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# MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 9, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

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## *In the Flow*

*Michael Zinke, BT*

Back in 1990 a psychologist by the name of Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (pronounced “Chicks sent me high”) wrote a book titled *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. In this book Csikszentmihaly defined and analyzed his concept of “flow” – as in “in the flow”. Csikszentmihaly describes his theory that most people are happy when they are in this state of “flow” which can be described as a Zen like state of oneness with what is being done at the time. The idea of flow is like the feeling of being in the zone or in the groove. In other words the person is completely immersed in what they are doing. At times we all realize this feeling with something that we are doing and time flies by and other needs like eating or drinking are totally ignored and unrealized.

Csikszentmihaly describes flow as “being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one.” (Taken from an interview with Wired magazine, [www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.09/czik.html](http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.09/czik.html)). The flow state also implies a kind of focused attention and it has been noted that mindfulness meditation seems to improve a person’s capacity for flow.

The term flow came about when Csikszentmihaly interviewed all types of people and were asked to describe their experiences when everything was going really well. Everyone said it was like being carried by a current, spontaneous, effortless like a flow. Like being in the middle of a fast moving stream, the current carrying you down the river effortlessly; just floating along with the current.

So, if we look at the way Csikszentmihaly describes flow and relate it to our Zen teachings I think we can see some correlation. In Zen we teach the middle path, very similar to going with the flow. When we teach ‘become one’ we are really saying do what you are doing 100%. Very similar to how Csikszentmihaly describes flow. When we become one with what we are doing we still remain aware of things going on around us but our major concentration is on the activity we are doing at the time. So when at work, we do our work 100%, when we are working on a hobby, we do the hobby 100%. When becoming one with the task we are doing, time does seem to fly by and at times we forget to stop for food or drink because we are totally involved in the task we are doing. When we become completely engrossed in the activity at hand we then become completely satisfied with what we are doing.

But, every once in a while, or (probably more accurate for most of us) often, we seem to get out of the flow. Think of in the flow as floating down a river. We start off in the center of the river, just floating along with the flow of the current. After a while something forces us to move away from the center of the river, out of the flow, and more off to the edge of the river. When that happens we find ourselves getting hung up on a branch from a tree that has fallen into the river or we get stuck between the rocks at the river’s bank. When we get stopped by an obstacle we struggle and struggle and usually remain stuck until the water in the river rises and frees us from the obstacle. When freed from the obstacle we return to the center of the river and rejoin the flow. For a while at least. In Zen we walk the middle path but often we stray off the middle path and into the rough areas along the side of the path. Sometimes we walk in this rough area for a short period of time and then return to the middle path. Sometimes we walk in this rough area for a long period of time before returning to the middle path. In either case, while off the middle path and in the rough areas along the side we struggle and struggle to get back to the middle path.

It’s the middle path, or the “flow” that keeps us happy; that keeps us moving along in life. The middle path, or “flow” reduces our suffering and allows us to become one with everything we do. But, we have to remember that when we divert our lives from the middle path or out of the “flow” then the struggle begins. In Zen meditation helps us to realize when we leave the middle path. Meditation helps us to quickly realize where we are and what we need to do to get back onto the middle path. So when we find ourselves off into the rough areas alongside the middle path we can correct our actions and get back into the “flow”.

We often experience the feeling that Csikszentmihaly describes, the feeling of euphoria, or of being totally engrossed in what we are doing and the good feeling that accompanies those periods. In Zen we call that enlightenment or being awake. Zen Master Seung Sahn told his students that getting enlightenment is not hard; keeping that enlightened mind is very difficult to do, however. As I often tell people, the sound of enlightenment is “duh!”. We all have those “duh” moments when we clear our minds and the

answer to a problem suddenly appears and the answer turns out to be so obvious we say “well, duh”. We should have known the answer but our minds weren’t clear enough to realize that at the time until something or somebody shows us the correct answer. Then we marvel at how dumb we were not to realize the answer on our own. So the problem we face is how do we learn to hold on to those clear moments and live our lives always in the moment? Hmmm, I’ll let you know when I figure that part out. Until then, keep practicing; keep setting aside a few minutes every day to do some meditation. The act of meditating every day at about the same time of day, trains our minds to let go of all the space junk that accumulates in our minds. As humans we really hate to let any of that junk go. We like to keep it. We hold onto it in case we need it in the future, but we rarely need it and it just builds and builds and causes our suffering. Let it all go, keep a clear mind and enjoy life.

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## Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat September 28 - 30



**Zen Master Dae Kwang**

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for September 28 and 29, 2007. The retreat will be held at GLZC. Zen Master Dae Kwang will be leading this retreat and conducting interviews. The price of the retreat is being reviewed currently but will not exceed \$100 for both days, or \$55 for Saturday only and \$45 for Sunday only. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleep space should notify Peter (telephone number on last page) and should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, washcloth, and towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday, September 28th. Please plan on joining us for some very strong practice. **You may register for this YMJJ by signing up at GLZC or by email at [info@glzc.org](mailto:info@glzc.org).**

We are grateful to Zen Master Dae Kwang for taking time out of his busy schedule to visit us and lead the YMJJ’s. We are only provided the opportunity to sit with and interview with a Zen Master three or four times a year. Please plan on attending and taking advantage of this opportunity.

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## ***Why 108?***

As Dharma Teachers we are often asked "why do you do 108 bows in the morning?". Usually we answer with a typical Zen answer like "because we don't do 107". According to Buddhist belief there are 108 different impurities of the mind. By doing 108 bows in the morning, we make amends for these 108 impurities and start the day with a clean slate.

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### **Kido One-Day Retreat, Saturday, November 10, 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM**

To be held at:

**First Unitarian Society  
1342 N. Astor St. (Corner of Astor and Ogden)**

Kido means "energy path." Participants in the Kido play percussion instruments while continuously chanting "Kwan Seum Bosal." Bring a percussion instrument (this can be as simple as blocks of wood). Some additional ones will be provided. **You should also bring a bag lunch.** Newcomers are welcome. For more information, [contact us](#) or see the October newsletter.

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### **Calendar of Upcoming Events**

#### **September, 2007**

**Monday, September 3. No Practice due to holiday.**

**Friday, September 14. Extended Practice.** GLZC 7:00pm – 10:00pm

**Friday, September 28. Public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang.** GLZC, 7:30pm.

**Saturday – Sunday, September 29-30. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang.** GLZC, Saturday 6:00am – 9:40pm, Sunday, 6:00am – 3:30pm

#### **November, 2007**

**Saturday, November 14. Kido Retreat.** First Unitarian Church. 9:30am – 3:30pm

#### **December, 2007**

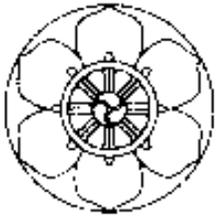
**Monday, December 3. Introduction to Zen and Buddha's Enlightenment Day Ceremony.** GLZC, 7:30pm

**Monday, December 24. No Practice due to holiday.**

**Wednesday, December 26. No Practice due to holiday.**

**Monday, December 28. No Practice due to holiday.**

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*is published by the*

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The Great Lake Zen Center is affiliated with the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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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.

