

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 8, Issue 5

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

October, 2006

Technology – Good or Bad?

Michael Zinke, BT

When I started out in the IT field (it was actually referred to as Electronic Data Processing at that time) I thought technology was good for the future. I watched it grow and marveled at the advances that were made. I watched computers shrink while the capacity and speed became larger and faster at the same time. I watched as we migrated from punched cards to terminals that allowed us to enter code directly into the computer, watched the birth of PCs and the evolution of the laptop. Obviously technology has continued to grow. I am currently sitting in an Amtrak train, typing on a laptop that has more power than ever dreamed of. My laptop is attached to the internet via a cellular connection card so I am actually connected to the entire IBM network as the train speeds down the track. That allows me to work anywhere in the world just like I was sitting at a desk in the client's headquarters. And I often wonder what tomorrow will bring.

Lately I have been wondering if all this technology is really good for us. I watch people when I'm walking to my client site in Chicago and I am amazed at how many people are walking along not knowing exactly where they are or where they are going because they are totally engrossed in some new electronic marvel. On many occasions during my walking I have to move out of the way of someone walking toward me with their head down, texting someone on their cell phone or dialing their cell phone or checking their calendar on their PDA or looking for a certain song on their MP3 player. It is becoming difficult to talk to people at work because most everyone around me has earphones on and they are listening to music that they have loaded into their MP3 player. Maybe it's me, but I tried listening to music while working a couple times and I really wasn't very productive. I can't seem to master the art of listening to music and writing technical documents actions at the same time.

So when I see people using all of this new technology I wonder where their mind is at that moment. They are obviously totally unaware of what is happening around them. They are totally oblivious to their environment. They seem to be always looking down fiddling with some new fangled machine while other people zig and zag around them. Sometimes I feel like if you look really close you can watch the present moment flying right by them without their knowledge.

But then, to be fair it isn't all the fault of technology is it? If you watch people you will notice that people don't need cell phones or PDAs or MP3 players to distract them. A lot of people lately seem to be mentally in some other place and time. They certainly are not in the present moment. You've seen people like this; they only recognize their own little world and totally ignore other people. For example, I was recently in a store buying a large piece of plywood. I turned the corner to go to the checkout lane but in front of me was a mother with a cart, two children walking beside her and the father at the end of the line. This was a fairly wide aisle as store aisles go with two checkout clerks at the end of the aisle, one on the right and one on the left. But they were strung out across the entire aisle making it impossible to get around them or to even get to the checkout clerk on the right or the left side of the aisle. No big deal except as they neared the checkout person, they all suddenly stopped while the mother and father had a discussion about whether or not they needed more beef jerky. They were totally unaware that people were waiting for them to move along; they were so involved in themselves that they didn't recognize they were holding up other people. Similar things happened to me 3 times in 3 different stores on a really bad day recently. People seem to be so totally absorbed in their own lives that they disregard other people.

So, in Zen we teach that we need to be in the present moment. We need to know what is going on around us at all times. How else can we recognize someone who is suffering? How else can we know that someone needs our help? We can't attach to our thoughts and let those thoughts distract us from the present moment. We have to live life, not let it pass us by and then regret that we missed an opportunity to help someone in need. So, if you are going to call someone on your cell phone, move out of the way of other people and make your call. If you think you need to buy more beef jerky, then move over and discuss the status of your

jerky inventory without preventing other people from doing what they need to do. When you do something, do it 100%. Don't become so absorbed in something that you aren't aware of what is going on in the present moment. It's only in the present moment that you can act; that you can do something that will make a difference. You can't do something in the past nor the future so don't miss the present moment in order to take action. So make a cell phone call, buy your beef jerky but be aware of the environment around you when you do those things. Technology isn't bad for us if we use it correctly but it is bad when we let it use us.

The Abbot's Corner

Peter Neuwald, SDT

We are trying out something new with this newsletter. I thought it might be helpful to have a column where I can share my thoughts with all of you. As many, if not most, of you know, we have changed our organizational structure from having two co-directors to something that is in line with most centers in the Kwan Um School of Zen. As you can probably tell from the title of this column, we now have an abbot (me) and a Do Gam. Dharma Teacher Susi Childress is serving as both the center's Head Dharma Teacher and the Do Gam. I spent a lot of time searching the internet for a translation of "Do Gam" and all I could come up with is "The Way of the Persimmon" -- I have a feeling this is not the correct translation. Suffice to say that the Do Gam is the Vice-Abbot. Also, in her role as Head Dharma Teacher, Susi is charged with overseeing the scheduling and operation of the center's practice and practice forms.

On another note, Susi and I were able to attend the annual Dharma Teacher Retreat in Providence in October. This was the largest DT retreat so far. It was difficult to choose which workshops to attend, which is a testament to the depth of teachings that were available. One high point for me was the viewing of a Korean television program on the life of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Kathy Park from the Cambridge Zen Center provided insightful translations. I continue to learn more about all of the Dharma work our founding teacher did in Korea, Japan and the West.

We also had the great fortune of a visit by Zen Master Dae Kwan, Abbot and Guiding Teacher of Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong. Born in Hong Kong, she practiced at Ajahn Chaa's Forest Monastery in Thailand. In her workshops, she offered us insights about her life as a woman practicing meditation in Thailand, her work in the conservation movement in Thailand (often being at odds with drug lords), and her spiritual practices, including her two years of solo practicing in Tu Boo Cave. One of the highlights of the weekend occurred while a number of us were waiting for rides to the airport on the last day. An impromptu gathering formed around Zen Master Dae Kwan where we were honored to hear more of her stories and teachings.

Sometimes we lose touch with the larger Kwan Um Sangha. When I attended the Dharma Teacher Retreat back in 2001, I was the only person attending West of Massachusetts. This year it was very gratifying to see a strong contingent from the Midwest, including members from Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, and, of course, Wisconsin. The retreat helped me to reconnect with many teachers and old friends, as well as connect to new teachers and friends in the larger Kwan Um Sangha.

Speaking of Sangha, we have a Kido ("Energy Way") Retreat coming up on November 4th from 10am to 3pm. If you have never attended a Kido, I strongly urge you to do so. If you have trouble with monkey mind, this will help tame it. Zen Master Seung Sahn has said that a one day Kido can provide as much benefit as a seven day Yong Maeng Jong Jin (sitting) retreat. Zen Master Seung Sahn, in reference to Descartes' "I think, therefore I am," also said "If I am not thinking, then what?" Come to the Kido, practice 100%, and see for yourself.

Kido One-Day Retreat, Saturday, November 4, 10 AM to 3 PM

Kido means "energy path." Participants in the Kido play percussion instruments while continuously chanting "Kwan Seum Bosal." Bring a percussion instrument (this can be as simple as blocks of wood). Some additional ones will be provided. **You should also bring a bag lunch.** Newcomers are welcome. The Kido will be held at the First Unitarian Church, 1342 N, Astor St., Milwaukee. For more information, contact Peter Neuwald or email us at info@glzc.org.

YMJJ Retreat & Precepts Ceremony Rescheduled

The YMJJ and Precepts Ceremony originally scheduled for October 5th and 6th will be rescheduled for February, 2007. Zen Master Dae Kwang had to postpone his trip to Milwaukee and Madison in October due to illness. Zen Master Dae Kwang usually leads the Winter Kyol Che in Providence during this time period and has attempted to find someone to fill in for him but has been unsuccessful so far. We are in contact with Zen Master Bon Haeng who has led our winter retreat the past two years and we are determining his availability. The exact date is not known as yet but check the December issue of the *Moon on the Water* for final date and final plans.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

October, 2006

Saturday, October 28. Buddhist Conversation Series - "The Buddhist View on the Death Penalty". Phuoc Hau Buddhist Temple, 4pm – 6pm.

November, 2006

Saturday, November 4 – Kido, First Unitarian Church, 10am – 3pm.

Wednesday, November 22 – No Practice or Dharma Talk, Enjoy the holiday with your family.

December, 2006

Monday, December 4 – Buddha's Enlightenment Day, GLZC, 7:30pm

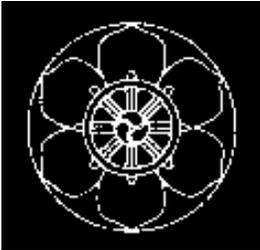
Monday, December 25 – No Practice, Due to the holidays there will not be practice.

January, 2007

*Sit in reverie, and watch the changing
Color of the waves that break upon the
Idle seashore of the mind*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882)

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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.

