



# MOON ON THE WATER

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Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

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## Ten Reasons to Practice

*Susi Childress, DT*

One of the most popular features seen on late night TV is the top ten list on *Late Show with David Letterman*. I give my apologies to Mr. Letterman as I am borrowing his idea and making a top ten list of my own. What follows is my *Top Ten Reasons to Come to the Zen Center and Practice Zen*.

**10. Hear and learn the teachings.** When I first came to the Zen Center, it was to hear a public Dharma talk with GLZC guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Kwang. I had already read a book or two about Zen, so I thought that going to a Dharma talk would be a good way to explore this new area of interest. I was excited about what I heard that night, and soon I began to go to the Zen Center regularly. Through regularly scheduled Dharma talks, some classes in Zen at the Zen Center in Racine, and reading books by KUSZ founder Zen Master Seung Sahn, I began to deepen my understanding of Zen. When I took ten precepts and began the Dharma Teacher in Training program, I participated in monthly discussion groups with the GLZC co-directors and other Dharma Teachers in Training. I have found that even when I hear a Dharma talk about a topic that I have heard before, there is always something to be gained. Oftentimes I develop a different understanding of the teaching than I had previously.

**9. Practice.** Learning the teachings of Buddha and Zen Master Seung Sahn are very helpful in my life, but without practice, it is not really Zen. *Zen* is Japanese for *meditation*. Reading about meditating without actually doing it is like trying to understand how a hamburger tastes without ever taking a bite. When I first came to the Zen center, the teachers taught me the proper way to sit so that I wouldn't get too stiff, and they instructed me about how to use a mantra to quiet my mind. After that there was nothing left to do but come regularly and just keep practicing. Practice helps me to internalize the teachings. Practicing with the other Sangha members keeps me on the correct path.

**8. Improve the ability to concentrate.** Staring at a floor for long periods of time may seem kind of stupid, but this "stupid" practice has improved my ability to concentrate. I have found that I am more mindful of my surroundings and the people with whom I have contact. I notice that I "read" people better than I used to, and I am more aware of ways that I can help others.

**7. Quiet the mind.** At first, sitting in meditation was anything but quiet for me. My mind was quite active, and the little voice in my head chattered non-stop. But now, after

many retreats, a week of Kyol Che last summer, and regular practicing, my mind actually "shuts up" once in a while. And, even though GLZC is not exactly the quietest place to meditate due to its location on a busy street, I have learned to become quiet even with noise and activity around me. This is a very useful thing for a high school special education teacher!

**6. Support the Sangha and the Zen Center.** A Zen Center is only as strong as its members. When we practice together, we help support each other in our practice. Many Zen students comment that they find it easier to concentrate and meditate with a group at the Zen Center. Practicing in a group imposes some pressure to sit still and to continue meditating until the chugpi is hit. Practicing alone at home can be more difficult because there may be interruptions and the temptation to move or quit early. So practicing at the Zen Center not only helps our own practice, but it helps others with their practice.

**5. Direction.** After practicing awhile some of us decide to take precepts. The precepts give us a direction to follow that reduces suffering in our lives and the lives of the sentient beings around us.

Or as Zen Master Seung Sahn says, "Only go straight, don't know, which is clear like space; try, try, try non-stop for 10,000 years, get enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering." That is our direction.

**4. Carry on the tradition and practice the forms.** Korean practice forms are followed at GLZC. Many of these forms have been practiced in Korea for many, many years. At first these forms seemed pretty exotic and strange, and I questioned if the strict attention to detail was really necessary. I decided to just trust the tradition that was handed down to us, and now I feel very comfortable with the forms. I have found that following a regular procedure for practice helps my mind to quiet down more quickly, and I can just focus on the task at hand. Also learning these forms helped me to see my attachments and my likes and dislikes. Learning to do such things as play the moktak and lead chanting practice taught me to "just do it" and not worry about if I was going to make a mistake. This was a huge step for me!

**3. Strengthen a commitment to practice.** When we read over the Temple Rules before a retreat, we find an admonishment to "make a firm commitment to attain enlightenment and save all sentient beings from suffering." Lately I have become aware that I have

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# Upside Down World

Zen Master Dae Kwang

The Chinese Zen Master Ching Ch'ing was famous for his strict discipline. Late one night as he sat with the monks he asked them, "What's that sound outside the gate?" One of the monks replied, "Master, that's the sound of raindrops." Ching Ch'ing then said, "This world is upside down; people lose themselves and chase after things."

If you look closely at our world it's apparent that something is very wrong. Everywhere you look there is suffering. Why? The Buddha said that the cause of suffering is desire: "I want... something." Anytime you want something you lose your true self and are "chasing" after that something. Suddenly the world flips over like an unbalanced iceberg... bluuuuub! Once the world is upside down, everything is seen differently. The Buddha called that ignorance. And just like a fish in water, we don't realize our ignorance until the wake-up alarm of suffering starts ringing loudly in our ears. In fact, when we hear people talking about the rightside-up world, we tend to reject it immediately... "That's not true; no way, you must be crazy or some kind of religious nut!"

When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount he was talking about the rightside-up world. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also. Ignorance doesn't include just our material desires, it can also embrace our "spiritual" practices as well; these too can become things. As Zen Master Huang Po, Lin Chi's teacher, said:

So, if you students of the Way are mistaken about your own real Mind... you will indulge in various achievements and practices and expect to attain realization by such graduated practices. But, even after aeons of diligent searching, you will not be able to attain to the Way. These methods cannot be compared to the sudden elimination of conceptual thought, the certain knowledge that there is nothing at all which has absolute existence, nothing on which to lay hold, nothing on which to rely, nothing in which to abide, nothing subjective or objective. It is by preventing the rise of conceptual thought that you will realize Bodhi; and, when you do, you will just be realizing the Buddha who has always existed in your own Mind.

How simple, but few people will believe it. Zen means "I don't want anything," "don't attach to anything," the direct simple antidote to suffering of all kinds. When Zen Master Seung Sahn says that if you don't want anything you get everything, who believes him? That's upside down! If he tells us to put it all down or to cut off all thinking, who will follow? If we can just detach from our thinking for even a second then... bluuuuub, the world turns rightside up; we are awake. We call this Great Love and Great Compassion.

Here is a question for you:

A monk asked Un Mun, "When it's not the immediate instinct and it's not the immediate phenomenon, how is it?"

Un Mun said, "An upside-down statement."

So, if there is no upside down and no right side up, then what? Zen won't help you.

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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

**Wednesday, April 28:** Tibetan Buddhism/Shambhala Training Talk, 7:30 PM, GLZC

**Dharma Workshop II:** Workshop on Special Chanting moktak, Kido moktak, ceremonies, GLZC 6-9 PM.

**Friday, May, 14:** Rummage Sale Preparation, 5 pm – Finish, GLZC, Pizza provided.

**Saturday, May, 15:** Rummage Sale, 8:00am-4:00pm, GLZC

**Saturday, June, 12:** Kido Retreat, 9:00am – 4pm, First Unitarian Society (corner of Astor and Ogden)

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## Friday Night Extended Practice

An extended practice was held Friday night April 23<sup>rd</sup> from 7:00pm to midnight. Extended practice nights provide an excellent opportunity for you to participate in strong, dedicated practice. Although extended practices are 5 hours in length, it is not necessary for you to stay for all 5 hours. You don't even need to start at 7:00pm, come join us when you can and leave when you want. Sit for a half hour or for 5 hours; whatever fits into your schedule. Watch the Calendar of Upcoming Events for the next extended practice night and please plan on joining us.

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## Ten Reasons ... (continued from page 1)

really made this firm commitment to attain enlightenment, but rather I have just been practicing because it seemed to help me and others... *only don't know and just do it.* Following this direction has been fine, but now I have begun to realize that I need to start focusing on moving forward and not just get complacent with my practice. I don't think I ever really believed that enlightenment was something I would attain, so I just did what I could. But every time I read those temple rules and come across this phrase, something inside me stirs and nags at me. Where is my commitment to attaining enlightenment and saving all beings from suffering? Perhaps if I make this commitment, it will require more from me in terms of time and effort, and maybe I have been kind of lazy. For me making this commitment will involve more extended periods of practice at YMJJ's and Kyol Che, and it will also mean making more of an effort to maintain my focus throughout the day. Ugh! This sounds like a lot of work, but with the support of my Sangha, the other retreatants, and our teachers, I believe I will take this commitment seriously and get down to work.

**2. Practice becomes the constant in your life.** You never know when your life will suddenly take an unexpected turn and suffering will appear. Perhaps a loved one is seriously injured or dies. Perhaps you are diagnosed with a serious illness. Maybe your children lose their direction and cause suffering for themselves and others, and you feel powerless to set things straight. Or maybe your job situation becomes very stressful. If you have been practicing regularly, this will help you to deal with these problems as they appear. You have some practice forms you can use to help you stay centered, and then you can help others around you. A few years ago my son suffered a serious football injury, and the doctors thought he would be paralyzed from the shoulders down, perhaps permanently. On my way to the hospital, I called Peter (GLZC co-director) and asked him to have the Sangha do chanting for my son at practice that night. When I and my daughter arrived at the hospital, we started to do Kwan Seum Bosal mantras using our mala beads. All through the afternoon and night, just Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal. We remained calm and focused. My husband, who has no spiritual practice, was quite agitated and eventually inconsolable. About eight hours after Greg was injured, the feeling started to return to his feet and legs. He stayed in the intensive care unit at Children's Hospital for a day, and then was moved to a private room. The day after that, he was released from the hospital with no permanent injury. The doctors couldn't explain it. The spinal injury showed up clearly on the X-rays. They just said, "Sometime miracles happen." I thought, "Boy, this chanting stuff really works!" My husband said, "Wow! Great medical care!" My neighbor

said, "Jesus saves!" So which do you like? All I know is that having a practice to fall back on really helped my daughter and me, and perhaps our practice also helped my husband in a way (at least he didn't have to deal with a couple of hysterical females!).

### **And the number one reason to come to the Zen Center and practice Zen...**

**1. For you.** There are probably 10,000 reasons to practice Zen regularly, but they all boil down to this one. In the end, everything we do in practice is to help others. First we help ourselves and become clear. Then we can see when help is needed, and we will also know how to help. When we are doing something, if we regularly ask ourselves, "Who is this for?" it might help us to keep our direction.

These are my top ten reasons to come to the Zen Center and to practice Zen. You may come up with a different list. Regardless the important thing is that we just do it. Just come, just practice, only help. I hope to see all of you at practice. I'll be there!

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## **YMJJ Retreats Scheduled**

Two YMJJ retreats have been scheduled with GLZC guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Kwang. They will be held July 24 - 25, 2003 and October 9 - 10, 2003. Mark your calendars and watch for upcoming details.

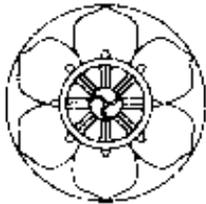
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## **Annual Rummage Sale Scheduled**

GLZC's annual rummage sale has been scheduled for May 15, 2004. More information will follow but start saving your treasures to bring to the sale. This is GLZC's major fundraiser for the year. What a great way to practice non-attachment! Items donated for sale may be brought to GLZC at any time for storing until the sale. Friday night May 14<sup>th</sup> will be the official setup work practice. Please join us in setting up the tables, pricing merchandise and eating pizza. You can also spot some of the real treasures before anyone else does and get the really good buys, like those ABBA albums.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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### **Regular Practice Schedule of the Great Lake Zen Center**

Monday and Wednesday at 7:30PM;  
Saturday at 8:00AM  
Other special events as described elsewhere in the newsletter. Unless otherwise noted, all events are held at the Great Lake Zen Center.

*Beginners Always Welcome!*  
Unless noted otherwise, *Introductions to Zen* are offered on the first Monday of each month. Dharma Talks are offered on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Both are at 7:30PM.

