintain the concentrative intensity of zazen practice, but in other sections of the large temples other monks might be busy with orphanages, small clinics, schools, and, in calamitous times, distributions of food and clothing. This broad range of engaged Buddhism was well suited to big, sprawling China, with its diverse peoples and pragmatic mentality—qualities for which America is also known.

The Japanese, however, have never had much appreciation for mixtures and diversity. From the Chinese Buddhist tradition they extracted Ch'an (meditation), gave it the name Zen, and applied their legendary standards of excellence and specialization, distilling it into a pure medication system largely unadulterated by social or political concerns. "Largely" because there were exceptions, big temples complexes like Engaku-ji, for example, where outside the sodo (training hall) a wide array of study and other activities and events could always be found. In my own several months at two training temples in Japan, though, I don't remember seeing children or any appreciable signs of family or community activities. These temples concentrated on practice in the traditional, strict sense by which Zen became known as "the Mind Sect."

The first priority of the Zen Center is practice and training, and will remain so. As Roshi's successor, my job is to pass on, as best I can, my understanding of the Dharma, which in essence is no different from Roshi's realization and that of his teachers and his teacher's teachers. This work will not change. It is my paramount obligation, my calling, and can never be neglected. Luckily, conducting daily sittings and sesshins is also immensely fulfilling to me, so there is no chance of our formal training being eclipsed by the rise and growth of a lay community spirit at the Center. If a serious conflict were to arise between sitting practice and other community involvements, the two would have to go their separate ways, even if it meant my leaving the Center. But such an outcome is unlikely in the extreme. No matter how family- and community-oriented the Center becomes, there will always be some whose life circumstances permit them the freedom to put aside everything else, when they feel compelled, to resolve the matter of birth and death. Such people will find a way to forego, either in the short term or over many years, the daily life of family and career in order to devote themselves to resident staff training.

The Center must keep its center: zazen. That is its marrow, its reason for being—to provide a practice environment for women and men who wish to develop the ability to maintain a one-pointed, stabilized mind in motion and at rest. Zen is, after all, the meditation sect of Buddhism, and zazen is not just one among many activities but is the basis of all activity. This focus is something that no member, surely, wants changed; it is what attracted us all to the Center in the first place, and what keeps us here. The daily sittings, the sesshin schedule, and even the regimen of resident staff training, then, will continue.

But let us now look to ways that the Sangha can unify itself and enrich its sense of community. How can we include children more in the Center? Do members want to organize more social and recreational activities? Can we find more ceremonies, rituals and other observances keyed to lay members of our pluralistic, contemporary American society? Let's continue meeting together regularly and crank out a monthly local newsletter to keep better in touch with each other. Let's "reknit our connections" to each other, to use Gary Snyder's words. In doing so we will inevitably find ourselves reconnecting to the vast world outside the Center, perhaps in ecumenical approaches to social and political activism. The abbot, for one, would love to get out in the marketplace more.

Sangha children grow up with a marvelous opportunity to partake in the life of a religious community. The annual Buddha's Birthday celebration and the occasional potluck or picnic have established a firm and fond ground on which to build a communal expression of Zen practice. As these ceremonies have matured, so also have we—as students and adepts of Zen practice, as teachers, and as parents. This is a rich basis for inviting children and families to find a place in the celebrations of the Sangha. Moreover, the wisdom and warmth of those grounded in the non-dualistic faith that is Buddhism is a precious resource, until now largely unavailable to those who work for change in the world. Members who engage in political and social work have had little organized support and fellowship from the Sangha. This must and shall change.

None of these observations are new to the Sangha. The need has been voiced from time to time over the years, but as the Center's work has been seen almost exclusively in

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terms of Zen training, those of us running the Center have felt little choice but to shrug our shoulders. Always the underlying assumption was that Zen was for adults only—in particular, single adults, or at least those who could manage to attend daily sittings and sesshins regularly, and for those who could enter the quasi-monastic program of full-time staff training in Rochester. This model of Zen practice has proven too narrow. It is time now to broaden our perspective on the role of the Center to that of lay community center as well as training center.

From the beginning it has been as if the Zen Center were straddling a fence, a fence marking its dual identity as both training zendo and community center. For two decades Roshi Kapleau nourished the more or less traditional, quasi-monastic training role of the Center, which came to earn for itself the label "the boot camp of American Zen." A regimen of daily sittings and retreats has been maintained by a full-time staff required to follow a structured work-training schedule. This emphasis on sitting and disciplined training has been vital in establishing a strong foundation for teaching, practice, and enlightenment: the three pillars of Zen. But over time many of those unable to participate in many sittings or sesshins—much less in the staff program—came to see the Center as inaccessible. It was as if the Center, although with a leg on either side of the fence, could plant only one foot. The other side—the "lay" side, that side of Center life involving children, families, and all other extra-zendo Sangha-community activities—has been largely neglected.

Now, however, we have grown enough—all tall enough—to plant that second foot on the other side of the fence. In fact, to wait any longer would reflect an ignorance—"ignorance"—of the way things are. While our membership has leveled off to a steady size, its makeup has changed drastically from that of the Center's early years. No longer are we predominantly single young adults experimenting with provisional jobs (often chosen, in the late 60's and 70's, according to how much time off they allowed for attending sesshin). Today the majority of members must juggle the time requirements of growing families, demanding careers, and sometimes social, political, and other community involvements. For most members these large areas of the householder's life have naturally been put before time at the Zen Center, where little more than traditional training has been offered. For all but the handful of members who would devote themselves to their sitting practice—in their own homes if not at the Center—the emphasis of the Center has been too narrowly focussed to be available. What the Center has

offered, in fact, has been so narrow as to fall through the cracks in many people's lives.

So...where exactly do we go from here? I have enough faith in the wisdom of the Sangha to let it decide, by consensus or vote, what activities and programs the Center will undertake outside the zendo. The very process of getting together to decide in what direction the Sangha moves will itself unify and enrich us as a community. I am amenable to anything—short of Wednesday night bingo.

Nor is there reason not to look to our own Western churches and synagogues for ideas. Every Sunday morning the streets in the Arnold Park area are crowded with the cars of parishioners of neighborhood churches. What pulls these hundreds of families out of their homes to Sunday services each week, and what keeps them as members, often not just for years but for generations? The worship, certainly. But it may well be as much the fellowship that draws so many, the community support offered throughout the week as well as

that now practices it in America. Without diluting it.

Let us not imagine that the practice of Zen meditation is something separate from our life in community. Our family, our group activities, our meeting and social programs are all opportunities for training, for applying our zazen in "the world." This is the real work of Zen: integrating our practice and realization with every aspect of daily life. As Zen Master Hakuin reminds us in his *Chant in Praise of Zazen*, "Our dancing and songs are the voice of the Dharma"—if we make them so.

So, the Center will forge ahead now, not in a new direction—our sights remain fixed on the Four Bodhisattvic Vows—but toward a new balance, a new emphasis on the Zen Center as a lay community. This is not so much a decision as a natural outgrowth of change, a response to the needs of the Sangha as it is rather than as it once was or as it could be. We are embarking on a far-reaching development that will have to unfold gradually as the Center adjusts to its new role. More than ever the Sangha will be needed to plan and implement these changes with care and cooperation. For now, the most pressing matter is how to work out the management of the day-to-day operations of the Center without relying exclusively on our small resident staff. Suggestions, comments, and volunteers are more than welcome for the work before us.



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### Family & Zen?—Just Do It!

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**Birds—15 minutes.** I fancy myself something of a birder. So, I keep feeding stations and a sharp eye.

**Reading Newspaper—10 minutes.** At first, I insisted on the *New York Times*. Then for brevity, I switched to *USA Today* but found it, also, was too time consuming. Finally, I settled on the news summary found on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. The local paper? Forget it, not worth 5¢, much less a 25¢.

**Watching TV News—45 minutes.** 15 minutes of the *Today Show* (or *Morning Edition* on Public Radio) and the Evening Network News. I used to watch the in-depth, hour-long *McNeil-Lerher Report*. Of course, this means that I do not know anything about local events, but if I need to know, my wife will tell me.

**General Reading—60 minutes.** I subscribe to over 25 publications a month. I also manage at least a book a month. Some is done during my work period since some of it is work related.

**Gardening—20 minutes.** This may be a fancy term for yard work since it includes mowing the lawn, picking up leaves and brush, pruning, etc. I call it gardening because at least part of this time is spent walking around my yard day-dreaming about a Japanese garden.

**Spacing out/Personal time—60 minutes.** I know that I spend at least this much time in the O-zone.

If you've read this far, you'll want to know that these categories represent nearly 34 hours of time. Each day.

The *USA Today* article suggests that the answer is multi-tasking every moment. Flossing in the shower, reading the paper while riding the exercise bike, watching the news while cleaning the

kitchen, etc. This reminded me of the story about Dae Soen Sa Nim, who always admonishes when driving a car, just drive the car, etc. Whatever you are doing—Just do it. Once when he was found reading and eating at the same time. He said, "When eating and reading, just eat and read."

However, I think you'll agree, even with multi-tasking there are too many tasks to get done in a day. Many things in actual practice receive less time than I have indicated and many get post-poned or more likely, don't get done at all. And of course, you've thought of things that I haven't mentioned and allotted time to. For instance, *Primary Point*, my part-time computer sales, my on-going house remodeling, local politics or the public service/volunteering that is so important in this era of the budget deficit.

Unfortunately, my family is dependent on my pay check, so, my work is not negotiable when it comes to time shaving and I've already explained about my sleep. The things that suffer are my wife, my children, my Zen practice, Tai Chi, exercise, and reading. Of course, you have to prioritize but what do you do when everything must be done? All I can say is that I don't really have time to think about it. Moment to moment, I just do it—though sometimes it feels like chaos.



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