
MOON ON THE WATER

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Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

February/March 2015

Great Question of Life and Death

Zen Master Dae Kwang, February 16, 2011

At the heart of Buddhism and Zen lies the great question of life and death: What am I? What is a human being? Why do we suffer so much? Why are we here on the planet earth? Are we here to make money? Are we here for sex, food, or fame? These are the questions which became the focus of the Buddha's practice and the reason why he left home. He left home to find the answer to the great question for all beings. He didn't leave home to find a better palace to live in or kingdom to rule; he didn't leave home to find a better job or a better wife. His intent was clear: why do we suffer so much and how can we get out of suffering? He faced this question not just for himself, but to help all beings get out of suffering.

Buddhist tradition teaches that suffering is the mother of Buddha. Without suffering there would be no Buddha. Suffering is the source of the Buddha's search. It's the same for us – we suffer. Now the H1N1 flu virus is with us; there's famine and war everywhere. We experience old age, sickness and death just like the Buddha. We experience pain when we have to be with people we dislike and we feel sorrow when we

See *Great Question of Life and Death* continued page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1** Great Question of Life and Death
- 1** Abbot's Corner
- 3** Calendar of Upcoming Events
- 4** Original Face
- 5** Tangled Up
- 5** Old Age Zazen

Abbot's Corner

Dump It in the Lake?

Pete Neuwald, Abbot



Gretchen and I recently moved from our home of seventeen years into a condo. Our old home was not a McMansion by any means; it was the lower floor of a two story duplex. We did have three bedrooms, half a basement, and half an attic, whereas now we have two bedrooms and a storage unit. There was way too much room in our old home to store lots of stuff accumulated over the years. So, our choice when moving was to either eliminate most of that stuff or store it somewhere.

When Layman Pang decided to concentrate on his and his family's practice, he took all of his possessions and dumped them into a river. That was interesting. Why wouldn't he give it all away to others who perhaps could have used it? It is said that he did not want to risk burdening others with all of that stuff. We probably would have gotten in trouble with the Department of Natural Resources if we dumped our stuff into Lake Michigan, so we decided to sell or give away what we couldn't take with us.

When we started looking at what we would need to get rid of, it was a little difficult at first. Pretty much all of our books went. That wasn't too hard; we'd been clearing those out over the past few years mostly selling them at the Zen Center's rummage sales. I'm going mostly electronic with books now anyway, so that wasn't too tough. I was still surprised at how many we had left though. Some were still in the boxes from the last time we moved almost two decades ago. Why were we keeping all of that?

We also got rid of all of our CDs and, ultimately, our music

See *Dump It in the Lake?*

continued page 2

Great Question of Life and Death continued from page 1

are separated from those we love. Everyone wants to escape these things, but few can find the way out. Fortunately, we have encountered the Buddha's teaching.

All of the Buddha's teaching is concerned with suffering and how to relieve suffering. In Zen we say that every human being's job is the same – find your true self and help the world. When the Buddha left home he didn't go to a library to try and find the answer to his great question. Instead, he started looking inside himself to find the answer. We are the same. Just like the Buddha, no outside source, even Zen teaching, can give us the answer. We must look inside – that's the meaning of practice and meditation – looking inside to find the answer to the great question of life and death by returning to our original substance, your true self.

One time, the famous monk Xuan Jue visited the Sixth Patriarch of Chinese Buddhism, Hui Neng. After entering the great hall at Nan Hwa Ssu, he circled the Patriarch three times, hit the floor with his staff, and just stood there without bowing. The Patriarch admonished him for violating the rules of etiquette and asked him why he was so arrogant. Xuan Jue replied, "The great question of life and death is a momentous one. Death may come at any moment; I have no time to waste on ceremony." As Zen Master Seung Sahn says in the temple rules, in the great work of life and death, time will not wait for you.

The Patriarch said, "Why don't you attain the substance of 'no birth', then the problem of death and its coming will not concern you anymore."

Xuan Jue replied, "Since substance has no birth, the basic problem of death and when it comes is solved."

From a Zen point of view, it's the illusions of mind that keep us from realizing our true nature. These illusions are based on our likes and dislikes and we tend to be very attached to them. Desire, anger and ignorance are continually at work, through attachment, to cloud our minds. The great hope of Buddhism is that we can cut through these clouds and let the sunlight of our original nature shine through. How do we do that? How do we practice correctly to attain our substance, so we don't waste our time?

The Buddha always taught us not to attach to anything. Letting go of our attachments is the way out and the goal of all practice. The Sixth Patriarch got enlightenment when he heard one line from the Diamond Sutra, "When thinking arises in your mind, do not attach to it." This is the basic technique. In Zen, we call this style "I don't want anything" practicing. After all, if you want anything, even from meditation, you only create more suffering.

All the meditation techniques common to Buddhism have this as their basic ingredient. So, whether you are using a mantra, a hwa t'ou, or just following your breath, it's all the

same. They are just techniques to allow you to let go of your thinking and return to your true self, your substance. This is why we look inside, because this is where the answer is. This is also why the great question and its answer lie before thinking, before attachment to like and dislike. OK, but why didn't I "get" something?

Interestingly, the only thing that separates those who get something from practice from those who don't is: who does it? The "doing" of meditation is based on a clear intention to help our world and a "just do it" mind. It doesn't require any special ability or special technique, just do it! All the different techniques point to your true self, you just have to look and have a clear intention. As the Sixth Patriarch pointed out, the original mind, which is pure and clear, can only be attained through the habit of practice. He further noted that a sage and a demon were the same, but the sage understands his true nature while the demon doesn't. So, as our founding teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn would always say, "I hope you only go straight don't know, which is clear like space, soon get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering."

Dump It in the Lake?

continued from page 1

system. Again, that also wasn't so tough since we haven't bought any CDs for several years. Most of our furniture went; all of our appliances went. That was still not very hard to part with, well, except for my recliner. The condo was pretty much sold furnished with newer appliances and built-in furniture, so it wouldn't fit anyway. Our exercise equipment went. The treadmill was a little tougher since I did get a lot of use out of it. However, there is an exercise center at the condo, so it wasn't really needed, nor would it fit anywhere anyway. I *really* did not mind leaving the snow blower!

I had tax records spanning my whole working life since I was sixteen years old. That would be around 46 years! I *probably* no longer needed all of them, although it was mildly interesting to see how little pay I made back then. We shredded about 175 pounds of documents! That felt outright liberating!

Then we came to some of the items that were more difficult to let go of – mementos, gifts, and family heirlooms. We still clearly couldn't store everything, so many of the items were sold. Some were given to other family members; some, a very few, we kept. We got rid of most of our paintings; including some I created (which, to my surprise, were actually purchased at the estate sale.) There were high school yearbooks, old newspapers with headlines of lunar landings, my old draft card, and many other mementos. Photos we did keep.

As I was going through all of this stuff I wondered how it was that I was able to accumulate so much stuff, much of which I never looked at, like those boxes sitting in the attic for seventeen years unopened. Of all of our stuff, how much of it

See Dump It in the Lake?

continued page 3

Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 2015

- **Introduction to Zen**
Monday, February 2
7:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Sitting 8:00 PM – 9:00 PM

- **Intensive Practice**
Tuesday thru Thursday, February 3-5
7:00 – 9:00 PM

- **Public Dharma Talk**
Friday, February 6
7:30 – 9:00 PM

- **YMJJ Retreat**
Saturday – Sunday
February 7 – 8

- **Dharma Talk**
Wednesday, February 25
7:30 – 9:00 PM

March 2015

- **Introduction to Zen**
Monday, March 2
7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

- **Dharma Talk**
Wednesday, March 25
7:30 – 9:00 PM

- **Extended Practice**
Friday, March 27
7:00 – 10:00 PM

Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang

Friday, February 6, 2015

Please join us for a Dharma Talk by Bodhisattva Teacher, followed by Q&A with Zen Master Dae Kwang, guiding teacher of the Great Lake Zen Center. This is a free talk, open to everyone. It will start at 7:30 pm at the Great Lake Zen Center, 828 Locust St. This talk is the kick-off to our Winter YMJJ Retreat.

Winter Yong Maeng Jong Jin Retreat

February 7-8, 2015

Are you ready to strengthen your practice, break through delusions and attain your true self?

Join 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, along with kong-an interviews, formal meals and short work periods

Our YMJJ Retreat will be held at GLZC, 828 Locust St. It will run from 6:00 am Saturday, February 7 through 3:00 pm Sunday, February 8.

Zen Master Dae Kwang, the guiding teacher of the Great Lake Zen Center, will be leading the retreat and conducting interviews. 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

Dump it in the Lake? *continued from page 2*

did I really need? Some I kept just because it was easier than trying to get rid of it, like the unopened boxes. Other things I thought that maybe I would need one day – like all of our camping equipment that lay unused for years. Yet more items, because they had sentimental meaning, at least at some time in my life.

This exercise in moving and downsizing was really an exercise in letting go. I was forced to look at what I really could use vs. what I simply wanted. I had to look at my relationship with all the accumulated things in my life. What did I think was important or useful? What could I let go? In the end, it was a liberating exercise. We didn't throw everything in Lake Michigan, but we did dramatically lighten our load. Hopefully, we didn't increase other people's loads!



Original Face

Gretchen Neuwald, DT

My husband and I recently moved into a condo that has several large windows, offering a great view of the downtown skyline and the Lake. These big windows allow a good amount of natural light to come in, even during these darker winter months. Our new place also has several large floor-to-ceiling mirrors that act to capture and reflect the light, which helps us feel less confined by the smaller living space of our new home.

While I like the effect that the mirrors create, I do find they take some getting used to. It's a little disconcerting to glance in a certain direction and suddenly catch a glimpse of myself. I feel like I'm spying on myself. Sometimes I sense someone else in the room and then looking around, discover it's just my reflection. Mirrors in general tend to make me feel self-conscious and a little uncomfortable.

I don't think mirrors always did that to me. When I was young, I remember liking the sensation of seeing my own image. I think most kids do. Researchers say that at about the age of six months children are fascinated with images of themselves and others in mirrors. At the age of 15 to 18 months they begin to recognize that the images in the mirror are reflections of their own bodies. For older children, looking into the mirror is like meeting the most interesting person on the planet. Most kids at that age are intensely curious about themselves. Indeed, I remember staring into the mirror, gazing deeply into my own eyes, searching for something. I'm not sure what I was looking for. I think I was hoping to catch some essence, some solid impression, of "me." What was I really like? I thought the mirror might tell me or at least give me a clue. But all I saw in my eyes was my own image staring back at me; my eyes only a mirror within a mirror.

Growing up with six siblings, I was constantly teasing and being teased. So when my brother said I had big ears or my sister said I was scrawny, even though those remarks sometimes stung a little, I never took them much to heart. Even at age seven or eight, when I fell on some slippery rocks and badly chipped my two front teeth, I was still pretty unconcerned about my appearance. But in third grade, when a boy I liked called me "chipped teeth and turkey legs," things began to change. I began to wonder "Am I pretty or not pretty?" At that age, things seemed so black and white—being "pretty" meant being popular and happy; "not pretty" meant being lonely and sad.

My self-consciousness increased as I experienced the dramatic physical changes that come with puberty. My changing body made me feel strange and chubby. I'd look into the mirror and see someone I didn't recognize, someone "fat." My broken teeth and other physical imperfections seemed more pronounced. I actually stopped smiling, in order to hide my teeth. I ended up becoming an anorexic

teenager, shedding pounds until I was dangerously thin, yet looking in the mirror and still seeing a fat girl.

Eventually, I overcame my obsession with being thin. In my early twenties I found a dentist that I could afford and got my teeth capped. As a young woman, I became a feminist and began to understand how sexism contributed to my negative body image. I stopped shaving my legs, wearing a bra and tweezing my eyebrows—until I realized that caring that much about "not caring" was just another obsession. With time, I found my own "middle way." Now I wear contact lenses, dye my hair and don a little makeup. I have learned it's okay to want to look nice, both for myself and for others.

Mirrors still sometimes cause me to fret about my appearance, but much less than when I was younger. Maybe this nonchalance just comes with getting older. I suspect it also has something to do with this spiritual path and the practice of letting go of attachments. I'm a lot more comfortable with being in my own skin. When I check myself in the mirror now, it's mostly about grooming. Is my hair parted? Do I have spinach sticking to my teeth? I'm also hopeful these mirrors will help me correct my posture, because I do need help with that.

Despite all this, I'm still not completely comfortable with mirrors—sometimes I get a jolt when I catch my reflection and notice all the wrinkles and sagging skin. How did I get so old? Perhaps some of this uneasiness is good. Mirrors reminded me that I am changing, changing, changing; and that life is short.

Over the years I have found that my mind determines what I see in the mirror. My thinking makes "pretty," "ugly," "thin" and "fat." It makes "sex object" or "old lady." Living with these mirrors is living with a kong-an. The mirrors are constantly asking, "The mirror face or your face, which is correct face?" They both look the same, but if I touch my face, the mirror face does not feel my fingers. So, are they different? But my real face is constantly changing, day to day, moment to moment, which means like the mirror, my real face is empty. So, are they the same? What is my real face, my correct face? Is that what I was trying to find years ago, staring so intently into my eyes in the mirror?

Long ago an eminent teacher asked, "Before thinking of good and bad, what is your original face?" Zen Master Seung Sahn taught "Don't make anything; then you will get your original face and get everything. If you don't understand your face, only go straight—don't know." Now I tell myself when looking in the mirror, "Just go straight; don't make anything. Attain your original face, then all these mirrors are no problem."

Tangled Up

Frank Pauc

Last week I had a talk with my friend, Mohamed, on the phone. We were discussing my son, Hans, and his deployment to Iraq in 2011. I told Mohamed that my time in the military probably makes it easier for me to understand the experiences that Hans had in the war. Mohamed responded by saying that my time in the military probably inspired Hans to enlist in the first place. After thinking about it, I realized that my service in the Army was the only reason that I ever met my wife, and the only reason that Hans even exists. I finally had to give up trying to figure out how my actions may have caused Hans to go to war. I got all tangled up in karma.

I ask questions. I want to know "why" things happen. I don't think that I am alone in doing this sort of thing. Humans are naturally curious. It is part of who we are. Some questions have clear answers. I have difficulty with the questions that seem to have no good answers.

Zen doesn't necessarily discourage us from asking questions. Zen is designed to help us to understand. Part of this understanding is the realization that there are limits to our understanding. Zen shows us that we can't figure out everything. Some things just are.

Realizing that I cannot fully understand why Hans went to war is both frustrating and liberating. It is frustrating because I have to admit that my understanding is finite. It is liberating because I can do other things. I can stop spinning my wheels in an effort to figure out why my son did what he did, and I can open my mind to what is around me. What is all around me? Everything in the present moment. Everything that exists. Everything that matters. Everything that I need.



Old Age Zazen

Mary E. Lux

Through the hum in my aging ears,
the sound of sand sifted by the wind
along a beach, or water rushing in its rill
down a mountain height,
I hear a faint tapping on the other
side of the zendo wall –

a reassuring signal
from all you saints and bodhisattvas
drawing nearer – or is it I
who draws closer to you?

So I straighten, old piece of sinew,
holding on with mute resolve,
ignited by a mysterious fuel
into a burning singularity of joy.

Evening Zazen

Mary E. Lux

Only a month from summer's solstice,
already the thin minutes of light
melt away like lozenges
over the horizon's lip.
"Who know where they go?"
I ask bitterly.

My shadow, sitting so upright
on the zendo wall,
surprises me by its likeness—
so apart from me
but with a tenacious familiarity.

Seems firm as an anchor
yet, as the light in the zendo ebbs away,
we both disintegrate—
the texture of the air around us
becomes visible, a loose-woven fabric,
pointillist,
its colored spots vibrating faintly.

Everything becoming one palette
of material being
encroaching, washing us away
into the default,
darkness.

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The Great Lake Zen Center is affiliated with the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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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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