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# MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 11, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

Jun-Jul, 2009

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## ***No Hindrance Canoe Trip***

*By Peter Neuwald, SDT*

### *The Mind Is No Hindrance*

How often do we see nature through anthropomorphic eyes? We may see it as heartless, cruel, loving, cute, cuddly, mean, or malevolent. In reality, nature neither cares about nor resents humans; it simply "is". This basic quality of nature is the source of clear teaching for us. When we have an idea of what nature *should* be, or what we think it is, nature allows us to see and break through our dualistic mind, the "like/dislike, want/don't want" mind.

It was the third day, the longest and hottest day, of our canoe trip. My friend, D.A., and my brother, Dave, accompanied me. After paddling through an endless, twisty creek for most of the day, we finally came upon Trout Lake. I was absolutely exhausted and sun-stricken when we arrived at the stream's mouth. The wind was kicking up whitecaps and we had to paddle to an island campsite near the far shore of the lake. After fighting the wind for an hour of eternity, we finally reached our destination. I was thoroughly fatigued. After helping to set up camp, I went right to sleep, even skipping D.A.'s dinner of "glop."

I slept for a solid twelve hours. The next morning, rather than feeling well rested and invigorated, I felt weak and groggy. We broke camp and headed out on the still choppy lake to battle the wind once more. According to our plans, we were to paddle to shore, portage across a highway and find a creek that would lead us to the next lake. As we began paddling, I started not only to fight the wind, but also my mind. All I could think was, "I feel lousy! I can't do this! I'm still exhausted!" Ahh, but nature does not commiserate. It cares not a hoot about how one feels. The wind blows; the waves become whitecaps.

After much struggling and straining, we finally reached the shore. I still had a huge complaining mind. Now that we were at the road, my clever mind connived with that complaining mind to make a deal. There was a way out! The highway led directly back to Boulder Junction where our car was. One of us could walk or hitch to town, get the car and come back for the canoe and equipment. I voiced my plan in a not very uncertain manner. It turned out that Dave also was feeling as I did, but D.A. was holding out. He wanted to go on to see the trip through. Ironically, this was his first camping experience. In my mind, I could hear the words, "He was the one who was supposed to be having a hard time." Talk about having a load of garbage up there!

Well, Dave and I tried and tried, but D.A. simply would not budge. Finally, I broke and said, "OK, let's do it." Of course, internally, I figured a few "I told you so's" would come out of the deal. We crossed the road and, after some searching, found the "creek." It was pitifully small even for a creek. My mind said, "Aha! It's begun already!" Yet, even as that thought appeared, a change was brewing. I had begun to resign myself to the situation. We were going forward, wherever it led.

After paddling and portaging over downed trees and branches for some time, something interesting started to occur. Not only did I not think about how tired I had been; I didn't really think much at all. All I did was paddle and portage, paddle and portage, paddle and portage. Where had that complaining mind gone? Through the act of only doing what my job was in that moment, the mind that had seemed so strong only a short time ago had vanished.

Continuing up the creek we suddenly saw the origin of the creek's shallowness – a huge beaver dam. We got out and peered over the top of the dam – there was an immense flowage! The paddle through the flowage was warm and calming. By letting go of my desire for quitting, I simply began to enjoy the birds, the water, the warm breeze, and the plants all around me. Even finding our canoe bottom loaded with "bloodsuckers" didn't affect my change of mood. We had only one more portage for the day. That portage led us to Palette Lake, a beautiful little spring-fed lake located in the isolated high land of the area. I had traveled from hell to heaven in one day. That afternoon and evening we enjoyed the most memorable time of our trip – relaxing, swimming, and utterly enjoying the serenity and beauty of the spot.

Paddling that canoe was just like chanting and bowing. When chanting, bowing and paddling a canoe, the complaining mind, the "I don't like this!" mind, loses its steam and vanishes. And, when it whines, "I don't want to do this!," we just go ahead and do it anyway, not letting that mind get in the way. Then we can begin to wake up to birds, beaver dams, leeches, paddling, friends, . . . everything that appears in this moment.

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## *Right Mind*

Mark Overs

Do you know when you are in your right mind? According to Jill Bolte Taylor, the author of *My Stroke of Insight*, experiencing life through the right hemisphere of our brain is being in our right mind. Jill Bolte Taylor is a brain researcher who, at the age of 37, had a stroke that wiped out the functioning of the left hemisphere of her brain. On the morning of the stroke she writes "In place of that constant chatter that had attached me to the details of my life, I felt enfolded by a blanket of tranquil euphoria."

The left brain characteristics that are verbal, analytic, rational, and linear are useful for functioning in society but do they give me a sense of well being? No. In contrast to the left brain here is a sample of what Jill Bolte Taylor writes about the right brain. "My mind is all about the richness if this present moment. It is filled with gratitude for my life and everyone and everything in it. It is content, compassionate, nurturing, and eternally optimistic." The common expression "what is in your heart" is perhaps more correctly stated as "what does the right hemisphere of your brain tell you?"

After brain surgery to remove the blood clot, Jill Bolte Taylor was able (over a period of time) to recover the functioning of her left brain. What she found was that her left brain then tended to dominate her awareness and she was losing the experiences of her right brain that she had begun to treasure. She offers several techniques for interrupting the left brain, mainly mindfulness and mantra practice. She writes: "To experience peace does not mean that your life is always blissful. It means that you are capable of tapping into a blissful state of mind amidst the normal chaos of a hectic life."

It seems that our society encourages development of left brain functioning. Developing our left brain makes us productive but are we happy? To reclaim the state of "Being", of the right brain or to put it another way, to return to our right mind, meditation is necessary. The practice of bringing our attention back to the present moment over and over again leads to a more balanced brain.

I hope that some of you will be interested in reading *My Stroke of Insight*. I also hope that my little book report has inspired some of you to a deeper meditation practice.

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## **Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat**

**October 23 – October 25**

A YMJJ retreat is being scheduled for October 24 and October 25, 2009. 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 \$120 for both days, or \$80 for Saturday only and \$50 for Sunday only. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleeping space should notify GLZC by voicemail at (414) 264-1676 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, October 23rd. 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](mailto:info@glzc.org). Pre-registration is now being requested. Please register for the YMJJ and pay the appropriate fees by Saturday, October 17, 2009. We are now also requiring a registration form be completed. The form can be obtained at GLZC, [www.glzc.org](http://www.glzc.org), or via email.**

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## **June – July????**

Yes, this really is the June/July issue of "*Moon On The Water*". Like many other people in this current economy my company is cutting back on resources and those of us that are still working there have to pick up their work as well as continuing to do our own work. That means long days and, usually, week-end work as well. Combine that with a lot of travel and you find the reason for the lateness of the newsletter. Hopefully, things will slow down some at work and travel will be reduced so the newsletter can get back on schedule. Until then I thank you for your patience.

## July, 2009 YMJJ Participants



### Calendar of Upcoming Events

Regularly scheduled events include Introduction to Zen on the First Monday of each month, Dharma talks on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Regular practice periods are Monday and Wednesday evenings, 7:30pm to 8:30pm and Saturday morning from 8:00am to 9:00am. Unless noted below.

#### September, 2009

Friday, Sept 18. GLZC Extended Practice. GLZC, 7pm – 10pm

#### October, 2009

Friday, Oct. 23. Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Saturday & Sunday, Oct. 24 and Oct. 25. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC.

#### November, 2009

Saturday, Nov. 15. KIDO Retreat. First Unitarian Society, 9:30am – 3:30pm.

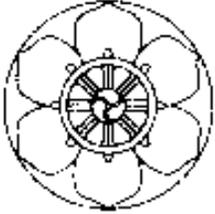
Wednesday, Nov. 25. No Practice - Thanksgiving. GLZC

#### December, 2009

Friday, Dec 4. GLZC Extended Practice. GLZC, 7pm – 10pm

Monday Dec. 7. Buddha's Enlightenment Day. GLZC, 7:30pm

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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.

