

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 4, Issue 6

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

December, 2002

Christmas in Nirvana

Jeff Ligman, DT

Every year around this time I start receiving the following question from quite a few people: "Do you celebrate Christmas?" This is a question that people ask me who know me "as a Buddhist," and I assume they are wondering if this precludes me from celebrating a holiday so tied to the Christian faith. It reminds me of another issue that arises at times, when I am interacting with someone professionally, and they ask me if I am a Christian and believe in Jesus or God. Over the years I have developed some (perhaps) smooth ways of responding to these situations designed to reduce stress and conflict for both me and the other person. Afterwards, however, I am often left feeling a bit odd or uncomfortable, like I have escaped a trap only to fall into a deeper one.

I think that sometimes people ask these questions because they are genuinely interested in me, or Buddhism, or both, and want to explore something. Other times I can feel that gut feeling that tells me I am about to be the object of some degree of evangelism. One technique I have developed is to adopt an inner sense of superiority over the other person or religion. I can thereby maintain my inner sense of self and assuredness but present an exterior of communion with the other person. This is the easy way out, where I just say I celebrate Christmas and believe in God and Jesus. I do, but I also believe in Buddha, and the Taoists, and Shamans, and dogs, and trees, and all sorts of stuff. I kind of leave that part out.

Another option would be to try to "hit" the other person's mind, put it back on them, and ask questions like: "What is Christmas?" "What is God?" and so on. Zen stuff. Reverse evangelism, sort of. Zen style. And yes I have tried this approach as well. This seems to always end up in a kind of power struggle, with both parties becoming more entrenched. Also, and maybe more to the point, I end up feeling I am not helping, only being selfish and not compassionate.

So, all of this is really a lot of thinking on my part. But it is what I go through and, I suspect, many others do, too. I have heard similar stories. The other thing I notice a lot during this time of year is how our expectations are so powerful and disconnected. So many of us expect so much from Christmas and get so disappointed. So many of us expect so much misery from Christmas and get just that.

If you are clear, then you will know how to help. There is a famous story about our guiding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn. He was asked where he will go when he dies. He reportedly said, "Straight to hell!". When the perplexed student asked why, Zen Master Seung Sahn replied, "Oh, more people to help there!"

Sayings of Zen Master Kyong Ho

(1849-1912)

Great-grandteacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn

1. Don't wish for perfect health. In perfect health there is greed and wanting. So an ancient said, "Make good medicine from the suffering of sickness."
2. Don't hope for a life without problems. An easy life results in a judgmental and lazy mind. So an ancient once said, "Accept the anxieties and difficulties of this life."
3. Don't expect your practice to be always clear of obstacles. Without hindrances the mind that seeks enlightenment may be burnt out. So an ancient once said, "Attain deliverance in disturbances."
4. Don't expect to practice hard and not experience the weird. Hard practice that evades the unknown makes for a weak commitment. So an ancient once said, "Help hard practice by befriending every demon."
5. Don't expect to finish doing something easily. If you happen to acquire something easily the will is made weaker. So an ancient once said, "Try again and again to complete what you are doing."
6. Make friends but don't expect any benefit for yourself. Friendship only for oneself harms trust. So an ancient once said, "Have an enduring friendship with purity in heart."
7. Don't expect others to follow your direction. When it happens that others go along with you, it results in pride. So an ancient once said, "Use your will to bring peace between people."
8. Expect no reward for an act of charity. Expecting something in return leads to a scheming mind. So an ancient once said, "Throw false spirituality away like a pair of old shoes."
9. Don't seek profit over and above what your work is worth. Acquiring false profit makes a fool (of oneself). So an ancient once said, "Be rich in honesty."

Buddha's Enlightenment Day Celebrated

Approximately 2500 years ago Siddhartha Gautama sat under the Bodhi tree, meditating, intent on discovering the answer to the question: "What am I?" When he looked up and saw the morning star, he attained the Great Enlightenment. He became known as the Buddha, or the Awakened One, and went on to teach many students about the nature of suffering and how to eliminate it.

On Monday, December 9, GLZC celebrated Buddha's Enlightenment Day. On this day we were reminded of Buddha's great try mind in reaching enlightenment and of his love and compassion in teaching others how to get out of the sea of suffering. The ceremony consisted of special Kwan Seum Bosal chanting, meditation, a presentation of flowers, and the reading of a poem followed by a dharma talk. The GLZC sangha enjoyed treats and tea following the ceremony.

Buddha's Enlightenment Day Poem

By Do Il (Jeff Ligman, DT)

Buddha attained enlightenment;
So many have talked about it.
Later he died and they burned his body.
Where are his ashes now?
Where is his enlightenment?
Gathering ashes the wind blows them away.
Outside the wind is so cold tonight,
Inside the incense burns on the altar.

Heart Kyol Che Scheduled Opening Ceremony

Monday, January 6, 2003, 7:30 PM

On Monday, January 6, there will be a celebration at GLZC marking the beginning of Heart Kyol Che. Kyol Che, literally translated, means "tight dharma", and it is an extended period of intense practice. At GLZC we celebrate Heart Kyol Che during the same period of time that the Kyol Che 90-day retreat is occurring at the Kwan Um School of Zen's main temple in Providence, Rhode Island.

Participants in Heart Kyol Che will make commitments to increase their practice during this period. Heart Kyol Che will continue until April 7, 2003. There will be an intensive week of practice half-way through the Heart Kyol Che period. During the week of February 17, 2003, we will hold nightly practices, Monday through Friday, from 7:00 PM until 9:00 PM. On Saturday February 22, there will be a Kido chanting retreat from 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM. On Sunday, February 23, there will be a one-day retreat at GLZC from 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM. Mark your calendars, and plan to join us for this great opportunity to turn up the flame on your practice!

YMJJ Retreat and Precepts Ceremony Held at GLZC October 25-27, 2002

On October 25th GLZC's guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Kwang, gave a public talk at the Great Lake Zen Center in Milwaukee. This talk kicked off our annual fall YMJJ retreat that culminated in a precepts ceremony on Sunday, October 27. Those in attendance at the retreat included Kwan Um students from Madison, Chicago, Racine, and Michigan as well as our own GLZC sangha members. We would like to thank Zen Master Dae Kwang for his excellent, clear teaching and also thank those in attendance for their strong practice, together action, and silence.

Following the weekend of strong practice, two GLZC sangha members took ten precepts to become Dharma Teachers in Training. Dee Schwaiger and Mike Yonkers are our newest DTTs. Also at the precepts ceremony, GLZC co-director Laura Otto-Salaj took 16 precepts and became a Senior Dharma Teacher. As a senior dharma teacher, Laura will be able to conduct consulting interviews. The GLZC sangha is very grateful to Laura, Dee, and Mike for their generosity and commitment to their practice, our Zen center, and our sangha. Congratulations and thank you!



*From L to R: Laura Otto-Salaj, Peter Neuwald,
Zen Master Dae Kwang, Mike Yonkers, Dee Schwaiger.*

Extended Practice Scheduled:

An extended night of practice has been scheduled for Friday, January 17, 2003 at GLZC. The practice will be held from 7:00 PM until midnight. Come for all five hours, or come for as much as you can. Hope to see you there!

Practice Cancellations:

There will be no practice at GLZC on Wednesday, December 25, 2002 or on Wednesday, January 1, 2003 due to the holidays.

Christmas in Nirvana ... (continued from page 1)

We often see Christmas as some sort of heaven or nirvana right here on earth. We expect therefore, that all sorts of wonderful, peaceful, loving things will happen. But instead, sometimes people push in lines, fight with each other, get disappointed, get selfish, all of the stuff that makes us human. Then, we can get really frustrated with how negative we think people get.

Rather than get frustrated with the negativity, maybe we should approach this as Zen Master Seung Sahn, as a wonderful opportunity to help, to help Christmas suffering. What would Christmas be like in Nirvana? Maybe a lot like hell, with lots of people to help.

I tend to cringe a bit when people ask me if I celebrate Christmas. Inwardly I say, "Here we go again!" I still don't know how to answer. It's a very, very big question. Right now I, whatever I say, am sitting at my desk writing this. When someone asks me next, I will try to answer with don't know mind

Celebration of Peace for the New Year Sponsored by the Greater Milwaukee Chapter of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship Wednesday, January 1, 2003, 10 A.M. – Noon

This year the program will be held at the Great Lake Zen Center. The celebration is an ecumenical Buddhist opportunity to encourage peace and non-violence. The celebration will include meditation, chanting the Heart Sutra, readings about peace, tea, cookies, and companionship.

For further information, call Peter at 414-771-2490.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

Wednesday, Jan. 1: Buddhist Peace Fellowship's New Year's Day service at GLZC

Monday, Jan. 6: Heart Kyol Che opening ceremony, GLZC, 7:30 PM

Friday, Jan. 17: Extended practice, GLZC, 7:00 PM-midnight

Monday, Jan. 20: Discussion/lecture class: *Just Do It. (Zen and the Art of Exercise: are they the same or different?)* with Dee Schwaiger, GLZC, 7:00-8:30PM.

Friday, Jan. 23- Sunday, Jan. 26: YMJJ retreat co-sponsored by Chicago and Madison sanghas in East Troy, WI.

Monday, Feb. 17-Friday, Feb. 21: Intensive week of practice at GLZC, 7:00-9:00 PM.

Saturday, Feb. 22: Kido chanting retreat at First Unitarian Church, Ogden & Astor, Milwaukee, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM. Bring a bag lunch.

Sunday, Feb. 23: One-day retreat at GLZC, 9:00 AM-4:00 PM.

Sayings ... (continued from page 1)

10. Don't try to make clarity of mind with severe practice. Every mind comes to hate severity, and where is clarity in mortification? So an ancient once said, "Clear a passageway through severe practice."

11. Be equal to every hindrance. Buddha attained Supreme Enlightenment without hindrance. Seekers after truth are schooled in adversity. When they are confronted by a hindrance, they can't be over-come. Then, cutting free, their treasure is great.

from *THOUSAND PEAKS: Korean Zen -- Tradition and Teachers* by Mu Soeng (Primary Point Press, revised edition 1991)

Yong Maeng Jong Jin Weekend Zen Meditation Retreat with Dharma Master William Brown, JDPSN Friday - Sunday, January 24 - 26, 2003 Edwards YMCA Camp & Conference Center East Troy, Wisconsin

We hope you'll plan on joining members of the Great Lake Zen Center, Chicago's Ten Directions Zen Community, and Madison's Isthmus Zen Community as we come together to jointly sponsor a weekend Zen meditation retreat. The retreat will be held at the beautiful Edwards YMCA Camp & Conference Center on the shore of Lake Beulah, midway between Milwaukee and Beloit. Readily accessible from Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago, the Edwards conference center offers a beautiful setting for Zen practice amid pine woods, lake shoreline, marshland, and wooded dells.

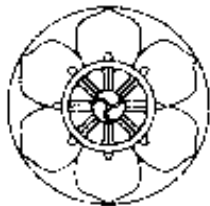
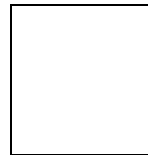
Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Korean means "to leap like a tiger while sitting," and refers to a silent meditation retreat involving many forms of meditation practice, including sitting, walking, bowing, and chanting. It has been said that these weekend events are not so much "retreats" from our lives, but opportunities to enter more fully into our lives by meticulously investigating who we are and using the fruits of that investigation to help this world.

For more information or to register, please call Peter at 414-771-2490. You may also sign up at GLZC or e-mail us at info@glzc.org. Space is limited, and advance registration is required.

T-shirt Orders

Anyone who would like to order either a long or short sleeve GLZC T-shirt should let Susi know by January 15, 2003. You may either sign up at the Zen center or e-mail her at susichldr@aol.com. The cost of the shirts is \$15. Be sure to specify the size and whether or not you want short or long sleeves. Shirts are gray.

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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.

