

MOON ON THE WATER

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Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

December, 2005

Unfolding Seasons

Zen Master Soeng Hyang

Each of the seasons of nature come forth on their own whether we ask them to or not. They are beautiful teachers that are around us all the time. Each season, each situation, each moment generously offers us an opportunity to see the mind that sometimes has trouble trusting how things are unfolding.

A famous Zen saying is, "Spring comes and the grass grows by itself." The grass just does it. Whether it's a late spring or an early spring, the grass has no opinion. You can sit on the lawn in complete stillness, and you will not hear a complaint from one blade of grass about spring being late or early.

One spring morning I was sitting in the orchard at Providence Zen Center. There were two cardinals; one was over the beehives, and the other was near the pine tree about fifty yards away. They were speaking to each other. Their calls kept changing, and it seemed so beautiful. Then the cardinal by the beehives swept down into the brush and disappeared. The other bird kept calling out for a little while; then it stopped.

The practice of Zen is to just perceive and to see. But as humans we sometimes apply our ideas to animals. I had decided that the cardinal that had disappeared was a male, and the one left behind was a female. So I was thinking, "That's too bad. The male left her; she's still calling, and he disappeared and stopped answering her.

But did some sad thing happen? I don't know. The cardinal stopped calling for a cardinal reason, not a human reason.

The seasons can show us not only our projections, but also our expectations. As summer approaches, my aversion to heat makes me distrust that season. I start wondering if it's hot and muggy in June, what will it be like in August? I start worrying that it's hot because pollution has ruined the ecological balance, and that my daughter won't be able to grow up in a "normal" world because of our myopia and greed.

But if I sit with my questions, I can feel very grateful. Grateful for the beautiful spring that has passed, grateful for the summer heat, grateful for my happy, healthy daughter. I can also feel grateful for all my worries. Worries wake me up. I can look at the content of my worries and learn what it

is I still don't quite trust, and ask what it is that has aversions and attractions.

In the fall I've often taken my daughter to Temenos, a retreat center in northwestern Massachusetts. There's a beautiful, tall white pine that I've climbed many times. When my daughter was eight, I let her climb it with me for the first time.

Three quarters of the way up, I looked down and asked myself, "What have I done?" Instead of feeling grounded and balanced in what I was doing, suddenly my center went up to my head. That's not a good place for your center to be. I gulped and took a deep breath, and reminded myself of why I had wanted to climb this tree with her.

My daughter was really enjoying it, and she wasn't feeling frightened. So I just kept going, and the branches started to get thicker; there were more needles, and you couldn't see down as easily. There's a spectacular view from the top, and my daughter got to see it.

But going down a tree is even harder than going up. When we finally got to the bottom, we both laid on our backs on the ground, and looked up at the tree and admired it. I asked myself, "What is this?" Just to experience how we felt at that moment. We were both really glad we had climbed that beautiful tree; that was all.

On a warm morning during a Winter Kyol Che retreat, I was sitting quietly in the interview room, waiting to give interviews. The window was open, and I was listening to the melting snow on the monastery roof coming down, landing on the ground. It was really nice to simplify, to just listen to that dripping, that melting.

Then a student came in for an interview; she was upset to the point where she couldn't even sit down. Just listening to that snow had made my mind so clear and simple that I could say to her, "Now the situation is to sit down." Finally, enough trust formed that the student was able to sit.

I asked, "Do you have any questions?" There were lots of questions ... complicated questions, painful questions, lost questions. I didn't answer any of them directly. I just said, "Stop. What is this retreat? Let's try to practice what this retreat is."

I said, "Be quiet, then listen." The student heard the melting snow. "Let's just sit and listen to that for five minutes." So we sat and listened to it ... just the trickling water.

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Then I said, "You know, that's choicelessness." It was warm enough that the snow became liquid, with no idea or discrimination about it. The snow was just following the situation. Not wanting to hold onto the white crispness, not wishing to stay that way, and not wanting to become water, either. Just melting and then falling onto the mud next to the monastery ... slap, slap, slap.

The ground knew the ground's job. Sometimes it thaws a little bit and takes in the water; sometimes it stays hard and the water runs down into the pond. It's all just following the situation.

The student finally began to relax, following that natural process going on outside the window. I had a lot of faith in the sound of that melting snow dropping off the roof. I was

really in tune with just that morning, just that melting, just that January thaw. Through that came teaching, came support for the student's practice.

If the snow was thinking, it might be very frightening to melt, drop off the roof, and slap onto the ground. If we're thinking, if we're holding onto our own identity, what could be more scary than to lose it? "I'm crisp white snow. Oh no, I'm water!" Zap, like that.

With people, it's more subtle and slower than snow melting. But if we're holding onto what we think we are, the transformation becomes very frightening. If we're able to let go and just be with the change, we will be able to recognize it as grace, as universal compassion. Rather than feeling fear, we will be able to feel grateful ... grateful for the unfolding of this moment, grateful for the unfolding of the seasons.

Go Ask a Child

by Susi Childress, DT

"Go ask a child when you don't know the answer." I remember reading these words in Zen Master Seung Sahn's books many times over the years. Since I am a teacher, I am fascinated with the concept of asking children for the answers when I don't know. So much for the traditional teacher/student relationship! While I must admit that I have learned a lot from my students when I have cared to pay attention, I think it is my daughter who has brought the meaning of these words home to me.

First let me say that my daughter had a particularly rough time handling her teenage years, and I struggled with how to parent her during this time. Just when I felt like giving up on her, she would hit my mind with extremely clear teachings that I carry with me even today, many years later. She taught me about "Just do it" and "Don't be attached to outcomes." She also taught me about practicing compassion for all beings regardless of how it might inconvenience us. I offer you her teachings in the hope that they may help you, too.

Just do it~ When my daughter was a senior in high school, she was enrolled in a current events class in which she was required to read, summarize, and report on a current event from the newspaper each day in class. One day she selected an article that told the story of a nine year old girl from the inner city in Milwaukee who had been shot in a drive by shooting. The little girl had been sitting on the front porch of her house on a Sunday morning with her one-year-old cousin, waiting for their parents to come out of the house and take them to church. When the car drove up, slowed down, and shots were fired, the little girl pushed her cousin into the house out of harm's way and took the bullet herself. She was then paralyzed from the neck down and was recovering in Children's Hospital. When my daughter read this article, she was so moved by the story that she felt she

must do something. After school that day, Jenni asked me if she could have some money to buy a stuffed animal for someone in the hospital. I asked her who she knew in the hospital, and she told me the story about the little girl. Jenni wanted to take a toy to the hospital and give it to the girl from the story. I felt sorry for the little girl, too, but I figured that Jenni wouldn't be able to connect with this girl... after all, the hospital staff would be concerned with confidentiality and wouldn't release information to her about their patient. And she was a crime victim... wouldn't that make it even more difficult for a stranger to meet her? Besides, this family didn't know Jenni, so why would they want a stranger visiting their daughter? Did I mention that Jenni didn't even know the girl's name? I had quite a few reasons why Jenni shouldn't pursue her admittedly admirable intentions, but my daughter seldom listened to me, and she proceeded to prove me wrong. She just looked at me with a challenging twinkle in her eye, and with a sense of determination, pulled the phone book out of the cabinet and looked up the number for Children's Hospital. She repeated her story several times over as she was transferred from one nurse's station to another, but she finally spoke with the nurse who was handling this girl's case. The nurse told Jenni that she would ask the girl's mother if she could visit and give a present to her daughter. Jenni called back the next day to get her answer, and the answer was yes, she could visit during visiting hours on Sunday. We went out and bought a big stuffed dog, and Jenni made a card on the computer that said, "You are my hero." When it came time for Jenni to go to the hospital, she went in all by herself, found the correct floor and nurse's station, and presented her present and card to the little girl. The girl's mother was surprised that Jenni had followed through with her plan. She said, "I can't believe a teenager gave up time on her

weekend to visit a sick child in the hospital, especially a child she doesn't even know!" The mother burst into tears and gave Jenni a big hug. I often wonder if that mother thought at the time that Jenni would want something in return, or at least to maintain some kind of friendship with the girl. Or maybe she thought that Jenni was doing this to feel good about herself. But the truth was, Jenni just wanted to let this little girl know that someone read her story, was touched by her heroism, and wanted to recognize that. Jenni's direction was very clear that day, and she taught me not to let my thinking mind get in the way of helping others. My daughter became my hero. And today I recognize my same checking mind whenever I see victims of natural disasters, terrorism, poverty, etc. on TV. I feel compassion for the people, but then I start checking and create all kinds of obstacles to keep me from acting. I try to remember the lesson my daughter taught me and just find some way to help.

Practicing compassion for all beings regardless of how it might inconvenience us~ When Jenni was 15 she decided to volunteer at the Wildlife in Need Center as a baby bird feeder. She would go to the center one day a week and feed the orphaned baby birds with an eye dropper. One day a neighbor came running over to tell Jenni that they had found a baby bird in their yard. The bird had fallen out of a nest which was very high in a tree, and no one was able to return the baby to its nest. So we took the bird out to the WIN center. When we got there, we were informed that since the baby bird was a house sparrow, they would not be able to help it. Apparently it is against the DNR policies to help non-native species since they are considered a nuisance and a threat to other native species. Jenni was very upset about this. How could we just let this innocent baby bird die? The caretaker at the WIN center told Jenni that she could try feeding the baby at home herself, but that would take a lot of effort! They need to be fed every half-hour from 9:00 AM until dark everyday until they are able to feed themselves and be released. But in Jenni's mind, there was nothing else we could do. We brought the bird home, and she began the routine of being this bird's foster mother. To make a long story short, she ended up with three baby house sparrows within a week (courtesy of the WIN center), and she fed those babies, cleaned their cage, and eventually helped them learn everything they needed to know in order to be released. Whenever she went out with friends, she had to find a bird sitter. If we went out to dinner, the birds came along and stayed in the car. Jenni would have to run out to the car to feed them every half-hour. I was sure that when the time came to release the birds, Jenni would be way too attached to handle it. But I was wrong. One day, it was obviously the right time. Jenni did it while I was at work. I just came home and found the cage empty. When I asked her what happened, she said, "I released them, and they flew away." And that was that. No attachment. Jenni never worried about not taking care of the birds because it would be too much trouble. She cared for those birds for 3 ½

weeks. It meant getting up early (for her!), and it meant spending her entire day caring for the birds. But that was no problem because she had compassion for those birds. She just did it.

Don't be attached to outcomes~ One evening, when my daughter was 16 years old, she went with me to a class at the Original Root Zen Center. The teacher was talking about having a clear direction, and only doing it, not worrying about what will happen if you don't get the results you hope for. He said that if you worry about the outcome, you may never do anything. In the course of the conversation that followed, I told the story of Jenni feeding the baby birds and used it as an example of her just doing it, not worrying about whether or not the birds would live or not. But then I made the comment that I didn't really know where she learned that lesson, and Jenni immediately said, "I got it from you." I was shocked. Our relationship was rocky at best during that time, and I didn't remember directly teaching her this lesson. So I said, "Really? How?" She told the following story: "I remember when I was about four years old, and there was a really big fire in our neighborhood one night. You and I were worried as we came home that maybe it was our house on fire. We were relieved that it wasn't our house, but then we were concerned about which one of our neighbors had lost their house, and we wondered if anyone was injured in the fire. We drove back to where the fire was and realized that we didn't know who lived in the house. The house was burnt to the ground. The next day, as we came home in the afternoon, I wanted you to drive by the house so we could see it in the daytime. When we drove past, the lady who had lived there was out in the yard sorting through what was left of their possessions. It wasn't much... a few toys and some clothes were strewn on the yard. The lady was crying, and we felt very badly about it. You said, 'I think that lady is about my size. I probably have some clothes that would fit her.' I added that I had some toys that I had outgrown that looked to be about the right age for her child. We went home and packed up some bags of clothes and toys and brought them back to the lady. She gratefully accepted our donations, and we wished her well and left. This is how you taught me to just do it and don't worry about outcomes. Maybe the clothes didn't fit her, maybe the toys weren't the right kind, maybe she didn't need our stuff. We didn't know, but we just did it, and that was that. I still remember this. It had quite an impact on me." I sat there, amazed that Jenni remembered all of this. She was only four years old at the time. I hadn't really thought about this event in years. But then I understood what she was saying. When I was clear and only doing it, not worrying about the outcome, I also taught that to my daughter. I didn't know what effect this action would have on my daughter. In fact we don't often get to know how our actions affect others. But that's why it's so important to try to be clear. My daughter learned about compassion and helping others without attaching to outcomes because I acted clearly. What if I had not acted? What would she have learned then?

My daughter got her degree in social work this past summer, and she is now away at law school. I am very

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proud of her, but she continues to face challenges on a daily basis that require her to be clear. Sometimes she is, and sometimes she isn't, just like me, and you, and all of us. So what can we do to try to increase our moments of clarity and help us to see the path in front of us? Practice, practice, practice. Calming down our thinking minds through

meditation, chanting, or mantra practice helps us to cut through the checking and holding that interferes with clear action. With steady practice we develop a strong center that is there for us when we need it. But sometimes when an answer is not appearing, perhaps we should remember to ask our children what they would do. Many times their minds are not so cluttered with the stuff that keeps us from acting correctly. Try it... their answers might surprise you!

No Practice Monday, December 26, 2005

Due to the Christmas holiday; there will be no practice on Monday, December 26. Enjoy the holidays and join us on Wednesday night December 28th for a dharma talk given by one of GLZC's teachers.

Heart Kyol Che 2006

The start of Heart Kyol Che at GLZC will be held on January 9, 2006. Kyol Che is a traditional Korean Zen retreat. The name means "tight dharma" or "coming together". In Korea, it is the three-month winter and summer periods when monks and nuns do intensive sitting practice in the mountain temples. Providence Zen Center holds two Kyol Che retreats annually, with students sitting up to three months in the winter and four weeks in the summer.

The Heart Kyol Che is an opportunity for students who cannot sit the traditional Kyol Che, or who can sit only part of it, to participate by doing extra practice at home and participating in together practice as they are able. This will run concurrently with the traditional Kyol Che. By doing this Heart Kyol Che together, we strengthen our own practice, and provide support to our fellow students who are able to sit the traditional Kyol Che. We in turn can draw inspiration and energy from their commitment.

You can participate in the Heart Kyol Che through your commitment to practice at home and by attending talks, sittings, and retreats at the Zen Center. During the Heart Kyol Che period the Great Lake Zen Center will offer extended sitting hours and an intensive practice week. During the Heart Kyol Che period you can participate by committing to extra practice to show your support in a variety of ways. Some ideas are as follows:

- 1 . A n effort to do daily practice (suggested minimum is recitation of the Four Great Vows; bowing; chanting of the Heart Sutra; and sitting - fifteen minutes)
- 2 . Doing daily mantra practice (suggested minimum is one thousand Kwan Seum Bosals)
- 3 . A personal day of silence and mindfulness (optional)
- 4 . Long sittings (suggested minimum is one)
- 5 . Dharma talk s (suggested minimum is one)
- 6 . Yong Maeng Jong Jins and one day retreats (suggested minimum is one day)
- 7 . One or more weeks of Winter Kyol Che at Providence (optional)
- 8 . Winter Kyol Che ceremonies at Providence (optional)
- 9 . Work practice at GLZC

Extended Sittings

In addition to the extended practice week prior to the YMJJ, Michael Zinke will be offering 3 two hour sittings during the Heart Kyol Che period. The first sitting will be on Saturday morning following regular practice, January 21 from 8:30am to 10:30am. The second sitting will be held on Sunday, February 12 from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. The third sitting will be on Friday, March 24 from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. The sittings are totally optional for everyone but if you have time and wish to sit, please join him during one or all of the sittings. There is no charge for the sitting and no need to sign up, just show up at the Zen Center at the specified times.

Upcoming YMJJ

As the newsletter goes to press, final decision on the dates for the February/March YMJJ are still to be determined. Exact details will be available in the February Newsletter. Zen Master Dae Kwang will be leading the Kyol Che at the Providence Zen Center and we are contacting other teachers to lead the retreat. The dates will either be February 24 – 26, 2006 or March 3 -5, 2006. When finalized the dates will be available on the website (www.glzc.org) and in the February newsletter.

Heart Sutra Class

We regularly chant the Heart Sutra in Korean and in English, but, do you really know what is all being said within the sutra? On February, 12, 2006 from 3:00pm to 5:00pm Michael Zinke, BT, will be presenting an in depth look at the Heart Sutra. There will be a two hour class offered for anyone interested in learning a little more about the Heart Sutra. There will be a sign-up sheet at the Zen Center for all interested. The class will be offered at no charge but, of course, donations to the Zen Center are always welcome.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

December, 2005

Monday, December 26: No Practice.

January, 2006

Monday, January 9: Heart Kyol Che Opening Ceremony. GLZC, 7:30. Join us as we open the 90 day period of intense practice corresponding to the 90 day Kyol Che retreat.

Friday, January 20: Extended Practice. Join us for an extended practice period from 7:00pm to 10:00pm. Come and practice for the entire period or join us for as long as you can.

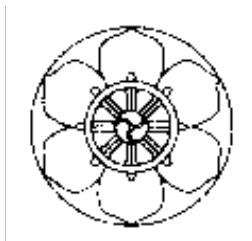
February, 2006

Monday thru Thursday, February 20 -23: Intensive Week. Intensive week during the Heart Kyol Che period. Practice will be held each evening from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. This week is prior to the YMJJ and may be changed due to the availability of the Zen Master leading the YMJJ. The February newsletter will contain finalized dates.

Friday, February 24 – Sunday, February 26: Tentative dates for the YMJJ, May change due to Zen Master availability.

The 2006 GLZC Event calendar will be posted on the website soon.

Great Lake Zen Center
828 E. Locust St.
Milwaukee, WI 53212



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Great Lake Zen Center
828 East Locust Street
Milwaukee, WI 53212
414-771-2490 (Peter) or
414-380-9215 (Laura)

e-mail: info@glzc.org

Web-Site: www.glzc.org

Kwan Um Web-Site: www.kwanumzen.org

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

Founder: Zen Master Seung Sahn
Guiding Teacher: Zen Master Dae Kwang
Co-Director: Laura Otto-Salaj, SDT
Co-Director: Peter Neuwald, SDT
Treasurer: Dee Schwaiger, DTT
Secretary/Publicity: Andy Yench, DT
Editor: Michael Zinke, BT

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.

