

MOON ON THE WATER

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Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February, 2008

Mind Makes Wilderness

Andy Yencha, DT

Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh.
A young man skis
In deep snow
Through cold woods
That only exists
In his mind

I grew up in the Appalachian foothills of Northeastern Pennsylvania dreaming of wilderness adventures in the American west or Alaska. To prepare for these hoped journeys I would escape the cookie-cutter subdivision where my family lived to any of several nearby State Parks or State Game Lands. In these “wild” places I hiked, or cross-country skied, away the best days of my teenage years. Almost always alone on these training trips I realize now, looking back, each one was also a meditative practice to empty a mind brimming with adolescent chatter.

One adventure that sticks out was a ski trip to State Game Land #57, a large public hunting ground in south central Wyoming County. Single digit temperatures increased the sense of adventure I felt waking up early on a school in-service holiday to start an hour long drive to the trailhead. The plowed road ended next to a gated service road that stretched uphill into a frozen maple-beech forest. Donning a heavy daypack stuffed with extra clothes and food, I remember the morning woods were unusually quiet. Except for a light wind that gently swayed frozen branches 30-40 feet above my balaclava covered head the world was still. There were no other visitors I could see or hear. The bitter cold, and the fact it was a work day for most folks, preserved the solitude all day. Despite the chill, the resistance of pushing my skis through six inches of unbroken snow warmed me up fast and the hours started slipping away.

In this part of the Appalachian Mountains the hills rise abruptly, 300-500 feet, before topping out as broad plateaus that remain relatively flat for miles. Huffing and puffing my way along a portion of the trail that bisected one of the numerous beaver swamps that pockmark these highlands, I began to wonder if I had enough energy to finish the long loop I planned. A short while later, with my food eaten and canteen empty, I decided the answer was no. I needed to either trace my parallel tracks backwards or bushwhack south across and down the plateau to another service road that led more directly to where my truck was parked and was, I knew, packed down by snowmobiles the prior weekend. With daylight fading I decided to risk the quicker route and glided into the forest.

I don't remember many details about the shortcut except I was relieved when the flatlands abruptly gave way and I could hear the expected gurgle of a small stream, about the size of the Menomonee River near Miller Park, in the narrow valley below. With little technique and no grace I angled my way down the steep tree covered incline, intentionally grabbing onto saplings to stop my forward progress and set my next direction. My spirits got a lift when I reached the bottom in one piece and discovered the snow on the service road was packed hard enough to walk on, which I did since I was entirely sick of skiing.

Like a laborer toting a shovel after a hard days work, I tossed my skis and poles over my shoulder and started the long trudge back to the truck. The setting sun silhouetted the trees on the ridge tops 400 feet above. All day I had been exerting myself but now my breath was relaxed and quiet. In the frosty air the steady gurgle of the creek and the squeaky crunch of my boots on the hard snow punctured the silence. Walking alone in the early darkness I was as physically isolated as I had ever been, but I was also as close to 100 percent in the moment as I had ever been—a lone warm sentient being in a cold, dark, stunning universe filled with sound.

Wilderness, both the idea and the reality, has touched many people like it did me 25 years ago on this trip. The power wilderness has to transform lives is a good thing I think, but I used to believe Wilderness was the *only* thing that could connect humans with nature. I had what we might call in Zen jargon, “wilderness-mind” or “wilderness-attachment”? The danger with wilderness-mind is where do you find peace when you are in the city? The vast majority of the world's 6.6 billion people live in urban areas. If wilderness is the only place where we can “wake-up” we're in trouble. There are not enough wild places to go around. Lucky for us, I don't think we need wilderness to clear our minds. Much to my surprise I've found that sitting meditation at the Great Lake

Zen Center—where the conversations from people passing on the sidewalk filters into the Dharma Room and where the energy created by the rumble of traffic on Locust Street vibrates up through the floor—also brings me a powerful sense of clarity and connection. What can you say about these two experiences, wilderness-mind and city-noise-mind? Are they the same or different? Is one better than the other? Try them both yourself with 100% effort, and then let's talk.

Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat

February 22 - 24

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for February 23 and 24, 2008. 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 being reviewed currently but will not exceed \$100 for both days, or \$55 for Saturday only and \$45 for Sunday only. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleep space should notify Peter (telephone number on last page) and should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, washcloth, and towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday, February 22nd. Please plan on joining us for some very strong practice. **You may register for this YMJJ by signing up at GLZC or by email at info@glzc.org.**

We are grateful to Zen Master Dae Kwang for taking time out of his busy schedule to visit us and lead the YMJJ's. We are only provided the opportunity to sit with and interview with a Zen Master three or four times a year. Please plan on attending and taking advantage of this opportunity.

Intensive Practice Week

February 18 - 21

During the week of February 18, we will hold nightly practices. Monday through Thursday we will practice from 7:00pm until 9:00pm. Intensive week is followed by a free public talk with our Guiding Teacher, Zen Master Dae Kwang on Friday, February 22nd at 7:30pm and the YMJJ on Saturday and Sunday.

There is no need to sign up for practice on Monday through Thursday, nor is it necessary to sign up for the public talk. You are not required to sit the entire two hours on the Monday through Thursday practices if you can't stay that long. Come when you can and leave when necessary.

Extended Practice Night

March 14

An extended practice evening has been set for Friday March 14, 2008 from 7:00pm to 10:00pm. Join us for an extended evening practice. You can come for all or part of the practice.

Extended One Day Practice **April 5**

An extended one day practice will be held on Saturday April 5th from 9am to 3pm. Senior Dharma Teacher Susi Childress will give a sutra talk from 9am – 11am, followed by an extended sitting from 11am – 3pm. Please bring a bag lunch. There will be no 8am practice due to the sutra talk and extended sitting.

Midwest Sangha Gathering **April 25 – April 27**

The Midwest Sangha Gathering is being planned for April 25th through April 27th, 2008. More information will follow as the agendas are finalized. Look for more information in the April newsletter.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February, 2008

Monday - Thursday, February 18 - 21. Intensive Practice Week. GLZC, Practice from 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

Friday, February 22. Public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Saturday – Sunday, February 23-24. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, Saturday 6:00am – 9:40pm, Sunday, 6:00am – 3:30pm

March, 2008

Friday, March 14. Extended Practice Evening. GLZC. Practice from 7:00pm – 10:00pm

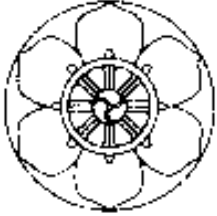
April, 2008

Saturday, April 5. Extended One Day Practice. GLZC, 9:00am to 3:00pm

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

Friday - Sunday, April 25 - 27. Midwest Sangha Gathering. More information to follow.

Great Lake Zen Center
828 East Locust Street
Milwaukee, WI 53212



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

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
Abbot: Peter Neuwald, SDT
DoGam: Susi Childress, SDT
Treasurer: Michael Zinke, BT & Dee Schwaiger
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.

