

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 8, Issue 1

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February, 2006

What is a Zen Retreat?

Zen Master Dae Kwang

At the end of his life Buddha said, "Life is very short; please investigate it closely." This is the first meaning of a meditation retreat: Investigation. Everyone knows that life is short; soon the show is over. Behind that realization is always the question, What am I, really? This question and the profound doubt that it entails is what the Buddha faced. That is the question of our life too -- what are you?

In China, a cut of meat is called "pure meat," meaning that it is not mixed with anything else, like in a sausage. People always want the butcher to give them "pure meat." There once was a Zen practitioner who was investigating the question, "Who has Buddha Nature?" -- i.e., what am I? All day long, as much as he could, he would look into this question. Every day on his way to work he would pass a butcher shop. He would always hear people clamoring for pure meat, but he never paid it much mind. One day as he passed by, a woman was vehemently insisting that the butcher give her only "pure meat." Her insistence rankled the butcher, who shouted back, "Madam, which piece is not pure?" When the man heard this angry shout, he suddenly realized that everything is "pure meat." Everything has Buddha Nature. What *doesn't* have Buddha Nature? He was enlightened. This is true investigation. If it is constant and sincere, then it will have a result, guaranteed.

Our retreats are governed by the temple rules. Originally these rules came from the monastic code for Zen temples set up by Pai Chang Zen Master, one of Ma Tzu's top students. Much like the Rule of Saint Benedict, it sets forth rules for how to live together harmoniously. Our temple rules also tell us how to practice correctly. But more than that, they contain a prescription for relating to everything in this world in a compassionate manner. Central to this and to the correct practicing of Zen is what we call "putting it all down." The temple rules say, "Do not cling to your opinions. To cling to and defend your opinions is to destroy your practice. Put away all of your opinions. This is true Buddhism." This tells

how to practice correctly. Just let go of -- i.e., let rest -- your every opinion. As the temple rules say, "The great round mirror has no likes or dislikes." This is our original nature. The second meaning of any meditation retreat is to put down your opinion, your condition and your situation, and return to your original nature.

In the Majjhima-nikaya, a collection of sutras in the Pali Canon, a monk asks the Buddha to summarize all of his teaching in one sentence. In the course of forty-some years of teaching the Buddha taught many, many things. However, his simple reply was, "Don't attach to anything." Wow, there it is in a nutshell -- very simple! The Fifth Patriarch got his big enlightenment when he heard this line from the Diamond Sutra: "When thinking arises in your mind don't attach to it." These ancient worthies were always teaching the same simple thing. Our only job is to do it. So the third meaning of a retreat is "just do it." After all, retreats are very simple. Everything is decided for you: when to get up; what to eat when to meditate -- everything. Your job is to do it.

Most of our retreats are relatively short -- one, two or three days, or perhaps three months. But Buddha practiced very hard for six years and Bodhidharma sat for nine years in a cave above Shao Lin Temple. How can we possibly attain what they got? Actually, it's very simple: At this moment, just apply yourself with sincere effort in asking this question: What am I? That means investigate closely. That means cut off all thinking -- wake up from your like and dislike dream. At that point, you and Buddha and Bodhidharma become one. This is the last meaning of a retreat -- wake up and help our world. That is already the Buddha's mind. But that's just dead words so, I have a question for you: How is it possible for you and Buddha and Bodhidharma to become one? Quick! Answer! Thinking won't help you.

1. Out of clutter, find Simplicity
2. From discord, find harmony
3. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity

Albert Einstein, three rules of work

Coming and Going (Sort Of...)

Laura Otto-Salaj, SDT

While writing this, snow is swirling outside and my daughter plays with her friend.

I've decided to resign as Co-Director of the Great Lake Zen Center. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that I've recently taken a tenure-track faculty position at the local university, and intend to go up for tenure within two years as this will help my family – this will require a lot of work on my part, work which has already started. Another reason is that it is important to do everything with 100% effort - between all the things that are going on right now (teaching, research, family, GLZC...), I'm afraid something will take a back seat and not be done very well. I'm afraid that that was already happening with my practice and the Zen Center, and it's so tremendously important for many reasons (teaching, research, family, GLZC... ☺) that this not happen.

This practice group started out in an apartment on Marshall Street in 1993 – we were small but enthusiastic, an offshoot of the Original Root Zen Center in Racine. Later we moved to an apartment on Weil Street, literally a couple of blocks from where we are now. Next there was the basement of the local Unitarian church and transition of leadership to Peter Neuwald and me in 1997. After awhile, we finally decided that the sangha needed their own devoted space to practice. After a short time in Wauwatosa, we moved to our present unit on Locust Street, where we've been for 6+ years. During this time, we've seen comings and goings, changes and growth, and the establishment of a small but thriving Zen center community. We've seen new preceptors and Dharma Teachers appear. The most important reason for my resignation is this one: together with Peter, we've held our positions for the past 8+ years. Things have changed, and the needs of the Zen Center have changed. Our structure was established when times were different, and organizations need to be able to morph to meet their needs. Our Co-Director model worked for awhile, and now some changes are needed to make this Zen Center as terrific as it can be (not that it's not already a wonderful place). Over the years, there are others who have also appeared who wish to take on leadership roles. So, this is a great opportunity for some really terrific things to happen, to bring new energy to GLZC and the sangha. The time is right for change.

Not that I'm going anywhere – I will be at practice just as before, although travel may prevent me from being there as much as I'd like. You will see me hitting the moktak, leading practice, giving talks, answering questions, doing consulting interviews, attending retreats, or just sitting. My job has not changed.

I'd like to thank Peter Neuwald for his support these past years in what has been tremendously satisfying (and sometimes overwhelming, but it was always ok). His support as a Co-Director, friend and dharma brother was incredible and crucial, and I'll never forget it. I'm very proud of what we all have accomplished in the development of this Zen Center. The sangha of the Great Lake Zen Center have shown great love, compassion, and only help this world nature that sometimes, in those moments when I forget, I've always got such wonderful examples to come back to that it's no problem. That's really what practice with others is all about, and I'm grateful to have a place to come to.

Thank you all, and I look forward to seeing you at practice.

Laura Otto-Salaj

*Limitless undying love which shines around me like a million suns,
It calls me on and on across the universe.*

-John Lennon

Heart Sutra Class

Due to a number of events going on during February, the Heart Sutra class was moved to Sunday, March 19, 2006 from 3 – 5pm. Please sign up for the class using the sign-up sheets on the bulletin board at GLZC or email mzinke@us.ibm.com. Thank you.

Beginner's Mind Retreat – Saturday, April 1 9am – 2pm

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. Watch the website for further information.

YMJJ Retreat

February 25 - 26

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Bon Haeng for February 25-26, 2006. 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. 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.**

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. Prior to becoming a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1975, he taught yoga for four years, living in ashrams in Boston, Washington D.C., and Tucson, Arizona. He works as an executive in his family's chemical company.

Intensive Practice Week

Monday, February 20 – Thursday, February 23, 2006

Monday - Thursday Practice from 7 PM - 9 PM

Friday Public Talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng (Mark Houghton) at 7:30 PM

Saturday - Sunday YMJJ Retreat

During the week of February 20, we will hold nightly practices, Monday through Thursday, from 7:00 PM until 9:00 PM. A free public talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng (Mark Houghton) will be held on Friday, February 24th at 7:30 PM.

There is no need to sign up for practice on Monday through Thursday, nor is it necessary to sign up for the public talk. It is necessary to sign up for the YMJJ weekend retreat.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February, 2006

February 20 – February 23: Intensive Practice Week. Extended practice each night for Heart Kyol Che, GLZC, 7pm – 9pm.

Friday, February 24: Public Talk with Zen Master Bon Haeng. GLZC 7:30.

Saturday, February 25 and Sunday February 26: YMJJ. With Zen Master Bon Haeng, GLZC, 6:00am – 9:40pm on Saturday and 6:00am to 3:30pm Sunday.

March, 2006

Sunday, March 19: Heart Sutra Workshop. GLZC, 3pm – 5pm

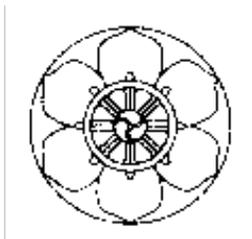
April, 2006

Saturday, April 1: Beginner's Mind Retreat. GLZC, 9am – 2pm.

Monday, April 10: End of Heart Kyol Che and Buddha's Birthday Celebration. GLZC 7:30pm.

Saturday, April 29 and Sunday, April 30 – Midwest KUSZ Sangha Week-end. Details to Follow.

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MOON ON THE WATER

is published by the

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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.

