
MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 15, Issue 5

December 2013/January 2014

Buddha's Enlightenment Day

Jose Ramirez JDPSN on Dec 15, 2011

[Raises Zen stick over his head, then hits table with stick.]

Every day people are born. Every day people die.

[Raises Zen stick over his head, then hits table with stick.]

The Buddha understood this point and realized there is no life, no death.

[Raises Zen stick over his head, then hits table with stick.]

Life is life, death is death.

KATZ!

Happy Buddha's Enlightenment Day!

See *Buddha's Enlightenment Day*

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Abbot's Corner

Did You Hear the Thunder?

Pete Neuwald, Abbot



I came across a posting that someone had written concerning a talk that Zen Master Dae Kwang was giving in Singapore. Halfway through the talk it started to thunder. Someone asked a question and Zen Master Dae Kwang responded with "Can you hear the thunder?" He then clapped his hands and said, "That is it! *That* is the answer from Buddha." More questions were asked – "What is an enlightened person?" "Who can become enlightened?" "How do you practice and become enlightened?" Zen Master Dae Kwang's answer to each was "Did you hear the thunder?"

Then it started to rain so loud that he stopped speaking and everyone just sat there. After twenty minutes of sitting with the rain he began to speak. He said, "You don't need to remember anything I said. The rain is the best dharma talk."

This month we celebrate Buddha's Enlightenment Day (Bodhi Day). On that day we commemorate the day that the historical Buddha attained enlightenment. But what is it that the Buddha attained? Did you hear the thunder?

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We all know the story. Siddhartha Gautama was sitting under the Bodhi tree; he looked up, saw the morning star and boom! He got enlightenment. And ever since this story has been an inspiration to spiritual seekers because, let's face it, we believe the Buddha got something and we want to get what he got. Did he really get anything? Even before he saw the morning star he already had a taste of enlightenment at the banks of the Niranjana River.

Siddhartha had been practicing very hard for many years. He had been following the advice from many different teachers that told him that in order to find the answer he was looking for he need it to give up worldly pleasures and subjugate his body. To this end, he exposed himself to the elements, endured many trials, and brought himself almost to the point of self-destruction. He was really, really thin and weak, nothing but skin and bones; So much so that he almost drowned when he bathed in the Niranjana River. In one version of the story, Sujata, a girl from the nearby village, seeing how famished he was said to him, "It looks like you are really hungry, can I bring you some food?" Siddhartha asked what her name was and, in a Zen like style, said, "Sujata, I am very hungry. Can you really appease my hunger?" Perhaps he was not only referring to his physical hunger but also to his spiritual hunger. Sujata nodded, offered him milk and rice pudding, and told him that "Yes, this will appease your hunger." I like to imagine that what Sujata offered him was a delicious bowl of kheer, the nice rice dessert that you can find at an Indian restaurant.

The moment Siddhartha tasted Sujata's offering he had a profound realization: he had been too hard on himself. You can imagine how good that kheer must have tasted after eating very little for many years. He probably felt good, happy, thankful. He felt his strength coming back. At the first taste he understood cause-and-effect; he attained just like this: when hungry eat, when tired sleep. That, for me, was Siddhartha's first taste, literally, of enlightenment.

Today we celebrate Buddha's enlightenment. But what did he attain? Under the Bodhi tree Buddha realized that the body has life and death but original nature has no life or death. After six years of strong practice he understood himself 100%. The Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng, on the other hand, lived a simple life and attained enlightenment after hearing one sentence from the Diamond Sutra: "Do not become attach to any thoughts that arise in the mind". At that moment, he also understood himself 100%. He told the Fifth Patriarch, "Human Beings have North and South, but in Buddha nature is there North and South?" Buddha saw a star and got enlightenment; Hui Neng heard a sentence and got enlightenment. Are these the same or different?

In Zen we talk a lot about life and death and sometimes we may take this literally. But life and death happen in this moment, right in front of our eyes. "Life and death" point to the never-ending appearance and disappearance of

phenomena. If you pay attention when you are sitting in meditation, and even sometimes in your daily life, you will notice that thoughts appear and thoughts disappear, that feelings appear and feelings disappear, that impulses appear and impulses disappear, that sounds appear and sounds disappear.

In the Wake-Up sermon Bodhidharma said, "Sages don't consider the past. And they don't worry about the future." At some level we understand that yes, the past is gone and the future is not yet here, and that all we have is the present, or so we think. Bodhidharma continues, "Nor do they cling to the present." That is a very interesting point: we have to let go even of the present. How do we not cling to the present? He concludes, "And from moment to moment they follow the Way." Moment to moment; sounds familiar? If we keep a clear mind then each moment is enough, each action is complete. Moment by moment there is no life, no death. Moment by moment just like this is the truth.



A brahmin once asked Buddha:
"Are you a God?"
"No, brahmin" said Buddha.
"Are you a saint?"
"No, brahmin" said Buddha.
"Are you a magician?"
"No, brahmin" said Buddha.
"What are you then?"
"I am awake."

Calendar of Upcoming Events

December 2013

- **Introduction to Zen**
Monday, December 2, 7:30 - 9:00 PM
- **Extended Practice**
Friday, December 13, 7:00 - 10:00 PM
- **Buddha's Enlightenment Day Celebration**
Saturday, December 7, 9:30 - 10:30 AM
- **No Practice**
Wednesday, December 25
Enjoy the Christmas Holiday!

January 2014

- **Buddhist Peace Fellowship New Year's Day**
Wednesday, January 1, 10:00 AM
Shambhala Meditation Center
- **Heart Kyol Che Ceremony**
Monday, January 6, 7:30 - 9:00 PM
- **Kido Retreat (tentative)**
Saturday, January 18, 10:00 - 3:00 PM
- **Dharma Talk**
Wednesday, January 22

Buddha's Enlightenment Day Celebration

Saturday, December 7th
9:30 am – 10:30 am
Great Lake Zen Center

Long ago, Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni sat under the Bodhi tree for six years. At dawn he looked up and saw the morning star in the eastern sky. At that moment, experiencing the world for the first time with complete clarity, he attained enlightenment. Once a year we come together to celebrate Buddha's great victory in penetrating the nature of ultimate truth. Please join us for a short ceremony, which traditionally includes the sharing of an Enlightenment Day poem written by a fellow Sangha member. Refreshments, corn tea and friendly conversation follow.



Heart Kyol Che 2014

Monday, January 6, 7:30 pm

The start of Heart Kyol Che at GLZC will be held on January 6, 2014. Kyol Che is a traditional Korean Zen retreat. The name means “tight dharma” or “coming together.” In Korea, it is the three-month winter and summer periods when monks and nuns do intensive sitting practice in the mountain temples. Providence Zen Center holds two Kyol Che retreats annually, with students sitting up to three months in the winter and four weeks in the summer.

The Heart Kyol Che is an opportunity for students who cannot sit the traditional Kyol Che, or who can sit only part of it, to participate by doing extra practice at home and participating in together practice as they are able. This will run concurrently with the traditional Kyol Che, ending on Buddha's Birthday in April. By doing this Heart Kyol Che together, we strengthen our own practice, and provide support to our fellow students who are able to sit the traditional Kyol Che. We in turn can draw inspiration and energy from their commitment. You can participate in the Heart Kyol Che through your commitment to practice at home and by attending talks, sittings, and retreats at the Zen Center. During the Heart Kyol Che period the Great Lake Zen Center will offer extended sitting hours and an intensive practice week. During the Heart Kyol Che period you can participate by committing to extra practice to show your support in a variety of ways. Some ideas are as follows:

Commit to daily practice (suggested minimum is recitation of the Four Great Vows; bowing; chanting of the Heart Sutra; and sitting fifteen minutes)

Do daily mantra practice (suggested minimum is one thousand Kwan Seum Bosals)

A personal day of silence and mindfulness

Do extended sittings (suggested minimum is one)

Attend GLZC Dharma talks (suggested minimum is one)

Attend a YMJJ retreat (suggested minimum is one day)

Volunteer for work practice at GLZC. (Contact our House Master Chris Rundblad if interested in helping with the cleaning or maintenance of our Center)

The Garden

Mike Zinke, BDT

Originally there was nothing. Then the grass was removed, the soil was turned and raked, the rocks were removed and peat moss was added to help the soil retain moisture. Seeds and starter plants were introduced to the warmth and protection of the soil. Some took hold and sprouted; some weren't strong enough or fertile enough to survive in this new, strange environment and died before maturing.

The survivors grew and formed plants. The plants produced blossoms that later became peas, beans, tomatoes, sunflowers, corn, and a host of other delicious foods. During their growing period, plenty of hard work was required to remove the weeds that threatened to strangle the weaker plants and it seemed that every part of the country except the garden received ample rain during the summer. Watering the garden became a nightly ritual. But before long you could bend over and pluck a pea pod from the vine and without uttering a single sound the pea pod would offer its life to the harvester. Then came the beans and tomatoes. The garden kept giving of itself throughout the summer. At times its generosity exceeded our requirements and new homes had to be found for the surplus.

Then, slowly at first, the leaves of the plants started turning brown at the edges. The edges became wrinkled, dry, and crumbly. No amount of watering or care helped as the brown color and dryness spread throughout the leaves, then the stalks, and finally down to the roots of the plants. The plants slowly decayed. The colder nights and occasional frost sped the plant's demise. New growth stopped, the bountiful supply of offerings decreased to only a few of the hardiest plants and soon even they gave up the struggle. The sunflowers that once stood straight, tall, and reached for the sun now bent over as if looking for a place to lie down in surrender to the approaching winter.

Then on a cold November night, the skeletons of the garden plants were placed into the fire pit. A match was struck and the flames started to consume what little remained of the garden. The flames started slowly, then seemed to jump from one plant carcass to another, then to another, and another. The flames rose high and the darkness of the night gave way to the light offered by the fire. Hiss! What little moisture remaining in the stalks turned to steam from the heat of the fire. Pop! What was once a thriving, living plant now succumbed to the hungry fire. The yellow, orange, and blue tongue of the fire engorged the decaying flesh of the garden; leaving only ashes in its path. Crackle! The flames leapt higher and higher as if dancing in a celebration of destruction. Hiss! More moisture turned to steam – or is that a plant



crying out in pain? The night's darkness is illuminated by hundreds of tiny, glowing embers flying high into the air before slowly descending back to the ground where the glow gradually disappears and the remaining ash grows cold once again.

The flames grow smaller as the fuel supply is consumed, then without notice they suddenly grow larger as new food is found in an attempt to temporarily satisfy the fire's hunger. Soon there is no more food for the insatiable flames and they also start to disappear. Beneath the ashes of what was once the garden grows a bed of hot embers. The embers appear to pulsate as if they are a living, breathing entity. A slight breeze feeds the embers and they grow brighter, burst into flames, then the flames die out once more. The embers continue to breath for hours after the flames have disappeared; consuming every last ounce of plant flesh.

As the flames dissipate, darkness recaptures the night. At first a slight dimming is noticed, then swiftly the heavy darkness falls upon the area extinguishing what little light remains. The evening cold, replaced by the warmth offered by the fire, returns with a vengeance as if angry for being pushed away. The night is very still, very dark, very quiet. The garden is now only ashes.

Sometimes we humans feel as though we will last forever, or that new car we so badly want will last forever, or that our happiness or good position will last forever. But we forget the characteristics of external phenomena – things are created (arising), they start to form (stability), then they start to decay (decline) and then they disappear (dissolution). When we get attached to things we ignore these characteristics. We think that our material things will last forever, or that we will last forever or our good situation will last forever. We think these things because this is what we want, what we desire. Our suffering is caused by not recognizing that eventually all things will decay and disappear – just as the once flourishing garden is no more.

Kids

Frank Pauc

"You never thought I would turn out like this, did you?"

Stefan asked me that with a crooked grin as we sat in El Beso, eating Mexican food. Stefan had been telling me about his newfound atheism, among other things. No, I hadn't expected Stefan to turn out this way and I couldn't remember any more what I had expected. However, I was pretty sure it wasn't the young man sitting across from me in the restaurant booth. I tried to decide what I felt. Was it sadness? Was it amusement? Was it both?

There are few relationships more tangled in attachments than that of a parent and a child. The problems in a parent/child relationship require a clear mind, and that is exactly what is so difficult to attain. Desperate hopes and visceral fears permeate everything, and the probability of seeing reality is low. Everything is too intense and personal. It is like when I look at something so closely that I can't properly focus on it.

Zen encourages to person to act in a way that is "not for me," to be selfless and compassionate. With my kids, how can I tell the difference between what is "for me" and what is "not for me?" What am I doing out of love, and what am I doing to satisfy my own desires? Is a college degree something I want for my child or is it something I want for me? Why does it bother me if my son smokes weed? Should I care who my daughter dates? The boundary between "for me" and "not for me" is porous and shifting. Needs and wants change and it may be impossible to sort them out rationally.

Zen teaches that things in our world are transient. Nothing remains static. When Stefan first came home from Texas, he hugged me and jokingly said, "Hey, Old Man." He was both teasing me and stating and stating an undeniable fact. As we embraced, I wondered what happened to the little boy I had held in my arms and perhaps Stefan wondered what happened to the man who had arms strong enough to hold him. Both those people are long gone. The Zen teaching smacked both of us upside our heads.

Sitting on a cushion helps. It's not that meditation enables me to understand my relationship with my children. That probably won't happen. Zen helps me to accept our relationship as it is. It is liberating in that I don't need to figure it out.

Zen helps me to cut through the veil of my hopes and fears. It allows me to look across the table and actually see the young man with the goofy smile and the laughing eyes. It

allows me to truly see the young woman with those dark brown eyes that are anxious and sad. It allows me to perceive the Buddha nature that shines through them with a terrifying brilliance. It allows me to love them.

Buddha's Enlightenment Day Poem

Sitting in the morning dark,

The Buddha looked up at the
morning star.

What did he see? What did he get?

Tonight, no stars, only rain.

What do you see? What do you get?

Originally, no stars, no rain,

What is rain's original nature?

Plop! Plop! Plop!

Happy Buddha's Enlightenment
Day!

Chong Kwan (Peter Neuwald)
December 9, 1999

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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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