

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 8, Issue 6

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

December, 2006

'Tis the Season

Michael Zinke, BT

*And so this is Christmas/ for weak and for strong/For rich and the poor ones/The road is so long/And so happy Christmas/For black and for white/for yellow and red ones/Let's stop all the fight.**

I doubt that any other time of the year displays more blatant desire than what we see during the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas. People put their shyness aside and tell other people their deepest desires without hesitation. And others listen to those desires, accept the challenge and set out on a quest to satisfy those desires for their loved ones. And, there is absolutely nothing wrong with doing that, unless (ah, there's always that pesky little unless) the desires take over your life or you let the challenge of the quest take over your life.

In Zen we teach non-attachment to material things. Why? Because all things are impermanent and because we know that suffering is caused by desire, anger, and ignorance. Knowing that, we still fall into attachment hell and allow our desires to control our actions and our thoughts. Before long we find that the material item at the source of the desire is actually controlling us and everything we do. We usually keep those desires in check for a bit but during the Christmas season, people seem to stop the checking part and put all those pent up desires on little lists to, all too willingly, hand out to anyone asking the familiar question – “What do you want for Christmas?”.

This season of desire is inserted into our brains very early in life as parents drag their screaming children to the local mall and set the hysterical child onto the lap of some weird looking guy dressed in really funny clothes. The kids are coached to tell Santa everything they want for Christmas and then are bribed for the following 5 or 6 weeks to be good or there won't be any presents.

So how did all of this start? The history of Christmas is quite interesting but I won't bore you with all the details. And I guess I'm starting to sound like a real Scrooge here, hey? So, let me get back to the main subject. I just wanted to talk a bit about attachment during this holiday season. All of us see attachment in our lives. It is difficult to control and extremely difficult to give up. When we start the Zen practice we even attach to Zen things. We get a mala, then we get a fancier mala, then we get a stretchy mala, then we get a Buddha necklace or bracelet, we buy Buddha statues for the home and the garden and the car and every other place we can think of, we buy all kinds of T-shirts with clever Zen sayings, some people even get Zen tattoos. There's no problem with having any of these items but (ah, another one of those pesky little words) sometimes we get a little carried away with the material things. If we look at the founders of our practice we see that Zen monks had no possessions. Zen monks have only the robes on their backs and a set of bowls. Maybe we should all look to our roots for inspiration on non-attachment. We should practice what we teach and be examples for others to follow; not by preaching non-attachment directly to them but by demonstrating non-attachment in our everyday lives.

So, let's look at this holiday season as an opportunity to help others and that help can come in the form of a present or a special teaching. Let's not get so caught up in our own desires that we forget the many people in the world that need our help. Let's remember Iraq, Afghanistan, Darfur, Iran, the impoverished right here in the USA and see if there isn't somehow we can help these people as well.

I think John said it best:

*A very Merry Christmas/and a Happy New Year/Let's hope it's a good one/Without any fear.**

** Taken from Happy Christmas (War is Over) by John Lennon.*

Heart Kyol Che 2007

The start of Heart Kyol Che at GLZC will be held on January 3, 2007. 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 . An 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

Study Class on the Diamond Sutra

Peter Neuwald, Sr. DT, is putting together a study class on the Diamond Sutra. The class will be held following the regular Saturday morning practice on March 17. The official time, if you can't make it for practice is 9:00am to 11:00am. If you interested in attending please let Peter know. There will be a sign-up sheet posted soon.

New Format for Introduction to Zen Classes

Starting in February we will be trying out a new format for the monthly Introduction to Zen nights. We will start the talk at the regular 7:30pm starting time but will add a sitting period from 8:30pm to 9:00pm following the Intro. This will allow new students to experience an actual sitting period. If you attend and cannot stay for the extra half hour sitting, no problem.

YMJJ Retreat

February 10 - 11

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Bon Haeng (Mark Houghton from the Cambridge Zen Center) for February 10-11, 2007. The retreat will be held at GLZC. Zen Master Bon Haeng will be leading this retreat and conducting interviews. The price of the retreat is \$80 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 and should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng at 7:30 PM on Friday, February 9. The Retreat will conclude with a precepts ceremony on Sunday, February 11. 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.

No Practice Monday, December 25, 2006

Due to the Christmas holiday; there will be no practice on Monday, December 25. Enjoy the holidays and join us on Wednesday night December 27th for a dharma talk given by one of GLZC's teachers.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

January, 2007

Monday, January 3. Heart Kyol Che Opening Ceremony. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Friday, February 19. Extended Evening Practice. GLZC 7:00 – 10:00.

February, 2007

Monday, February 5. Start of Heart Kyol Che Intensive Week.

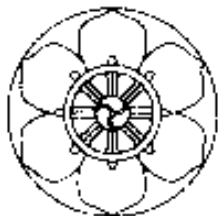
Tuesday, February 6 thru Thursday, February 8. Extended Sitting Periods. GLZC 7:00 – 9:00.

Friday, February 9. Public Talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng. GLZC. 7:30

Saturday, February 10 thru Sunday, February 11. Winter YMJJ with Zen Master Bon Haeng, GLZC.

Sunday, February 11. Precepts Ceremony. GLZC. Check website for exact time.

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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.

