
MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 14, Issue 2

Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

April/May 2012

Buddha's Birthday

Zen Master Seung Sahn

According to the lunar-calendar the Buddha's birthday will take place on April 6. On April 9, the Great Lake Zen Center will hold a celebration of the Buddha's birthday upon which occasion in 1973, Zen Master Seung Sahn gave the following talk:

Long ago an eminent teacher said, "The Buddha did not come to the Kapila empire and was not born of his mother, for he had already saved all people from suffering." This is having one thousand mouths, and yet not needing them. If you understand this you will understand that in the palm of your hands you hold the noses of all the eminent teachers from the distant past to the present. And so, you will first attain. If you do not understand, you should not speak for that is only blood dripping. It is better for you to keep your mouth shut as spring passes.

The Buddha sprang from the right side of his mother and took seven steps in each of the four directions. He then looked once each way, raised one finger to the sky, and touched the ground with his other hand. He said, "In the sky above and

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Abbot's Corner

Understanding Cannot Help

Pete Neuwald, Abbot



The Kwan Um School of Zen emails a weekly teaching piece to its members. I would like to share a recent one by Zen Master Seung Sahn, our founding teacher.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Everything in this world – the sun, the moon, the stars, mountain, rivers, and trees – everything is constantly moving. But there is one thing that never moves. It never comes or goes. It is never born and it never dies. What is this not-moving thing? Can you tell me? If you find that, you will find your true self and attain universal substance. But understanding cannot help you find that point. Even one hundred Ph.D.'s will not show you your true nature."

"Our true nature cannot be found in books and academic studies because our true nature is before speech and words. It is before thinking. If you find your before-thinking point, then it is possible to attain your true self. So, a long time ago, Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am.' This is where philosophy begins. But if you are not thinking, what? This is where Zen practice begins."

This points very clearly to the root of our practice. We are called Zen "students," but our study is "before thinking study." This can be a very difficult concept to accept, because, well, it defies conceptualization. We are talking

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the sky below, only I am Holy.” You must understand this speech and must understand what this “I” is. I is empty. Empty is full. It has no name or form and does not appear nor disappear. All people and all things have it. So where is the Buddha coming from?

Long ago Zen Master Un Mun said, “On the Buddha’s birthday, as he sprang from his mother’s side, I hit him once and killed him, and gave him to a hungry dog. The entire world was at peace.”

What the Buddha said on his birthday is no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What the Zen Master Un Mun said is also no good, so I will hit him thirty times. What I have just said is no good, so I will hit myself thirty times.

Where is the mistake?

KATZ!!!

Today is the Buddha’s birthday and outside white snow is falling.

After the talk, one of the guests asked Soen Sa Nim, ‘Some people say the Buddha is a divine entity, others say he was superhuman and god-like, still others say he was just a wise, old man who understood a little more than most. What is Buddha?’

‘How did you get here?’

‘By foot.’

‘Why did you come by foot?’

‘I had no car.’

‘A man drives a car. What is it that drove your body here?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘The mind that does not know is the Buddha.’

‘Why do you then celebrate Buddha’s birthday?’

‘As I mentioned earlier, the great Master Un Mun once said, “On the Buddha’s birthday, as he sprang from the side of his mother, I hit him once and killed him, and gave him to a hungry dog. The entire world was at peace.” Do you understand what this means?’

‘No, I don’t.’

‘This is the Buddha’s teaching. When you understand this you will come to understand why we celebrate his birthday.’

The Temple Rules: A How-to Guide for Sustaining the Earth

Andy Yench, DT

“Green Sea and Blue Sky are the Buddha’s Original Face”

This vivid quote is from the *Temple Rules*, a short collection of instructions designed to foster harmony among people practicing Zen together. We take turns reciting the rules at the start of our Yong Maeng Jong Jin retreats. This snippet about Buddha’s face is one of my favorites. The words “green sea and blue sky” combine like a splash of cold water in the face. And equating them to the Buddha is like a splash of cold water on the mind. In only ten words this sentence shakes us awake and points at the fundamental truth that man and nature are one and the same. Powerful teaching. I think the great American naturalist, author and environmental advocate John Muir would have appreciated these words because he also understood how the distinctions we make between the human world and the natural world are artificial at best and destructive at worst.

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Evidence of the damage is everywhere but still hard to see. The reason is something a Zen student can appreciate: the examples are hiding in plain sight. While the popular media is filled with stories about environmental predicaments happening in other parts of the world it’s much quieter about the damage occurring outside our doors. It’s a lot like karma. Recognizing the negative (or positive) habitual behavior of friends and relatives is much easier than perceiving our own deep-rooted patterns. So, if you want to witness firsthand the consequences of human ignorance about our relationship to the rest of nature, you don’t need to walk on a melting glacier in Iceland, hear the roar of bulldozers in the forests of Brazil, or sting your lungs breathing the smoggy air above a sprawling mega city in some developing country. There are plenty of examples here at home.

Around 32 inches of precipitation falls on Wisconsin annually. In the last 15 years a growing percentage comes from major storms that drop one or more inches in a single deluge. But even before these “mega” storms started happening it was clear

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

April 2011

- Introduction to Zen
Monday, April 2, 7:30 - 9:00 PM
- Buddha's Birthday Celebration
Monday, April 9, 7:30 PM
- Extended Practice
Saturday, April 21, 9:00 - 11:00 AM
- Sutra Talk
Wednesday, April 25, 7:30 - 9:00 PM

May 2011

- Introduction to Zen
Monday, May 7, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
- Annual GLZC Rummage Sale
Saturday, May 12, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM
- Dharma Talk
Wednesday, May 23, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM



to anyone who was paying attention that rain storms and melting snow were causing bigger floods and more water pollution than they once did.

The cause was, and is, all around us. It's what planners call the "built" environment: the roads, roof tops, croplands and lawns to which we have grown very dependent and accustomed. As little as 150 years ago, before the landscape was built, storm water was intercepted by trees or filtered harmlessly into the soft earth. In our time, water falling from the sky is much more likely to hit a building or a parking lot. Since it can't soak into these hard surfaces it puddles until gravity pulls it across the land on a journey to the lowest point on the landscape which, for us, is Lake Michigan. The little puddles that leave your lot may not seem like a big deal all by themselves, but when you multiply them by the tens of thousands of lots in this region you begin to understand how a clean trickle can become a polluted torrent very quickly. This scale of landscape change has happened here before. The last time was 10,000 years ago during the Pleistocene epoch when vast ice sheets covered the land. But what took the glaciers tens of thousands of years to accomplish, humans have achieved in just over a century. And watch out, we are certainly not done yet.

Before tagging me "extremist tree-hugger", let me say that I don't believe there is anything inherently evil about the changes we and our ancestors have wrought on this region and, sad to say, the earth in general. Sure, when I was in my late teens, I held a dim view of human behavior and fancied myself an eco-terrorist wannabe, but now I understand the havoc we wreak upon the earth every day is perfectly "natural." Just like beavers build dams, humans pour asphalt, create giant monoculture farms, and fragment the landscape with subdivisions. We can't help ourselves, it's what we do. But, like a bag of granola, just because it's natural does not mean it's good.

The insight that whatever humans do to the environment, good or bad, is natural, hit me like a revelation during my freshman year at college. For a long time I wanted to tell everyone about my new insight. I enjoyed sharing and defending this understanding with colleagues and friends. But the passion I brought to these discussions never seemed to much inspire anyone else. I'm not entirely sure why, but I've gradually come to realize my case was only half developed. I was good at stating the obvious (human actions are natural) but not clear about what this meant in a practical sense. I thought being profound was enough, but my words never motivated action because I never told people what they could do to make things better. The *Temple Rules* do that. With poetry they open up our mind so we hear the practical instruction they contain to help us walk together on the path toward enlightenment. Metaphorically that path is our spiritual practice, but literally it is planet Earth.

So, what can you do to reduce flooding and clean up local water ways? Try to keep the rain water that falls on your property on your property. If it runs into the street it becomes stormwater, but if you collect it on your lot and let it slowly infiltrate, over hours or even days, into the soil or evaporate back to the sky we will all be better off. You can use rain gardens and rain barrels to capture the water or you can replace grass turf with mulched beds and trees since they are much better at soaking up and intercepting rain water. Finally, it's important to keep the water that does leave your property clean. So apply fertilizer and chemical weed controls as sparingly as possible or stop using them altogether. Dandelions in the green grass are like little yellow suns that sustain bees and other insects and, I'm told, the leaves make a great salad if picked early. Living simply remains good advice, so minimizing water and energy use are also very helpful and save money as well.

Ecology textbooks explain how all things, including us, are connected in a web of life but the *Temple Rules* provide the same teaching. The monks, nuns and lay practitioners who live according to these simple instructions demonstrate how humans can live harmoniously with other living things. Our practice at GLZC helps us do the same.

The Eye of the Storm

Frank Pauc

All hurricanes have an odd feature. While most of a hurricane is home to strong winds and driving rain, there is a small area in the very center of the storm that is tranquil and calm. Even though it is surrounded by noise and destruction, the eye of the hurricane is a place of peace. It provides a temporary stillness.

The Zen Center is similar in some ways. I look forward to sitting in meditation on Saturday mornings because the Zen Center provides a respite from the chaos and confusion that dominate most of my life. While I am at meditation practice, there isn't much that I am required to do. I just need to sit down and shut up. I always feel thankful while I am sitting. I am grateful for that time and that space, small though they may be.

It is not like there is perfect silence while we meditate. The sounds of a busy urban street can be easily heard inside the center. That's okay. Sometimes a rumbling motorcycle, or a blaring siren, or the sound of a passing pedestrian talking trash can bring me back into the moment. Meditation for me can devolve into daydreaming. A sudden jolt of the reality outside can get me to the here and now.

We sometimes talk about taking refuge in the Sangha. When I come to meditate I am taking refuge. While I am there, I am among other people who also have a desire for a clear mind and a peaceful heart. There is a positive energy in the room that I can't explain, but is there nonetheless. Meditation in a group helps me to center myself. I don't know how that works; I just know that it works.

The Zen Center is a place of peace and love. Although it has a specific physical location, the energy that permeates it can go elsewhere. Practice allows me to occasionally see things clearly even when I am away from the Sangha. Sometimes, I can be at home or at work, and I can still be in the eye of the storm.



Understanding

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about something that can't be understood by thinking or discussing. In fact, I'm having trouble writing about it now! When I first became interested in Zen I read many books and articles about Zen and about practicing Zen. Then I realized that the books kept telling me to stop reading and just practice, or more directly to "shut up and sit down!" So, I finally did. Sure, I still read books and articles (like those found in this newsletter). There's nothing wrong with reading and discussing – this can help point to "before thinking," but ultimately we can't attain "before thinking" through words.

Last week when we had our unseasonably warm weather, Gretchen and I were sitting on our porch enjoying the weather. Across the street one of our neighbors was teaching his young daughter how to ride her bike. It brought back memories of teaching our younger daughter how to ride without training wheels. I remember telling her how to pump with her legs and describing how balance, steering and braking worked. Maybe that helped, but only when she let go of her thinking and took a leap was she able to *attain* riding that bike. That's what practicing Zen is like. Understanding didn't help – just ride.



Looking over the southern mountain, I

Clap my hands: cumulus clouds transform

Into dog, tiger, man, Buddha, then disperse

And to my sorrow disappear over the mountain's

Edge in a rush of wind leaving

The sky blue, the trees green.

– Zen Master Seung Sahn

Buddha's Birthday Celebration
Monday, April 9th
7:30 PM

Please join us for celebration of Buddha's birthday with special chanting, meditation, the traditional reading of a poem, followed by a dharma talk and a flower offering. The celebration marks the end of the Heart Kyol Che period of intensive practice that began on in January. Following the celebration, cake, cookies, and tea will be served.

Empty-handed?

“Coming empty-handed, going empty handed – that is human...”

– Zen Master Seung Seung

Between coming and going- our lives fill up with attachments. How would you like help in becoming empty-handed? The time is fast approaching for our **Annual GLCZ Rummage Sale**. The sale will take place at our center on **Saturday, May 12 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm**. Start saving items now for donation to the sale. We accept almost everything (with the exception of clothes, large seasonal items, aquariums, humidifiers, vaporizers and computer components). This year we have decided to also accept **jackets and coats** to sell. This is by far our biggest fund-raising event, providing us with the funds needed for the rental/maintenance of our center, and support for retreats and other events.

This great event starts on Friday night with setup and pricing. Pizza will be provided for all those who attend and help. If you need help transporting items, please 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.

Now is the time to start scouring your closets, attics, and basements for things to donate. Remember, go “empty-handed,” let go of all attachments, and help the Great Lake Zen Center at the same time.

Rummage Sale Customer from The Andy Griffith Show

Customer
Uh, how much is this?

Sheriff Andy Taylor
Oh, 'bout three dollars.

Customer
What you suppose it is?

Sheriff Andy Taylor
If I knew that it'd cost you five.

Customer
Sounds like a bargain.

Sheriff Andy Taylor
Heh, yeah... yeah, one of these is nice to have.

Customer
I always wanted one.

Sheriff Andy Taylor
Yeah.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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.



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