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# MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 10, Issue 4

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

Aug-Sept, 2008

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## Going Empty-Handed

*Peter Neuwald, SDT*

Tomorrow I will be attending another funeral. It will be the sixth one this year. This one is for the mother of a close friend. She had been in hospice for a short while and I was fortunate enough to visit with her last weekend in Chicago. She seemed at peace and accepting of her impending death. Likewise, my friend was ready to let go of her mother.

I'm getting to an age where my parents' generation is starting to leave us. There was an aunt, an uncle, and a great-aunt. I'm also getting old enough where it's not that unusual for people my age to pass. There was the husband of a friend, only a few years older than me. And there was my cousin, who was younger than me and lived through the majority of his life in a wheelchair. All of these people have their life stories. My cousin was drafted by the Pittsburgh Pirates to play major league baseball. He also wanted to play college football and was injured by an illegal football tackle taught by his coach. He lived the next thirty-ish years in his wheelchair. He was 51 years old when he died.

My great aunt, who was German, lost her husband to a cannon shell in World War I. She and her second husband visited us when I was in high school some forty years ago. I remember hearing how her hair literally turned white overnight during the war. I can't remember now if that was WWI or WWII. She died at the age of 101 years, living nearly twice as many years as my cousin.

The following was included in the notice of her death:

Nicht die Freuden, nicht die Leiden  
stellen den Wert des Lebens dar.  
Immer wird nur das entscheiden,  
was der Mensch den Menschen war.

If my brother got it right, this translates to:

Neither the joy, nor the suffering  
represent the value of a life.  
It is always and solely determined  
by the humanity of the person.

Whether we have 50 years, or 100 years, it still all comes down to this: "What am I doing now?", not what do I plan to do next week, next year or next decade, but right now in this moment. We may not have next week or maybe even the next moment.

When faced with death, Zen Master Seung Sahn's "The Human Route" always comes to mind:

### The Human Route

Coming empty-handed, going empty-handed -- that is human.  
When you are born, where do you come from?  
When you die, where do you go?  
Life is like a floating cloud which appears.  
Death is like a floating cloud which disappears.  
The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.  
Life and death, coming and going, are also like this.  
But there is one thing which always remains clear.  
It is pure and clear, not depending on life and death.  
What is that one pure and clear thing?

So what is this true self that is not dependent on life or death? As Zen Master Seung Sahn taught us, only go straight, don't know.

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## **Rock Collecting for the Heart and Mind**

*Katharina Wren*

One night I received a message from someone thinking about suicide. This was someone I once loved with everything I had, and I knew I couldn't once again fall down the rabbit hole of trying to prove that someone cared about him. So I called someone from his family and asked everyone I knew to pray and/or hold our family in their thoughts.

The next day my son and I went to his karate class and then out for a quick bite to eat. I was about to head for home and start doing an endless list of things writing themselves on the screen of my brain as I drove, when something compelled me to head for the airport instead. There is something about the airport that calms me and takes me back to my childhood when my family lived in faraway places. Once we were by the airport, I knew to head to Grant Park, where there is a stretch of beach at the bottom of a stairway that goes through some woods. I had been feeling on edge all day, in that place of not knowing and not being able "to do" anything, and as I walked out onto the beach and caught sight of the pink-tinged grey edge where the water meets the sky, the edge within me literally dropped while I contemplated the horizon where anything is possible.

My son started collecting rocks, so many that he had to keep pulling up his shorts! He has been collecting rocks since he was old enough to explore on his own two legs outdoors. (He used to store all these rocks in my car!) Lately he has been telling me about how rocks may look ordinary, but you have to be patient to find the ones with crystals within, and then you have to figure out how to get to the crystal part. He also tells me to notice how the water transforms the rocks.

We started to leave the beach when the thought "it's getting late" began to take over. But then Gustav wanted to get "just a couple more rocks", and I watched him walk away from me down to the water's edge. After a while he started to empty his pockets and throw rocks into the water. From afar I could see the circles after each throw, which brought to mind the circle of life and the ripple effects, and I wondered if my son will be okay no matter what happens in our family. Just then, for no reason at all, Gustav turned around and cheerily yelled "I am okay, Mama!" I saw him take off his bright blue Croc sandals and not realize they had slowly but surely start to float away. But instead of calling out in the motherly voice that compels me to tell him what to do, I waited for him to notice. When he did notice, he laughed and chased after them, getting soaked in the process.

What I realized by watching him is that we need to let our loved ones have enough room to experience the universe in their way, while letting them know we are near enough should they turn around to look. I am realizing that the illusion of protecting them is simply another form of attachment. As much as we would like to protect them from the emotional dramas of others, we can trust that things will unfold as they will and that is when we will know what to do.

Moments are like rocks for Gustav. Taking the time to contemplate a mere pebble that we might not otherwise notice while running what appears to be the race for our lives, can transform an ordinary moment into one that is illuminated. He told me today that patience is knowing when to be a snail. Gustav knows when to throw a rock that he has investigated with rapt attention back into the water, and he waits for the ripples of each rock before throwing in another. He is already learning his own lessons, and there is nothing I can teach him that he hasn't already taught me. My fear told me that rocks can hurt him. His heart tells him that rocks are beautiful if you look at them long enough. And he knows when to let them go.

When we finally left the beach, a group of people arrived and I heard one exclaim, Wow, I have never seen this particular place quite so incredibly calm and beautiful. That's when the unbidden thought that is "yes" came. And I felt the strength from all the people who had held us throughout the day. As we approached the car, Gustav exclaimed, "This was the best day ever." I was deeply grateful that I hadn't just headed home instead. I asked him why it was such a great day, and he said: Because of the rocks, the water, and the flower I just picked for you.

It was a day that began with the fear of not knowing...and ended with the simple joy of Gustav.

## 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.

Friday, September 12. Extended Practice. GLZC, 7pm to 10pm.

### October, 2008

Friday, October 24. Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Saturday & Sunday, October 25 and 26. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC.

### November, 2008

Saturday, November 1. Beginner's Mind Retreat. GLZC, 9am - 12pm.

Saturday, November 15. Kido Retreat. First Unitarian Society. 9:30am – 3:30pm.

## Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat

October 24 - 26

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for October 25 and 26, 2008. 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 being reviewed currently but will not exceed \$100 for both days, or \$55 for Saturday only and \$45 for Sunday only. The price includes vegetarian meals. Sleeping space can be arranged if required at no extra charge. Those needing sleep space should notify Peter (telephone number on last page) 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 24th. 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).**

We are grateful to Zen Master Dae Kwang for taking time out of his busy schedule to visit us and lead the YMJJ's. We are only provided the opportunity to sit with and interview with a Zen Master three or four times a year. Please plan on attending and taking advantage of this opportunity.

## Extended Practice Night

September 12

An extended practice evening has been set for Friday September 12, 2008 from 7:00pm to 10:00pm. Join us for an extended evening practice. You can come for all or part of the practice.

## Kido Retreat

November 15

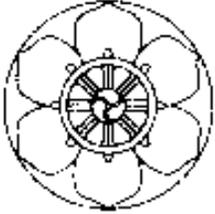
**9:30am – 3:30pm at First Unitarian Society, 1342 N, Astor St.** Kido means "energy path." Participants in the Kido play percussion instruments while continuously chanting "Kwan Seum Bosal." Bring a percussion instrument (this can be as simple as blocks of wood). Some additional ones will be provided. **You should also bring a bag lunch.** Newcomers are welcome.

## Beginner's Mind Retreat

November 1 - 9am – 12pm

This is a retreat purposely intended for newcomers to Zen meditation. No experience is necessary. Held at GLZC.

Great Lake Zen Center  
828 East Locust Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53212



## MOON ON THE WATER

*is published by the*

**Great Lake Zen Center**  
828 East Locust Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
414-771-2490 (Peter)

**e-mail:** [info@glzc.org](mailto:info@glzc.org)

**Web-Site:** [www.glzc.org](http://www.glzc.org)

**Kwan Um Web-Site:** [www.kwanumZen.org](http://www.kwanumZen.org)

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

Founder: Zen Master Seung Sahn  
Guiding Teacher: Zen Master Dae Kwang  
Abbot: Peter Neuwald, SDT  
DoGam: Susi Childress, SDT  
Treasurer: Michael Zinke, BT & Dee Schwaiger  
Secretary/Publicity: Andy Yench, DT  
Editor: Michael Zinke, BT

### **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.

