



Present View

PONDERING THE FIVE HINDRANCES ON A RUSH HOUR TRAIN.

Here editor Xianyang Carl Jerome explains how he grew to understand that the five hindrances are hindrances to being present, as well as to practice. Not that the two are different.

Xianyang Carl Jerome's first teacher was Zen Master and Beat Poet Zenshin Philip Whalen in San Francisco. For the past seven years, Carl has been a student of Master Ji Ru at the Mid-America Buddhist Association (MABA) and the International Buddhism Friendship Association (IBFA) in Chicago. In 2006 Master Ji Ru granted him Lay Teaching Endorsement and Carl continues to teach Buddhism classes and lead retreats. He is the editor of Rightview Quarterly magazine and editor and founding teacher of RightviewOnline.org.

It's 5:20 in the afternoon and I needed to go from our Temple into downtown Chicago on the El (the subway). It is only a two-block walk from the Temple to the El stop, so I decided to use that few minutes of walking time to follow my breath, rather than to be distracted by the colorful shop windows filled with Chinese trinkets and doodads. I took the mala off my wrist so I could move my fingers across the beads with each breath. Holding to my breath, I strolled to the El. I got one of the few remaining seats on the train, which would soon be rush-hour full.

At the next stop, the car was packed with tourists and students and commuters, all trying to carve out a space for themselves. There was a backpack on my right that kept banging me, a precariously balanced woman in heels in front of me that kept falling onto my knees. There were arms stretched in front of my face reaching for the pole that stops those who are precariously balanced from falling. And in another minute, as the train stopped and the loudspeaker bellowed, more people were pushing their way into the car, and into me. Follow my breath? I realize I haven't even noticed my breath since I sat down.

But I have felt sensual desire (isolated sights and sounds reminding me of places and things I had liked), and ill-will and impatience (particularly with the woman who kept falling on me), sloth and torpor (if ever I were going to feel like a sloth, this was it), worry and restlessness (yes, I was concerned about how I would get out at my stop, and I certainly noticed myself fidgeting), and skeptical doubt (there just no way I can practice in here right now, I thought to myself after failing to be able to even find my breath in all the commotion, much less follow it). All five of the hindrances had arisen in me, I noticed, not just hindering my practice, but obliterating it, not just removing me from my breath, but also removing me from being present.

It was then that I stopped seeing the five hindrances in the traditional perspective as just hindrances to meditation practice and began to understand them as more omnipresent hindrances to everyday practice.

For more about the five hindrances, please read Venerable Sujiva's article on page 29.

In our last issue we mistakenly said that Matsuoka Roshi founded the Chicago Zen Center. In fact, he founded the Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago. We apologize for the confusion.