



MOON ON THE WATER

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Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February, 2005

Let Your Universe Become Large

Zen Master Bon Haeng

Excerpts from a dharma speech in April 2002 at Cambridge Zen Center

It is amazing there is anything left to say. Fortunately, we can hear the same things over and over again, because we all forget. So the dharma is hearing the teaching, waking up to what we already know, and renewing our effort.

Tonight's kong-an is: how do you clean dust?

Once a famous sutra master from Hong Kong gave a dharma talk at Zen Master Seung Sahn's New York Zen Center. The sutra master's name was Sae Jin and, like many sutra masters, had thoroughly studied and analyzed Buddhist teachings. However, he had never experienced the true meaning of Buddha's teachings. This experience of Buddha's teachings is the entire focus of Zen practice. We focus, not on understanding anything, but on experiencing the same insight the Buddha experienced.

After Sae Jin's talk, he requested questions. Many were asked, to which he gave insightful answers. Then one student asked: "Your name is Sae Jin, which means 'to clean dust.' But the Sixth Patriarch said, 'Originally, everything is empty.' So where is the dust? And how can you clean it?"

Sae Jin was stuck. With all his great understanding, he only understood the sutras. Because he did not understand Zen, he was unable to respond.

Question Number One: The Sixth Patriarch said, "Originally nothing" What does this mean?

Question Number Two: The student asked, "Your name is Sae Jin, which means to clean dust. How can you clean dust?" If you were Sae Jin, what could you do?

Commentary: The Sixth Patriarch wrote a poem, "Bodhi has no tree. Clear mirror has no stand. Originally, there is nothing. Where is the dust?" But if you attain the Sixth Patriarch's mistake, then you attain the true meaning and these questions are no hindrance. But you must hit the Sixth Patriarch's mistake. This is very important.

Zen Master Seung Sahn was so happy with this question; it appeared in his dharma talks for the next two years. And out of this question grew the kong-an: if everything is empty, if there is nothing, how can you clean dust? This is an attack-style koan. Just cleaning dust or saying something about dust can't help you.

Koan practice means pulling the rug out from under your thinking. When you do this, it becomes starkly clear that thinking has nothing to do with your true nature. Your true nature is before thinking. Kong-ans can't be approached with your thinking, they must be approached with your confidence. This means asking, "Do I believe in myself? Can I trust life's experience this very moment?" We may think that confidence is an encyclopedia salesperson ringing a doorbell, confident in what she's selling. This isn't confidence, this is selling yourself something, selling yourself an idea and making it so strong, you can't be open to the universe. True confidence is completely accepting your not-knowing. It's accepting that no one knows and understanding that this is okay. When you do this, your universe becomes bigger. But when you take one idea, formulate something, and become attached to it, your universe shrinks. So let your universe become large. Let your sitting be without boundaries, and a good answer will appear all by itself.

Zen Master Bon Haeng (Mark Houghton) received Transmission in April 2000. He is one of the two guiding teachers of Cambridge Zen Center, where he was abbot for twelve years and lived for fourteen years. A student of Zen Master Seung Sahn since 1976, he holds a BA in Religion and Philosophy from Antioch College

Pizza Karma

Michael Zinke, SDT

For some odd reason I have interesting karma with pizza. I always seem to crave it whenever I can't have it. When I was in the military I was stationed with the 3rd Marines in Okinawa for awhile. At that time there wasn't anyplace anywhere near the military base I was at that served pizza and because I couldn't get any pizza; I absolutely craved it. I managed to live through the 'no pizza' experience and eventually returned to the States and ate so much pizza I thought I had satisfied my pizza karma, but, I was wrong. I was born and raised in a small Iowa farming community of about 2,000 people. Main Street was 2 blocks long and actually one block didn't really have any stores on it. There were two restaurants and two drive-ins. None of them served pizza. Whenever I made the trip from Milwaukee back to Iowa to visit my parents I always encountered the same craving for pizza as I had in Okinawa. Again, it had to be the thought that I knew it was impossible to get a pizza that made me crave it so much. This theory was proven on one trip back to Iowa when I mentioned to my mother that I would really love a piece of pizza and to my shock she replied 'well we have a new Pizza Hut on the edge of town, we can go there'. Well, guess what happened to that craving for pizza - it disappeared as rapidly as it appeared and never returned in subsequent trips back to Iowa.

So the power of thought can cause desire mind when it knows the desire can't be satisfied. Isn't that wonderful? Your mind knows when you can't possibly satisfy a desire and so it generates that desire and causes suffering in our lives. Quite a dilemma.

We have similar situations when our necessities are denied. I'm sure everyone has experienced a power blackout. Sitting in the dark, wondering when the power will come back on. We depend on electric power so much our lives are crippled when it isn't available. The same thing happens when we lose our water supply. It's at these times we realize how much we take these items for granted and how much we just expect them to always be available. But occasionally they aren't available and the realization of our dependency becomes apparent when we try to do little things like eat or read or a host of other things. Without these basic items we begin to appreciate them more when they are not available. At least for awhile, then we start taking them for granted again until we lose them once more.

Right now I'm sitting in Minneapolis, away from Great Lake Zen Center and away from my dharma brothers and sisters. Practicing alone is hard work; it's much easier to sit when others are around you providing energy to help each other through. The chanting is much more energetic when many people chant than when you chant quietly in your hotel room without a moktak because you're afraid other guests will wonder what kind of pagan ritual is going on in your room. So, in short, I really miss going to the Zen center and practicing with others. I've been traveling for many years now, and I've missed a lot of sangha practice. I've practiced alone so much that I long to be home and be able to come to practice with a group of people. I know I will not become complacent about this feeling and will come to the Zen center whenever possible, but perhaps other people do become complacent about practice when it is so easy to attend.

I guess it's just a variation of the pizza karma, when it is available it's not in our minds a lot. When it's not available, we think of it constantly. So if you are in Milwaukee, do you think about going to practice? Do you have a desire to go to practice? Have you ever thought 'gee, I can't wait to go to practice tomorrow'? Or, do you not think of it at all because it is available and your mind knows if you want to go, you can just get in the car and go?

Not being able to come to practice has been a big teaching in my life. Whenever I'm home during the week, I try very hard to make it to practice. What we should all do is really try to make it to practice on a regular basis. Excuses are so easy to find when you don't want to do something but please remember, no one ever said Zen was easy. You have to work at Zen, you have to try, you have to practice, in some way, every day. Your work is never complete. You don't finish practice when you take the 5 precepts, you don't finish practice when you become a Dharma Teacher in Training, you don't finish when you become a Dharma Teacher or a Senior Dharma Teacher. You don't finish. In fact, I think each of those steps is just the beginning. When we take the precepts or when we become a Dharma Teacher, we should consider it an obligation to be at practice, we should look at Dharma Teacher in Training, Dharma Teacher and Senior Dharma Teacher as role models just as much as teachers. And teaching is done by example just as much as talking. Remember, Zen is about demonstration.

So, from personal experience I can tell you that when it isn't possible to practice with the sangha, it becomes very important to attend practice whenever it is possible. And when it is possible to practice with the sangha, it is just as important to attend practice when possible. I envy those of you that live and work in Milwaukee and can go to practice anytime you want. I know sometimes there are obligations that make it impossible to attend, but with three practice times a week, we should all be able to make it to one of the practices. We come to practice to support each other, to energize each other, and to draw from that support and energy for our own practice. Right now we are in the midst of the Heart Kyol Che and we need to show our support for all of those sitting the Kyol Che because they also draw on our energy. Not long ago we made pledges to ourselves about strengthening our practice during the Kyol Che period. Now it is time to ensure we honor those pledges.

So I would suggest that we all examine our practice routines. Let's take a long look at why we didn't come to practice last time. Look closely at the excuse we had for not going and try to justify it. Was it really an obligation that had to be done or was there a way we could have met the obligation as well as made it to practice? Or, could we have just made it to a different practice time that week? Let's strengthen the sangha and provide support and energy for each other. Then, and only then, will we be able to grow our sangha and our faith in the teachings of Zen.

Election Dharma

Mike Yonkers, DT

Well, here we are a little over two weeks since the presidential election of 2004. This was a rough one for me. I am (unabashedly) a liberal democrat and I was a strong supporter of John Kerry. Now you know why this election was a rough one for me.

I experienced the emotional fallout from this election in a surprisingly strong way. What I went through was more genuine grief than disappointment. And, like all grief, there was a very strong element of anger involved as well. And then came depression. I was genuinely surprised at the force of the emotions that I felt.

I don't think that I'm alone in this, but I find that it's very difficult to go gladly to the meditation cushion when I'm in the midst of anger or in a blue funk, or in some combination of the two. But, of course, that's when we most need to spend some time in practice.

Of course, I eventually got back to the cushion. But in the process of getting there I asked myself just what it was that Zen practice offered to someone experiencing a bitter disappointment as the 800 pound gorilla in his or her emotional living room.

I was drawn to consideration of the teaching with which the Buddha chose to begin sharing his dharma – the four noble truths. The lingering thunderstorm of emotions that I had experienced after the election carried great resonance with the teaching of the first noble truth – that human existence is marked by a fundamental dis-ease and unsatisfactoriness. I was sure unsatisfied. We usually need very little convincing about the truth of the first noble truth.

But there's a leitmotiv (one of many) in Buddhist thought that needs attention here. Specifically, that of cause and effect. What's the cause of his profound sense and experience of dis-ease and unsatisfactoriness in our life?

The second noble truth tags that cause as desire, craving or thirst. For what? Fundamentally, for life to be different than it is. More specifically, for life to be what my ego, my "little I" would like it to be. It's our investment in seeing things through the lens of the ego that causes much of our sense of dis-ease and disenchantment with life. In my case, I was enormously emotionally invested in my version of the future of our country for the next four years. As a life-long Democrat, there was not a little ego involved in that investment.

In the 3rd noble truth, the Buddha told us that there's a way out of this sense of dis-ease and unsatisfactoriness in life. Simply put, it's to learn to relax our death grip on the version of life that our ego constantly serves up. The Buddha's prescription for the way out of this condition is usually put in terms of the teaching on the Noble Eightfold Path. The particular aspect of this teaching that stood out for me in all of this was that dealing with "Right View".

What does "Right View" have to tell a depressed liberal Democrat after the 2004 election? It says that relating to reality through the cramped vehicle of the ego, as though that were the correct thing to do, is the wrong view. In The Compass of Zen, Zen Master Seung Sahn says,

Right View actually means hold no view. It means having no idea.
Put down all thinking and opinions and see this world exactly as it is. . .
understand that actions based on desire, anger or ignorance will always
lead to suffering, both for us and others.

"Actions based on desire, anger or ignorance" is another way of saying "actions based on our limited ego's eye-view of how things are".

Buddhist teaching on “Right View” flows directly out of the teaching on emptiness. We operate from the standpoint of “Right View” when we operate out of the perception of emptiness.

What does that mean? It means letting go of the desire and craving of the ego, the “little I”, for life to be something other than it is – something constantly changing and without subsistent self-nature. It means letting go of attachment to the demands of a self-centered and self-oriented frame of reference for living life. Perceiving and acting out of emptiness means approaching the world from the broadest possible perspective, with that “mind clear like space” spoke of so often by Zen Master Seung Sahn.

Operating out of “Right View”, perceiving life from the perspective of emptiness, means operating from a perspective that see all phenomena – even bitterly fought elections and their aftermath – as contingent, incomplete phenomena the depths and ramifications of which we do not really know. In his book, The Diamond Cutter, Geshe Michael Roche talks about the emptiness of phenomena as their “hidden potential”. I like that. Nothing in this phenomenal world is complete and self-subsistent. Everything is in motion, bursting with emptiness, “hidden potential”.

Sure, the emptiness of things can be a soothing perspective when you’ve lost something big. It’s not so easy to see how this emptiness can be seen as just a positive thing in reference to what we love and cherish.

That’s why we practice. We practice, we train, to see the goodness of emptiness and the utter preciousness of all phenomena – and hitch a ride on the “hidden potential of things”, including ourselves. We practice to experience more and more the softening of the hard edges of our attachment to our self-centered way of seeing and interacting with the universe. Gradually, our desire for life to live up to our own ego-driven expectations gives way to a grateful willingness to be part of the process of life just as it is – even when we lose. In the end, practice doesn’t alter the truth of suffering, it alters the one who experiences the suffering.

But the discipline of Zen won’t let us lollygag in emptiness. That’s the “dark cave of Zen” we’re cautioned to avoid. Living out of “Right View”, living out of the perception of emptiness, doesn’t mean we drop out of life. It means, rather, that we examine the opinions and agenda of our “little I” and why we hold on to them from the perspective of emptiness. It means that we let them go when, in that perspective, they’re proven to be small and unworthy of our true nature. That’s what it means to “put down all thinking and opinions and see this world exactly as it is.”

So, am I still angry and disappointed about the way the election turned out? Sure, but I am no longer as attached to that anger and disappointment as I once was. Practice has shown me (again) that they are real but they are not me and not me I really am. They are empty, full of “hidden potential” to motivate me to find ways to better serve our community and the world over the next four years.

YMJJ Retreat

February 18 - 19

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Bon Haeng for February 18-19, 2004. 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 \$70 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 or Laura 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. 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.** The YMJJ will be followed on Sunday by a 100 day Baby Naming Ceremony at 2:00pm.

Buddhist Conversation Series

Saturday, April 30

The next in a series of discussions organized by the Buddhist Peace Fellowship will have Faith as its subject. The talk will be held at the Great Lake Zen Center and is planned for April 30, 2005 from 4pm to 6pm. The discussion includes panel members from GLZC, The Milwaukee Mindfulness Center, The Milwaukee Zen Center, the Shambhala Center, and the Tender Shoot of Joy Zen Center. This is a great chance to learn about other practice centers and to meet and talk with fellow Buddhists. Plan on attending for a stimulating discussion on faith. More information will be posted as details become finalized. Special thanks to all who attended the last talk on January 29th. I believe I counted 8 people from GLZC attending the talk. What a wonderful showing!

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February, 2005

February 14 – February 17: Intensive Practice Week. Extended practice each night for Heart Kyol Che, GLZC, 7pm – 9pm.

Friday, February 18: Public Talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng. GLZC 8:00pm

Saturday, February 19 and Sunday February 20: YMJJ. With Zen Master Bon Haeng, GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 1:30pm Sunday.

Sunday, February 20: 100 Day Baby Naming Ceremony. GLZC, 2:00pm

March, 2005

Saturday, March 5: Moktak Workshop. GLZC, 10am – Noon

Saturday, March 19: Beginner’s Mind Retreat. GLZC, 9am – 4pm.

April, 2005

Friday, April 22: Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC 7:30

Saturday, April 23 and Sunday April 24: YMJJ. With Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 2:30pm on Sunday.

Saturday, April 30: Buddhist Peace Fellowship Conversation Series. GLZC, 4pm - 6pm.

The Great GLZC Rummage Sale

The great, world famous GLZC annual rummage is sale is planned for May 14, 2005. Start saving things for donation to the sale. We accept almost everything (except clothes). The annual rummage sale is the only planned event we currently have that provides extra money for our wish list and extra necessities. We can help with transporting large items to the Zen center and will be providing storage space for some items, if necessary. Watch for further announcements for details but start scrounging for things now.

Beginner’s Mind Retreat

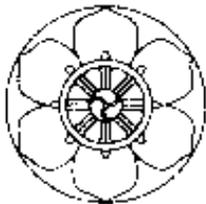
Saturday, March 19, 2005

Our next beginner’s mind retreat will occur on March 19, 2005 from 9:00am to 4:00 pm. If you have ever hesitated to do a retreat, join us for this introductory “Beginner’s Mind” one-day retreat. Newcomers are especially welcome. We will walk you through our retreat forms step-by-step. The retreat will include a formal meal, chanting, and sitting and walking meditation. You may register by signing up at GLZC or contacting Peter or Laura.

There are four kinds of Bodhisattva action. The first is generosity – just giving people what they need or want. The next is good speech – giving encouragement, confidence, and a persevering mind. Next is telling them about the Dharma and the way out of suffering. Finally, if they don’t listen, you must act with them – together action. Whether it is bad or good action doesn’t matter; your not-moving center shines to their minds. Then someday they will ask for help and listen.

Taken from “Only Don’t Know, The Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn”

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 Yencha, DT
Editor: Michael Zinke, SDT

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.

