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# MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 6, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February, 2004

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## Word Medicine

*Mike Yonkers, DTT*

Despite the fact that Zen has been part of the Western spiritual scene for quite a few years, it is still retains the quality of the exotic. My guess is that this is one of the reasons that so many of us first come to Zen practice by way of the bookstore or the library. As Westerners, our first approach to Zen (while no doubt impelled by the sting of the first noble truth) is almost always through the medium of the written word. Consequently, this means that this initial approach is almost always via our discriminating intellect. When, and if, we arrive at the door of a Zen practice center, we're usually pretty book-laden. I know I was -- and still am to some extent.

Ironically, this reading that brings us through the door presents the initial -- and perhaps one of the thorniest -- challenges to Zen practice. It is precisely our attachment to the outlook of the discriminating intellect that we must get through in order to attain the mind that is "clear like space" or what one Zen Master has called the "crystal clarity of the uninterpreted moment". But this attachment, as well as the suffering, confusion and struggle that it causes, is also the basic fuel for our practice.

So, is there a place for reading and the discriminating intellect it demands in Zen practice? Insofar as it leads us into the door of practice - or helps us lead others there - it would seem that there is. In an article entitled, "The Zen in Thomas Merton", John Wu, Jr. (the son of the celebrated author of The Golden Age of Zen) makes this point rather well using the language of the Christian tradition,

"From the perspective of enlightenment, human knowledge, when assisted by grace, becomes an indispensable tool in the gradual journey that takes us to the core on the inmost self where we come face to face with the source of existence and literally become lost in God. Or, as we allow ourselves to be immersed in God - to be God-drunk, as it were - self-nature emerges. Human knowledge, then, once it has faithfully executed its work, must finally teach us to help it get out of the way of the Light so that divine love and compassion may begin freely to operate in us along paths which, given the profound level at which it usually works, is often more dark than light."

In Zen practice, methods to "finally teach us to help it (human knowledge) get out of the way of the Light" are the principal focus of our efforts. One could say that these methods that accelerate this process (e.g., chanting, meditation, kong-an

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## Dependent Origination

*Zen Master Seung Sahn*

*While visiting the Sambosa Temple in Carmel Volleys California, Seung Sahn Soen Sa gave a Dharma talk to a large gathering of visitors on a Sunday evening.*

Buddha said, 'Existence or non-existence depends on a series of causes and effects.' In Buddhism the process of conditioned life is viewed as one of continual phenomenal change. Aging and dying depend on birth, which in turn depends on becoming. Becoming depends on attachment, attachment depends on thinking, thinking depends on consciousness. This series of conditions perpetuates itself, causing suffering, the degree of which is measured by karma. The concept of karma can be defined as volition, or the act of making a choice.

You were not born into this world because you planned or wanted to. You were born because your karma and your parents' karma caused you to be here. According to Buddhism, nothing occurs by accident; it does so by necessity through the functioning of karma. Our gathering here at Sambosa is not an accident.

Some are born with silver spoons in their mouths; some in famous families, some in poor status: some as whites, some as blacks, some as yellows. All people have different physical characteristics, personalities, intelligences, attitudes, etc.

Who or what creates this kind of universe where so many varieties of things are happening constantly? God? Buddha? Neither of them! The answer lies in the strict rule of cause and effect. Buddhism explains cause and effect with regard to the life continuum through the doctrine of dependent origination. It clearly shows how the cause becomes the effect and the effect becomes the cause. By the same token, the continuous recurrence of birth and death has been aptly compared to a circle. Death is not a release, but merely the prelude to rebirth. As long as this process keeps on recurring, suffering is inevitable.

Craving, or attachment, initiates thinking, which in turn causes human suffering. Your thinking influences not only yourself but also everyone else, which causes you to accumulate karma in your storehouse consciousness. This keeps you in a state of constant suffering.

Thus, in order to stop suffering, you must first stop thinking. If you raise a thought or craving, that will differentiate you from everybody else. When you are not thinking, you and all people are one, and there is no suffering.

The no-thinking, no-craving state of mind is the state of emptiness, The conception of emptiness in Buddhism,

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## Heart Kyol Che Intensive Week of Practice

Monday through Friday, February 23-29, 2004  
7:00-9:00 PM

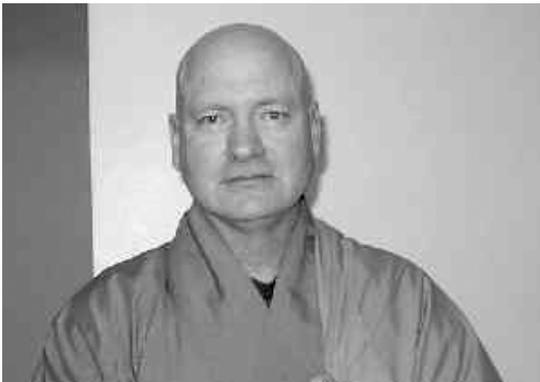
On Jan. 5, we held a small celebration at GLZC marking the beginning of Heart Kyol Che. Kyol Che, literally translated, means "tight dharma", and it is an extended period of intense practice. Participants in Heart Kyol Che have made commitments to increase their practice during this period. Midway through the Heart Kyol Che period, during the week of Feb. 23, we will extend practice times by one hour and practice each night of the week. Practice will be held from 7:00 p.m. until 9:00 p.m. Please join us on any or all of these nights, and stay as long as you able.

## YMJJ Retreat Scheduled

February 27-29 with Zen Master Dae Kwang  
6:00 AM-9:30 PM

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with GLZC Guiding Teacher Zen Master Dae Kwang for February 27-29, 2004. 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 \$70 for both days, or \$40 for one day. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space is available at no extra charge at GLZC. Those planning on staying at GLZC should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday. 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 or Laura.**



Zen Master Dae Kwang

## YMJJ Retreat Scheduled

Two YMJJ retreats have been scheduled with GLZC guiding teacher, Zen Master Dae Kwang. They will be held July 24 - 25, 2003 and October 9 - 10, 2003. Mark your calendars and watch for upcoming details.

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## Annual Rummage Sale Scheduled

GLZC's annual rummage sale has been scheduled for May 15, 2004. More information will follow but start saving your treasures to bring to the sale. This is GLZC's major fundraiser for the year. What a great way to practice non-attachment! Items donated for sale may be brought to GLZC at any time for storing until the sale.

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## Extended Practice Scheduled:

An extended night of practice has been scheduled for Friday, April 23, 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!

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

**Monday, Feb. 23-Friday, Feb. 27:** Intensive week of practice, daily at GLZC, 7:00-9:00 PM.

**Friday, Feb. 27:** Public talk by Zen Master Dae Kwang, 7:30 PM, GLZC

**Saturday, Feb. 28-Sunday, Feb. 29 :** YMJJ retreat at GLZC, 6:00 AM-9:00 PM. Fee \$70 both days, \$40 one day.

**Monday, Mar. 1:** Introduction to Zen, 7:30pm, GLZC

**Saturday, Mar. 20:** "Beginner's Mind" Retreat, 9:00am-4:00pm, GLZC

**Wednesday, Mar. 24:** Dharma Talk, 7:30 PM, GLZC

**Monday, Apr. 5:** Introduction to Zen, 7:30pm, GLZC

**Wednesday, Apr. 7:** Buddha's Birthday Celebration, 7:30 PM, GLZC Midwest Sangha

***"Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of  
Men of old; seek what they sought."***

Basho

## Word Medicine ... (continued from page 1)

practice) are our specialty. And the great irony that reveals itself in the context of such practice is that the source from which all this reading discriminating thought flows is no different from the source of the enlightenment we think it obscures. How could it be anything else? Universal substance is universal, after all. The mischief lies in our attachment to a way of seeing and interpreting that springs from the perspective of "I, my, me". In this context, we say something like, "Here is the universe and over there is something apart and separate that I call "I". That belief in separateness is the hell that is shattered by the Buddha Dharma.

The great 11th century Chinese Zen Master, Ta Hui is a great resource to turn to for inspiration and direction on getting through the sticking point of discriminating intellect. At Zen Master Dae Kwang's suggestion I have been studying the insights of this teacher as they have been translated in a little book called Swampland Flowers (Grove Press, 1977).

Here's a sample:

"Where do we come from at birth? Where do we go at death? If you know where we come from and where we go, then you can be called a student of the Buddha. Who is it who knows of birth and death? And who is it who experiences birth and death? Again: who is it who doesn't know where we come from and where we go? Who is it who suddenly realizes where he comes from and where he goes to? And who is it who, contemplating these words, blinks his eyes unable to understand, his belly churning up and down as if a mass of fire were placed in his heart? If you want to know, just apprehend him at the point where he can't understand. If you can recognize him then, you'll know that birth and death have nothing to do with him."

It all comes back to the basic teaching of keeping a "big question" so familiar to the students of Zen Master Seung Sahn.

"At this point, don't have any thoughts of affliction, and don't have any thoughts of the Buddha Dharma either: both the Buddha Dharma and affliction are extraneous matters. Yet don't think of them as extraneous matters either. Just turn your light around and reflect back: where does the one who entertains such thoughts come from? . . . Meditate like this over the long days and months, it will be like a man learning archery: naturally he comes to hit the target."

So, all of the reading and discriminating intellect with which most of us enter the doors of a Zen center are no

problem. None of the baggage we carry into practice is a permanent obstacle. In the context of hard practice they are grist for the mill, fuel for the fire. As Ta Hui points out,

"After all, gentleman of affairs who study this Path must depend on their dimness and dullness to enter."

Lucky for us.

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## Dependent Origination ... (con't from page 1)

however, is not the total rejection of the common sense reality we experience through our senses, but rather it is the brushing off of our false views so as to see the world and things as they really are.

The Buddha said, 'Men come and go with empty hands. Then where do they come from and where are they going? Life is like a cloud floating across the sky and death is like its disappearance over the mountain. As the cloud is without substance, so is man's life and death. It is all empty.'

The categories of existence and non-existence are applicable only in the realm of the conditioned and phenomenal world. Nevertheless, there is a seed innate in every man that never dies, that is crystal-clear and intrinsically pure.

Then what is it that stops craving and thinking, through which you transcend yourself to reach the state of nirvana? It is the very Suchness. In this realm you are identical with everything and everybody.

Realize that the myriad of things, alive or dead, organic or inorganic are all identical with Suchness. This is the Buddha state, the absolute and completely-independent unconditioned world where you can be with and of the whole universe.

At the beginning of my talk I held up my stick and drew a circle in the air. If you were thinking for an answer to what it was, your answer would be no good. Only when you are able to cut your thinking will you understand. When I hit the stick on the table all our minds became one for that instant.

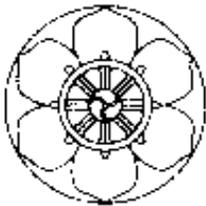
I hope you understand this truth. When you do understand, I hope you will teach others so they too can stop their thinking, craving, and suffering.

Thank you.

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***When an ordinary man attains  
knowledge, he is a sage; when a sage  
attains understanding, he is an ordinary  
man.***  
**Zen saying**

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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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.

