
MOON ON THE WATER

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Who Made You?

Zen Master Seung Sahn

A student in Moscow asked Zen master Seung Sahn, “What does Zen have to say about social and economic problems in society? I mean, these are real things that we must worry about.”

“Where does society come from? Where do economics come from? Do you understand that?”

The student was silent for a moment, and said, “Well, there can be many points of view on this –“

“Yah, that means everything comes from thinking. Human beings make economics and society. Out thinking makes economics, and our thinking makes society. And because people attach to their thinking, they also attach to their different ideas about economics and society, and cannot agree at all. Soon fighting appears, and suffering. That is the usual style for most people.

“But Zen is not concerned with this. Rather, who makes this thinking? Who is thinking about economics? Who is

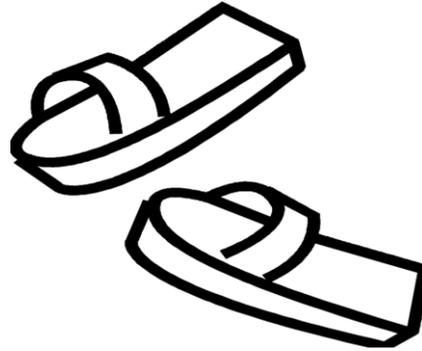
See *Who Made You*

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Abbot's Corner

Grass Shoes

Pete Neuwald, Abbot



From the day I started practicing Zen my mind was hit by the many Zen stories in our tradition, more so than by any explanations of Zen. I am continually amazed at how many words are written and spoken about something that can't be attained through understanding and thinking. That's why a clear story hits me – it is direct, based on experience and not dependent on understanding. Take for instance the story of Sok Du's grass shoes that Zen Master Seung Sahn told in *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*.

Sok Du, whose name literally means “Rock Head,” was a very stupid monk. (I seem to have a karmic affinity with stupid Zen students.) He tried studying sutras, but found that too difficult. Meditation also eluded him. He ended up working in the kitchen and on the temple grounds. He still went to dharma talks, although he didn't understand anything being said.

One day, Sok Du told the Zen master, “I'm tired of being so stupid. Isn't there some way that I can understand?” The Zen master said, “You must ask me a question.” After thinking a while, Sok Du said, “You are always talking about Buddha. What is Buddha?” The Zen master answered, “Mind is Buddha.” Now, the spoken Chinese words for “Mind is Buddha” (“*Juk shim shi bul*”) are very similar to “Buddha is grass shoes” (“*Jip shim shi bul*”). “What a difficult kong-an,” Sok Du thought. “How can Buddha be grass shoes? How will I ever understand ‘Buddha is grass shoes’? What does it mean?” Every day after that, whatever he was doing, he continuously kept this great question. He never went back to ask the Zen master for clarification; he just kept the question. This went on for three years.

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thinking about society? *Who* is thinking? What am I? *Don't know* That is *before* thinking. Society and economics are after thinking. But my true nature is *before* thinking arises. Attaining that is Zen. When you attain that, then your economic function can help other beings, and your social function can help other beings. But first you must attain your true self.

Excerpted from **Stepping Off a One-Hundred Foot Flagpole**

Zen Master Wu-Kwang, September 1, 1998

There is nothing wrong with naming things. The problem is that we take those names seriously and think that if we name something it exists in that way. There's a Buddhist saying that "all names are no names". What does this mean? That is a kong-an. Names are no names; no names are names. That doesn't mean that we have to get rid of all names and labels. It just means we should perceive that naming something isn't solid. It's translucent, transparent; don't hold it tightly. When you feel your arms, there's a feeling in your arms, there's just feeling your arms. That's the moment before you give rise to calling it "my body", as if it were something apart from you. That experience is just that. It is empty of self-nature, empty of some category. It just is what it is at that moment. It doesn't mean there is no body, like it dissolves or is insubstantial, although, from a scientific point of view, an atomic physicist would tell you the same thing as an ancient philosopher: Everything is in flux. Your body is ultimately just a mass of energy. You could say that means it is not a body, for it is not enduring, not permanent. There's no self-nature to it, and it depends for its existence on many things outside it.

If we were going to philosophize, we would say your body is dependent on the water, the air, the food you ate, the fact that a farmer in Nebraska grew the food you ate; the list could go on and on, until your body in this moment is only there because the whole universe is there around it. If you talked about the farmer who grew the wheat for the bread made this morning, then you would have to talk about all the things the farmer is dependent on as well; it goes on and on. Your body is not existing in and of itself. It's existing because of many other things. It's interdependent. And, if you recognize interdependence, then you recognize compassion, because you realize we're not in this alone. If someone is hurting that means I am hurting, and the sense of kinship and connection emerges.

In Zen training, we give rise to the question, "What am I?" Zen practice is essentially understanding my true nature, my true self. What am I? If you raise that question, immediately you are face to face with the state of mind that does not know. What is the essence of this "I"? All day long, I'm

using the word "I" this, "I" that, "I" the other thing, but what does the word "I" refer to? As soon as you try to look for it, you're left with a big question mark. Don't know. You have just that mind, that actual experience of that moment of not knowing. And that not knowing is your original self before thought, before words, before ideas. That not knowing is open. Why? "Clear like space" is clear like a mirror, so if red is coming at the moment, it totally just reflects red. If white is coming, it totally just reflects white. From that standpoint, the reflective mind is the mind that is responsive to the situation at hand, the mind that is involved in clear functioning. It is the mind that is capable of compassionate activity, because it is not holding anything in a limited way. It's like a mirror, reflecting and becoming one with the situation at hand. Morality, or right and wrong, or good and bad, are perceived in relationship to that moment. What is correct in the moment? If you're not holding a limited notion of anything, then you can perceive what is correct in this moment. What is my correct function right now? What is my correct situation right now? What is my correct condition right now? It doesn't come out of a preconception; it comes out of a responsiveness to the situation. But that can only occur if you let everything go and have that clear-like-space mind, mirror-like, just reflective.

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But this letting go of knowing can produce a lot of fear. One old Zen Master said, "It's like when standing on top of the flagpole, 100 feet in the air, how will you take one step forward?" Letting go of all this knowing feels like stepping off a flagpole 100 feet high in the air, and – pkshhh! – that's the imagined sense because the whole world as we know it is organized around our experience and how we've categorized it. This is this, that is that, or this in relationship to that, etc., etc., etc. The whole world comes into being for us in relationship to categories that we have developed over a lifetime, or if you believe in reincarnation, over many lifetimes. If you let go and enter the realm of unknowing, at that moment fear arises because knowing is security.

If you think you know something, then you feel secure at that moment. The world is as it should be, because you know what it is. But the minute you enter the realm of not knowing, you give up that security and enter into the borderline of going beyond knowing. At that point vitality can emerge, because it's not being limited by what's known. But vitality that's not supported from within turns to anxiety. The physical experience of anxiety is a kind of narrowing down of the chest and not getting enough air at the moment. But if, you can experience uncertainty without narrowing down, by getting enough support from your center of gravity and recognizing that you have eyes, you have ears, you have tongue, you have body, you have mind, you have orientation, you have all these things, then POW! – you can just perceive without having to know beforehand.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 2012

Introduction to Zen
Monday, February 6
7:30 - 9:00 PM

Intensive Practice Week
Tuesday - Friday, February 7 - 10
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

YMJJ Retreat
Saturday, February 11, 6:00 AM
thru Sunday, February 12, 3:00 PM

Extended Practice
Saturday, February 18
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Dharma Talk
Wednesday, February 22
7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

March 2012

Intro to Zen
Monday, March 5
7:30 - 9:00 PM

Sutra Talk and Dharma Play
Saturday, March 17
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM

Dharma Talk
Wednesday, March 28
7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Extended Practice
Friday, March 30
7:00 PM - 10:00 PM



Labels, Labels, Labels.....

Michael Zinke, BDT

I have to admit that I am totally confused as to exactly who or what I am these days. When I was younger there were only two political parties...you were either a Democrat or you were a Republican. As time went by a new party might be added for a while and then dropped like the Libertarian Party or the Green Party (maybe those are still around). We now have so many titles and groups I just don't know where I fit in anymore. There's the old traditional Democrat and Republican parties; the Independent party is growing but it seems that in between there are all these other labels: Progressives, Conservatives, NeoCons, Righties, Lefties, Liberals, Tea Partiers, TeaBaggers and probably more that I have left out.

Leaving the political labels behind, we also encounter other titles and more questions, like - Am I Pro-Life or Pro-Choice? Am I Catholic or Protestant? If I'm Protestant, am I Lutheran? Methodist? Presbyterian? Evangelical? Jehovah's Witness? Unitarian? If none of those, am I Buddhist? Islamic? Hindu? Taoist? Jewish?

Am I a Senior Citizen, or a Baby Boomer (depends on if there's a Senior Citizen discount!)? Am I a 99%'er, or a 1%'er (that one's easy)? So many titles and so little time to figure it all out.

I guess my point is that we have so many titles that we apply to people that divide everyone into separate little groups. Eventually this leads to segregation, disagreement, and feelings of inequality or feelings of being better than others. I don't know if it's just me or if others have noticed the country becoming more and more divided as we further classify each other into more and more detailed groupings. I often go to jsonline.com to see what's going on in the Milwaukee area and then browse the comments left by other readers. What I see is disheartening: no matter what the subject is, the commenters always turn every story into a political issue. I even read a story about the latest snowfall and, sure enough, there were comments blaming the snow on the liberals and some placing blame on conservatives. It is amazing to me how the anonymity of the web has emboldened people to freely criticize others' thoughts and ideas and allows people to freely display disdain for others by name-calling and humiliating them online. I also find it scary knowing that as time passes, things will only get worse and more divided.

In Zen we say "I am one with everything" and we try, or at least we should try, to eliminate the use of labels. We don't believe in duality, no positives and no negatives - everything is just as it is. We allow others to have their opinions and beliefs without criticism. We don't preach to people and tell them if they aren't practicing Zen, they are on the wrong path. Ikkyu Sojun (Japanese Zen Poet and Buddhist Monk) said it perfectly "Many paths lead to the top of the mountain, but at

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the peak, we all gaze at the same bright moon.” The Lotus Sutra tells us of Buddha’s teaching: “I look upon all living beings everywhere with equal eyes, without distinction of persons, or mind of love or hate. I preach the Law equally; as I preach to one person, so I preach to all.”

Thus, following Buddha’s teaching, our way is clear. We should listen to everyone and allow their comments without attaching to opinions. While we all still have opinions, we strive to not attach to them, so we can act clearly in every moment. Our suffering, our worry, our discomfort is eliminated when we realize that we can listen to the views of others without attaching to whether those views are right or wrong.

So maybe I don’t know all my different titles or labels in life but I know that when I remove them from my mind and don’t apply them to other people – my life becomes easier and I can read comments on news websites without aggravating my ulcer.

Snowflakes

Gretchen Neuwald, DT

There’s a stark beauty to winter. Winter landscapes are stripped down, reduced to bare essentials. Picture dark silhouettes of trees and telephone poles against winter’s lavender skies. Is there anything more beautiful than delicate branches encapsulated in ice? Snow embodies beauty of a most pristine and magical kind. Sometimes it falls as little white “pings” that sting your face and you think it can’t possibly amount to much, but it keeps falling and falling and before you know it, the roads and sidewalks disappear. Other times, great fat flakes float down and quickly blanket everything. Snow is a great equalizer, falling equally on fine buildings and dilapidated houses, on new cars and old beaters, on porches and dumpsters. Everything gets a new coat. Ever notice how disorienting snow can be? When the wind gets blowing, the snow flies every which way. Suddenly there is no up or down, right or left—just white. Then, right after a snowfall, everything is completely transformed. The sun is shining; the sky is a brilliant blue and the world looks brand new. And, if enough snow has fallen, it becomes a soft blanket that muffles sound. Such quietude and stillness--- until you hear the rev of snow blowers starting up. Oh well, that, too, is just this moment....just “VROOMM,” complete and perfect.

Here is a Zen story about snowflakes:

When Layman P’ang took leave of Yakusan [a famous Chinese Zen master], the latter asked ten students to escort him to the temple gate to bid him farewell. The Layman, pointing to the falling snowflakes, said,

“Beautiful snowflakes – they fall nowhere.”

“Where do they fall, then?” asked one of the Zenkaku [a practitioner of Zen]. The layman slapped him.

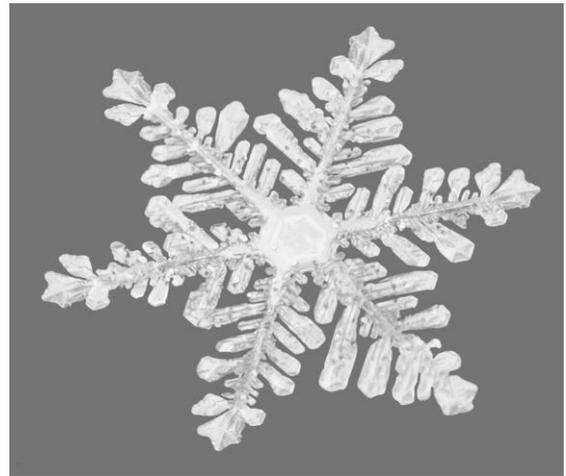
“Even a layman should not be so crude,” said the monk.

“How can you call yourself a Zen monk?” cried the layman. “Old Yama [lord of the underworld] won’t let go of you.”

“How about yourself?” said the monk.

Whereupon the Layman gave him another slap and said, “You look but you are blind; you speak but you are mute.”

Blue Cliff Record, Case 42



Grass Shoes

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Then one day, as he was walking down the hill to the temple carrying a large bundle of firewood he had gathered, his foot hit a rock. As he tripped and tumbled, the firewood fell to the ground, and his straw sandals flew up in the air. When they hit the ground, the grass shoes completely broke apart. And at that, Sok Du had an awakening. He went running to the Zen master and said, “Master! Master, now I understand what Buddha is!” The Zen master looked at him and said, “Oh? Then what is Buddha?” Sok Du took one of the broken grass shoes and hit the master on the head. The Zen master said, “Is this the truth?” Sok Du said, “My shoes are all broken.” The master burst out laughing, and Sok Du flushed with joy.

No thinking; no cleverness; no understanding. Sok Du believed one hundred percent in the kong-an his teacher gave him, even though he heard it incorrectly. He just kept this incorrect kong-an every day. Try, try, try, with no idea about how it will turn out.

The mid-Heart Kyol Che intensive week is coming up. Let’s enter it with Sok Du’s try-mind.



Good and evil have no self
nature;

Holy and unholy are empty
names;

In front of the door is the land
of stillness and quiet;

Spring comes, grass grows by
itself.

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Intensive Practice Week

February 6 – 10, 2012

Intensive practice week at GLCZ is Tuesday, February 6 – Friday, February 10. **It begins with the regularly scheduled *Introduction to Zen* on Monday, February 6 at 7:30pm.** Intensive practice week marks the half-way point of Winter Kyol Che. In Korea, Kyol Che is the time of intensive sitting practice. Providence Zen Center, the head temple of our school, holds two Kyol Che retreats annually, with students sitting up to three months in the winter and four months in the summer. In support of this, we are hosting an extended practice every night from 7pm-9pm from February 7 – 10. Everyone is welcome. No need to register. Come as many nights as you can.

Friday's extended session will involve some light prep work for the weekend YMJJ Retreat (see below) and close with a reading of the temple rules for everyone who is also sitting the YMJJ. If you plan to sit the YMJJ, please attend Friday's practice if you can.

Winter Yong Maeng Jong Jin Retreat

February 11 - 12, 2012

Feeling the winter blahs? Ready to re-focus and re-energize your practice? Come and sit with us on our Winter Yong Maeng Jong Jin Retreat. Enjoy this opportunity for sustained periods of mindfulness and together-action practice. The retreat will include sitting, walking, chanting, bowing meditation, consulting interviews with GLZC's Senior Dharma Teachers, formal meals and short work periods.

Our winter **YMJJ Retreat** will be held at GLZC, 828 Locust St., and will run from **6:00 am Saturday, February 11 through 3:00 pm Sunday, February 12.** The price of the retreat cost varies for DT/DTT, members of Kwan Um School, and non-members. See the registration form on our website for complete details. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleeping space should notify us by email and bring a sleeping bag, pillow, washcloth, and towel. For more information, email us at info@glzc.org

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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.



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