

MOON ON THE WATER

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Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

April, 2005

What is a Zen Retreat?

Zen Master Dae Kwang

At the end of his life Buddha said, "Life is very short; please investigate it closely." This is the first meaning of a meditation retreat: Investigation. Everyone knows that life is short; soon the show is over. Behind that realization is always the question, What am I, really? This question and the profound doubt that it entails is what the Buddha faced. That is the question of our life, too -- what are you?

In China, a cut of meat is called "pure meat," meaning that it is not mixed with anything else, like in a sausage. People always want the butcher to give them "pure meat." There once was a Zen practitioner who was investigating the question, "Who has Buddha Nature?" -- i.e., what am I? All day long, as much as he could, he would look into this question. Every day on his way to work he would pass a butcher shop. He would always hear people clamoring for pure meat, but he never paid it much mind. One day as he passed by, a woman was vehemently insisting that the butcher give her only "pure meat." Her insistence rankled the butcher, who shouted back, "Madam, which piece is not pure?" When the man heard this angry shout, he suddenly realized that everything is "pure meat." Everything has Buddha Nature. What *doesn't* have Buddha Nature? He was enlightened. This is true investigation. If it is constant and sincere, then it will have a result, guaranteed.

Our retreats are governed by the temple rules. Originally these rules came from the monastic code for Zen temples set up by Pai Chang Zen Master, one of Ma Tzu's top students. Much like the Rule of Saint Benedict, it sets forth rules for how to live together harmoniously. Our temple rules also tell us how to practice correctly. But more than that, they contain a prescription for relating to everything in this world in a compassionate manner. Central to this and to the correct practicing of Zen is what we call "putting it all down." The temple rules say, "Do not cling to your opinions. To cling to and defend your opinions is to

destroy your practice. Put away all of your opinions. This is true Buddhism." This tells how to practice correctly. Just let go of -- i.e., let rest -- your every opinion. As the temple rules say, "The great round mirror has no likes or dislikes." This is our original nature. The second meaning of any meditation retreat is to put down your opinion, your condition and your situation, and return to your original nature.

In the Majjhima-nikaya, a collection of sutras in the Pali Canon, a monk asks the Buddha to summarize all of his teaching in one sentence. In the course of forty-some years of teaching the Buddha taught many, many things. However, his simple reply was, "Don't attach to anything." Wow, there it is in a nutshell -- very simple! The Fifth Patriarch got his big enlightenment when he heard this line from the Diamond Sutra: "When thinking arises in your mind don't attach to it." These ancient worthies were always teaching the same simple thing. Our only job is to do it. So the third meaning of a retreat is "just do it." After all, retreats are very simple. Everything is decided for you: when to get up; what to eat when to meditate -- everything. Your job is to do it.

Most of our retreats are relatively short -- one, two or three days, or perhaps three months. But Buddha practiced very hard for six years and Bodhidharma sat for nine years in a cave above Shao Lin Temple. How can we possibly attain what they got? Actually, it's very simple: At this moment, just apply yourself with sincere effort in asking this question: What am I? That means investigate closely. That means cut off all thinking -- wake up from your like and dislike dream. At that point, you and Buddha and Bodhidharma become one. This is the last meaning of a retreat -- wake up and help our world. That is already the Buddha's mind. But that's just dead words so, I have a question for you: How is it possible for you and Buddha and Bodhidharma to become one? Quick! Answer! Thinking won't help you.

Faith in What?

Peter Newauld, SDT

“Faith” is getting a lot of press these days. If you google “faith,” you get 44.8 million hits. Ok, that includes hits like the British “Faith” shoe store, “Faith Hill” and the Tokyo online store, “Faith Internet Shop.” So let’s tunnel down a little. Searching on “faith” and “religion” gives us 6.69 million hits; “faith” and “Christian” jumps back up to 9.71 million hits. Hmm, that seems curious; maybe the term “religion” is out of vogue. Even just “faith-based” gives us 1.48 million hits. As an exercise for the reader, you may want to try “faith” and “Buddhist.”

So, there’s all this faith stuff out there – it’ must be pretty important. Heck, I think I’m pretty important, but if you google on “Peter Neuwald” you only get 80 hits and most of them are not me! Who are all those Germans with my name? But I digress. Something so important must be clearly explained somewhere, right? After all, if we want to get some of that faith-based money, we need to know whether we are indeed faith-based. So, for one last google, let’s try “what is faith”. We get 35,300 hits. It’s a lot less than I would expect, but still sizable. Looking through the hits, I’m a little disappointed though. Nope, web surfing is not going to help me out with this one!

Faith has become a word with different meanings for different people. Often it seems to mean the same thing as “religious belief.” So what does it mean for Zen Buddhists? Is it even something we need to concern ourselves with? On a superficial level, everyone has faith of some sort. I have faith that the sun will rise tomorrow. Is this truth? Not necessarily, since I also have faith that someday, hopefully long after my pension is used up, the sun will indeed not rise again. So maybe if Buddhists can agree that we have faith about the sun rising each day, then we can be faith-based organizations. One thing it is not, at least for this Zen Buddhist, is “religious belief.”

Zen Master Seung Sahn describes what he calls “Great Faith.” He says “Great Faith means only keeping one-pointed effort, no matter what the conditions are.” . . . “all your energy is only keeping one point, no matter what. ‘I must attain my true self.’ Every day try, try, try, for ten thousand years, nonstop. Then after some time, you can say, “Ahhhh! That’s my true self!” He goes on to describe a wonderful analogy about how a hen sits on her eggs. She doesn’t wander around; she doesn’t move from her eggs. Her direction is clear and she holds onto no opinion, condition or situation. Only sit on her eggs. Then, weeks later, her chicks are born. This is our faith, faith with no attachments. The only belief is the belief in ourselves. When we practice with this one-pointed effort, keeping a mind that only goes straight, we have Great Faith.

This Great Faith is at the core of our practice. This is an important point – it serves to strengthen our practice and our practice strengthens our Great Faith. It is not just an idea or belief in some dogma. It is intimately intertwined with our practice. The hen sits with Great Faith; we sit with Great Faith. With no sitting, with no practice, this Great Faith is meaningless. Like the hen, our faith and action go together.

So I say go ahead and write out your faith-based grant proposals; we are faith-based. It’s probably not the kind most people in this country think of, but I won’t tell. Besides, I couldn’t find what is meant by “faith-based” on the government’s web site anyway.

If you want to hear more on Buddhist faith, join us for the April 30th Buddhist Conversation on this topic. GLZC will be hosting this event, which is sponsored by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship. It runs from 4pm to 6pm.

Buddhist Conversation Series

Saturday, April 30

The next in a series of discussions organized by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship will have Faith as its subject. The talk will be held at the Great Lake Zen Center and is planned for April 30, 2005 from 4pm to 6pm. The discussion includes panel members from GLZC, The Milwaukee Mindfulness Center, The Milwaukee Zen Center, the Shambhala Center, and the Tender Shoot of Joy Zen Center. This is a great chance to learn about other practice centers and to meet and talk with fellow Buddhists. Plan on attending for a stimulating discussion on faith. More information will be posted as details become finalized. Special thanks to all who attended the last talk on January 29th. I believe I counted 8 people from GLZC attending the talk. What a wonderful showing!

Know myself? If I knew myself, I’d run away.

Goethe

JUST DOING IT

Deanne "Dee" Schwaiger, DTT.

How exciting it was to watch the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee men's basketball team compete in the NCAA tournament this year. After beating fifth-seed Alabama and fourth-seed Boston College the Panthers, ranked twelve, made it to the "Sweet Sixteen" for the first time in the schools 109-year history of basketball. These two wins positioned them to play number one-seed Illinois-notably the best team in the country-on their home turf. Sportscasters, reporters and fans were predicting that the Panthers would have a difficult time making it beyond the second game-if, in fact-they won the first game. Much discussion regarding team statistics, rankings and other synergistic attributes seemed to fill the air, reflecting opinions and ideas based on "past" performance metrics.

As a UWM alum I was cheering for my team, the Cinderella of the bunch, trying to "figure out" how teams were paired and what they needed to do to top the competition. During the first game, what hit me was the amount of intensity, effort and "just do it" action UWM brought to the game. When it was time to dribble they only dribbled, when it was time to pass the ball they only passed the ball, when it was time to shoot they just shot, when it was time to slow down or speed up the tempo of the game they did what was necessary, regardless of statistics, opinions and rankings. UWM had a job to do. This reminded me of Zen Master Seung Sahn's "try mind" teaching only try, try, try and don't make. If a player had to "think" ... "Hey, it's time to shoot because my defenders statistics aren't very strong on the outside shot" the act of playing the game would become rather difficult. If this were the process, during a game situation, the defense would be all over the offensive "thinker" creating the probability of a missed shot. Coaches and players that make up teams like UWM or the Illini,

don't get to this point in a tournament by reading "A Coach and Players Guide to the Sweet Sixteen", watching other people play the game or hanging out on the sidelines. They get to this point by "just doing it" with belief, determination and a lot of practice, which can be routine, grueling, fatiguing, and plain old "hard work".

Zen practice is like this. Zen practice also requires much intensity, effort and "just do it" action. Reflecting on my personal practice of going to the Zen center one night a week, sitting at home after a long day at the office when my body and mind just want to go to bed, writing this article for the newsletter while experiencing writers block, sitting a YMJJ when it would be more appealing to be doing anything but sit on a cushion or taking responsibility for preparing financial information for the sangha can also be routine, grueling, fatiguing and hard work. "Hard work" mind... routine, grueling, and fatiguing. How many times have you made "hard work" never recognizing its energy draining capacity by chasing the thought? How many times has a thought, idea or opinion stopped you from doing something? My "Just Do It" mind...coming to practice on Monday evenings, sitting on a cushion in the morning, finishing this article, attending July's YMJJ, and using the cool spreadsheet Mike Zinke, SDT created to make financial documentation easier. How many times have you "Just Did It" and were amazed at how quickly time passed, how effortless the project turned out to be or how someone else perceived you needed support and only helped? By examining life closely one recognizes that this is happening all the time. When was the last time you examined your life closely?

The outcome of the Panther-Fighting Illini game was a score of 77-63, which ended UWM's run to the "Elite Eight". Zen practice is Monday and Wednesday at 7:30 PM and Saturday at 8:00 AM. See you then.

YMJJ Retreat

April 23 - 24

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for April 23-24, 2005. The retreat will be held at GLZC. Zen Master Dae Kwang will be leading the retreat and conducting interviews. The price of the retreat is \$70 for both days, or \$40 for one day. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleep space should notify Peter or Laura and should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday, April 22. Please plan on joining us for some very strong practice. **You may register for this YMJJ by signing up at GLZC or by contacting Peter or Laura.** The YMJJ will be followed on Sunday by a Baby Naming Ceremony at 2:00pm.

Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.....John Lennon

THE GREAT GLZC RUMMAGE SALE

***MAY 14, 2005
9:00AM - 4:00PM***

The great, world famous GLZC annual rummage is sale is planned for May 14, 2005. Start saving things for donation to the sale. We accept almost everything (except clothes). The annual rummage sale is the only planned event we currently have that provides extra money for our wish list and extra necessities. We can help with transporting large items to the Zen center and will be providing storage space for some items, if necessary. The great event starts on Friday night with the setup and pricing of all the treasures. Pizza will be provided for all those who attend and help and while you are there you can spot those extra special items and get there early Saturday to buy them. If you need help transporting items, please contact Peter (telephone number is on the last page of this newsletter) or email us at info@glzc.org and we'll arrange a pick up. Remember, donations are tax deductible and receipts for your donations will be available.

Editor's note: I've stared and stared at this little blank space in the newsletter; trying to find something small to fit into this space to make the newsletter 'complete' and 'full'. And then it struck me, isn't that just the way the human mind works? A short little void in thinking and our minds automatically find a subject to fill the void. So maybe the best thing to put here is....

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Newsletter Notice...

Just a reminder: if you have not returned the newsletter response card that was mailed in January this will be your last newsletter.

The June newsletter mailing list will be updated and all non-respondent's names will be removed. If you wish to continue receiving this newsletter and have not returned the response card, do so today. If you can't find the response card email us at info@glzc.org or contact Peter or Laura. If you have returned card, thank you for your response. If you have donated to the publication of future newsletters, thank you again. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

April, 2005

Friday, April 22: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

Saturday, April 23 and Sunday April 24: YMJJ. With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday.

Saturday, April 30: Buddhist Peace Fellowship Conversation Series. GLZC, 4pm - 6pm.

May, 2005

Saturday, May 14: Annual GLZC Rummage Sale, 9am – 4pm

Friday, May 20: Extended Practice, 7pm – 10pm

No Practice, Monday, May 30 (Memorial Day)

June, 2005

Saturday, June 11: Kido One-Day Retreat, GLZC, 10am to 4pm

July, 2005

No Practice or Introduction to Zen, Monday, July 4

Friday, July 15: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

Saturday, July 16 and Sunday July 17: YMJJ. With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday.

August, 2005

Sunday, August 21: Beginner's Mind Retreat. GLZC, 9am - 4pm.

September, 2005

No Practice or Introduction to Zen, Monday, September 5

Friday, September 23: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

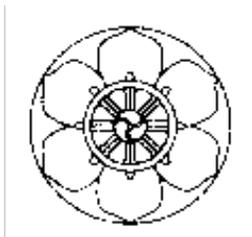
Saturday, September 24 and Sunday September 25: YMJJ. With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday. Precepts ceremony following the end of the YMJJ.

November, 2005

Saturday, November 12: Kido One-Day Retreat, GLZC, 10am to 4pm.

No Practice, Wednesday, November 23

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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.

