

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 5, Issue 5

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

October 2003

Reflections on a Year

By Gary Dixon

My Korean friend and business associate, Mr. Youngjong Yu, handed me a copy of *The Compass of Zen* and told me to read it on my way back to the U.S. He had finally run out of answers to my questions regarding Buddhism and thought that this book, written by Zen Master Seung Sahn, would help me. On the flight home I opened the book and began to read.

I was immediately drawn to one particular passage in the first chapter. Zen Master Seung Sahn writes, "There are many paths that one can follow in order to attain this point [true self]. We have many religions and spiritual ways. But actually there are just two kinds of religion in this world: subject religions and object religions. Following an object religion means believing in some kind of god or some power or opposite outside yourself." He continues by stating that, "Buddhism is a subject religion. It seeks direct insight into the very nature of existence itself, beginning with insight into the nature of our being, "What am I?" "What is this 'I,' and where did it come from?" This passage is why I came to the Kwan Um School and the Great Lake Zen Center. I wanted to know the answer to, "What am I" and "What is this 'I'?" I wanted to get something.

On my first visit to the Zen Center I received some basic instruction on how to sit and what to expect during the practice to follow. I was told that we would be chanting in Korean, but not to worry about the correct pronunciation and the meaning of the words. I was also told that we would sit for 25 minutes in the manner I had just been instructed. Panic began to set in. This was not another book read on Buddhism or Zen. This was the real thing!

I chanted, but it wasn't Korean. I have no idea what was coming out of my mouth on that first visit. My nine-month old son is more intelligible. I sat and was uncomfortable sitting still for 25 minutes, but no one seemed to notice and if they did, they didn't seem to mind my blundering through it. I was made to feel welcome and so I returned to practice fairly regularly.

Before my first retreat I received a basic explanation of what would take place during the retreat. I was told that the majority of the time would be spent sitting. **How hard can that be?** I was also told that we would eat meals differently, with bowls in a formal manner. **How hard can eating out of bowls be?** Then the bows, we do 108 of them. **No problem! I have done a few of those too. Sign me up!!!!**

I knew I was in for a long day when I was out of

breath at bow number 27. Things became worse when the pain appeared in my legs during the third sitting. Then I embarrassed myself by playing musical bowls at every meal. I went to bed that night tired, hungry, and full of thoughts about sneaking out in the middle of the night to go home and lie in my own bed. But I stayed. And just like my first visit to the Zen Center, no one gave me a hard time. In fact, I received encouragement and support and was told that even the senior members of the Sangha have difficulty from time-to-time. Again, I was made to feel welcome and have since participated in other retreats.

As time has passed I have become more proficient in these "forms". I can now chant in unison with others and I can comfortably sit for 25 minutes. My legs have become accustomed to this sitting and it now takes longer for the pain to appear in my legs during retreats. I almost have the bowls memorized and I have even learned how to serve during the meals at retreat. Even the bows are coming along nicely and at the next retreat I intend to do all 108 at the hellish pace of 7.2 per minute. Although I had become comfortable with the "form" of our practice, I was beginning to have some reservations.

If you remember from the first paragraph, I came to this practice wanting something. I wanted to know the answer to, "What am I" and "What is this 'I'?" After months of practice I did not feel I was any closer to the answer. Not even a hint of any real progress to inspire me onward. I began to second-guess the way I was sitting practice. Eventually frustration set in and I began to think that perhaps Zen practice, or at least our form of Zen practice, wasn't right for me. I was deep into "I, My, Me mind" and "checking." As a result, I considered quitting.

Then one evening at the Zen Center someone read one of the letters from *Only Don't Know*. In this letter, the author writes to Soen Sa Nim, "What am I? I ask this more and more through my day. But there is so much thinking!" I felt as if I had been hit in the head! This was me! In response Soen Sa Nim tells his student, "... not to check your mind and feelings.... Only go straight-don't know.... If you practice everyday, your checking mind will rest..." Now I began to practice with new resolve. Thoughts came, but I did not worry. And when they did come, I became better at not getting attached to them. So much for "checking," but I still had a problem with "I, My, Me" mind.

Inspired by the letters in *Only Don't Know*, I went and purchased a copy of the book and at the same time purchased a copy of another book by Zen Master Seung Sahn titled, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. In the latter, I was further inspired by the message in chapter 42, "Wanting Enlightenment." In this chapter Soen Sa Nim

Continued on page 3

YMJJ Retreat and Precepts Ceremony Scheduled

*October 17-19 with Zen Master Dae Kwang
6:00 AM-9:30 PM*

Precepts Ceremony October 19 at 3:00 PM

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with GLZC Guiding Teacher Zen Master Dae Kwang for October 17-19, 2003. 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 \$60 for both days, or \$35 for one day. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space is available at no extra charge at GLZC. Those planning on staying at GLZC should bring a sleeping bag, pillow, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang 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 or Laura.**

On Sunday at 3:00 PM, following the YMJJ, there will be a precepts ceremony. There is no charge, and everyone is welcome. GLZC co-director, Peter Neuwald, will be taking precepts to become a Senior Dharma Teacher. Andy Yencha will become a Dharma Teacher, and Gary Dixon and Jen Maher will be taking five precepts at the ceremony. Please plan on joining us as we celebrate the commitment Peter, Andy, Gary, and Jen are making to their practice and to our Sangha. Cake, tea, and juice will be served following the ceremony.

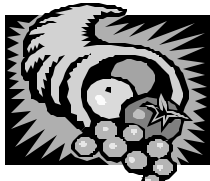
Buddha's Enlightenment Day

*Monday, December 8, 2003
7:30 PM*

A ceremony to commemorate the day Siddhartha Gautama attained the great enlightenment and became known as the Buddha is scheduled for Monday, December 8, 2003, at the Great Lake Zen Center. This is one of only two holidays celebrated in the Kwan Um School of Zen. The ceremony will begin at 7:30 PM, and all are welcome. Tea and cookies will be served following the ceremony, so please plan to attend and bring your family and friends.

Practice Schedule Change

Due to the Thanksgiving holiday, there will be no Wednesday evening practice on November 26, 2003. Practice will resume as usual on Saturday, November 29. Happy Holidays!



Thousand Year Treasure

Zen Master Dae Kwang

Recently I led a retreat at the Empty Gate Zen Center in Berkeley California. Among the retreatants was an older Chinese man whom I had never met before. From his dress I could tell that he was quite wealthy. Although he was quite uncomfortable sitting and bowing, he practiced with sincerity and intensity for three days. During a chat after the retreat he told me that he was from Indonesia and here in the States for just a short time visiting his son, who attended the University of California.

Suddenly, concern and sadness filled him with emotion. He told me something very shocking: just a couple of weeks ago he was quite wealthy -- his family had been living in Jakarta for several generations, but now, because of the recent turmoil in Indonesia, he had little left. Ethnic Chinese had been targeted in the riots there, and his business was destroyed. Even his wife could not leave the country because her passport was kept in a bank which had been looted. When he saw the poster for our retreat he walked in off the street and sat down; he said it was the only thing he could do!

This man's story reminded me of something. Every winter in the mountains of Korea our school holds a ninety-day retreat at Shin Won Sah Temple. Within the temple complex there is one building dedicated to a protective god recognized in the ancient religion of Korea. The building was originally built in the early Joseon Dynasty, late fourteenth century, as a place where the queen could pray for the protection of the nation. During retreats many of us would go up to this building to do midnight practicing. As with many traditional Korean temple buildings, the gate at the entrance is supported by two columns. Painted on these columns are Chinese sayings intended to inspire and encourage the practitioner. On the left-hand post it says, "Three days looking into the self, thousand year treasure." On the right it says, "One hundred year life, chasing after power and things, turns to dust in one day."

This is our life. No matter what we get -- even if it's the result of a hundred-year struggle -- can go away in less than a day. But the benefit we get from practicing gives us a lasting reward, a look at our true self and clear direction in our life. What a deal! The man from Jakarta was indeed fortunate -- there was nothing else for him to do.



Zen Master Dae Kwang

Reflections on a Year *(continued from page 1)*

states that, "The idea that you want to achieve something in Zen meditation is basically selfish." He explains that if we have thoughts of attaining something, we will never attain anything. There it was, after nine months, the slap in the face that I needed! I had to "put down" this "I, My, Me" mind and begin practicing without the desire to attain anything.

This past July the company I work for merged with another company and during this process there were many concerns about lost jobs and changing roles. Our practice enabled me to remain relatively calm throughout this ordeal. A few weeks after the merger was completed I was in California on business and several of my co-workers expressed their thanks to me for helping them cope throughout the merger process. They told me of numerous conversations in which I had told them not to get caught up in the mindset of speculation and "what if" scenarios. I had told them not to worry about what was going to happen or what might take place after the merger is completed. I told them that they should just worry about their current jobs and that things always seem to work out in the end. I had no idea that my words and actions had made such a difference.

When I returned home I shared this experience with my wife. She then told me that since I began this practice I have become more patient and more understanding towards her and my children. She also went on to tell me that even our friends and relatives have commented to her about how they have noticed a change. I had no idea!

A full year has now passed and I am preparing to commit further to our practice by taking the Five Precepts. In the past year I have learned and experienced many things. I have had the privilege of knowing and practicing with my immediate Sangha family at the Great Lake Zen Center and my extended Sangha family throughout the Kwan Um School. What wonderful teachers they all are! However, there is one teaching that stands above all the others I have learned this past year. And, that teaching is: the reason we practice at all is not for ourselves, but for others.

My family, friends, and co-workers have taught me this lesson. And even though I try everyday to practice with no desire of attainment, I really have attained something after all.

Joke Corner

Q: What did the Zen student say to the hotdog vendor?



A: Make me one with everything.

Keeping a Not-moving Mind

Zen Master Seung Sahn

From "Zen Master Goes to Europe" (unpublished) by
Zen Master Seung Sahn and Mu Sang Sunim
Copyright 1990 David B. Gerber

Once in China, Zen Master Ma Jo liked to sit Zen. He came to Zen Master Nam Ak's temple and sat for three years, strongly sitting everyday, sometimes not sleeping at night. Zen Master Nam Ak thought, "This man has been sitting three years but he has no question. This means, not yet. So I will ask him one time." Then he went to Ma Jo, bringing a tile with him and polishing it. Ma Jo asked him what he was doing. Nam Ak said, "I'm making a mirror."

"You are a fool," said Ma Jo. "You can't make a mirror out of a tile."

"Yes, you're correct," said Nam Ak., "What are you doing?"

"I'm becoming Buddha."

"It's like the tile. Only sitting, you cannot get enlightenment."

Ma Jo said, "Ah, this is not correct. Then what should I do?"

Nam Ak said, "It's like a cart. When the cart doesn't go, do you hit the cart or hit the ox?" Hearing this speech, Ma Jo got enlightenment.

So which one should you hit? The cart is the body, the ox is the mind. How do you keep your mind? This is very important. Keeping your body is sometimes important. Your body not moving is O.K. But if your mind is moving a lot, then you have a problem. The body can go anywhere, do any action, that's O.K. Keeping a not-moving mind is correct Zen. This is correct sitting Zen. How do you keep a not-moving mind? Cognition means becoming clear. First becoming one mind, then this not-moving mind becomes clear. The two come together, this is correct Zen. Correct body-sitting Zen is O.K., but correct mind-sitting is very important. So this ox is your mind. If you have a problem, you must hit your mind. Don't hit your body. So put it all down, your opinion, then no problem."

Ten Directions YMJJ Retreat

With Zen Master Soeng Hyang (Barbara Rhodes)

Argonne National Labs, Chicago

November 14-16, 2003

The Ten Directions Zen Community of Chicago is holding a YMJJ retreat with Zen Master Soeng Hyang beginning Friday, Nov. 14 at noon and continuing until Sunday, Nov. 16 at 2:00 PM. You may enter at times other than noon on Friday. There will be a precepts ceremony on Sunday and Harold Rails's wedding ceremony on Friday night. For more information or to register contact Margaret McKenzie at 630-681-0593 or by e-mail at MMcK70000@aol.com. Because Argonne is a secure facility, you must register at least one week in advance. Anyone wishing to take precepts should contact Margaret immediately.