

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 8, Issue 3

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

June, 2006

A Thousand Eyes, a Thousand Hands

Zen Master Seong Hyang

The Buddha taught that human beings' original mistake is perceiving ourselves as separate entities. All of the infinite manifestations of human suffering originate from feeling separate.

The Sanskrit word "Buddha" means "the Awakened One." Just as it is possible to be more and more awake, it is possible to go into a deeper and deeper sleep. As we awaken, we become more intimate with the sources of joy and pain.

How do we awaken from the illusion of separateness? Reading about waking up will not wake us up. Sincerely wishing to wake up, becoming more and more aware of our "stuck places" will not completely wake us up. What is the ultimate alarm clock? Is there an absolute, earthshaking, fool-proof method to shake us out of our sleepy habit force?

In Zen practice we ask "what is this?" To ask this is to inquire into each moment of our lives. To ask this is to let go of our ancient assumptions, opinions, and desires, and wake up to what is actually happening in this very moment.

In my work as a Hospice nurse, I have many opportunities to be with people as they are sick and dying. We have a large poster in our office which says, "Dying is no reason to stop living." As ironic as it may seem, dying often awakens people to living. Tremendous healing can occur during the dying process, at death, and after death both for the dying person and for their family and friends.

A few years ago, my father died very suddenly. Unable to be with him at the time of his death, I felt a need to do some type of ceremony. I went up to the attic of my parents' home, put a picture of my father on an altar, lit the candles and incense, and began to chant the "Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra."

The message of this sutra is that each of us is capable of great compassion and wisdom. Each one of us has the potential to open an infinite number of eyes, and to sprout an infinite number of hands. We can use all those eyes and hands to see and reach out to our fellow sentient beings throughout the universe, extending our wisdom and compassion.

As I chanted, I felt myself getting confused about why I was chanting, and who I was chanting to. I began wondering where my father was, and what I wanted the chanting to do for him (or, for that matter, for me.) I noticed that I was doing just what we do so often: I was separating myself from the chanting and from my father, and thinking about a goal or purpose for my actions.

At that point of confusion, I felt inadequate and very humble. I asked myself, "What is this? What does it mean to chant for someone after they die?" While questioning, I continued to chant.

For a few moments I tried to perceive my father's karmic suffering, and direct my energy in some way that would be healthy and bring him increased clarity. Trying that felt contrived, pompous, and useless. Who was I to try to help direct my father's flight into who knows where?

Again I asked, "what is this?" My head full of questions and doubt, I continued to chant. Thoughts of the confusing life my father and I had together flashed across my mind.

Then, finally, I was able to just chant, just try to hear my own sound, the sound of the sutra's words being repeated over and over again. 'Tis is the medicine of chanting: filling our usually busy mind with simple syllables, repeating these sounds that have no intellectual messages, and just listening.

Again I thought of my father, and his passing, and gradually, like warm sand heating my body after a plunge in the cool ocean, I allowed myself to remember the love I had for him. The love I felt in those moments was strong and simple. Subject and object fell away, leaving just a daughter's love for her father - just love.

In those moments, I felt awake and intimately connected to my father, dropping my habits of judging and controlling. Simply and genuinely, just loving him.

I have regrets about not having been able to feel that intimacy with my father while he was alive. But regrets can be a powerful fuel to move us towards a deeper commitment to heal, a deeper commitment to continually ask, "what is this?"

Whether we perceive our experiences as joyful or painful doesn't matter. The more we awaken, the less we make distinctions. We gradually stop thinking in terms of opposites (good and bad, health and illness) and simply are with each moment in a clear and open relationship. Our healing, our growth, come from being open and awake. Our discomfort, our suffering, come from defending and protecting our delusional separate selves.

This is the healing process - awakening to the original wholeness of life. Open and present in this moment, the thought of healing disappears; healing is a human idea. There is only being in an intimate relationship with the conditions and situations in our lives.

'Tis the Season *Michael Zinke, BT*

Ah yes, it's time for the old Zen saying, "Spring comes, grass grows by itself". As I drive around the city doing warm weather errands like going to the hardware store multiple times a day to get a whatchamacallit to fix something and then another trip to get one of those new fangled, multiple use, hammer/saw/screwdriver/monkey wrench combination tools to fix some other thing that broke last winter, I see Rummage Sale signs popping up faster than dandelions in the neighbor's yard. So, maybe we need to update that ancient Zen saying to be a little more modern something that fits our times – "Spring comes, rummage sale signs pop up by themselves". I'm not sure which is worse, all the rummage/garage sale signs that clog the streets or the rummage sale shoppers who stop traffic by driving by real slowly trying to determine if there's treasure to be found at a sale before they pull over and park. And then there are the shoppers that drive at normal speed and then all of a sudden hit the brakes to look and eventually pull over to the side of the road whenever they get a glimpse of a possible rummage sale sign. Driving around on a Saturday morning is kind of like driving through an obstacle course. As I weave my way around these people I feel somewhat like an Olympic slalom skier flying down the course zigzagging around the gates, on the verge of crashing at any moment.

To me the entire concept of rummage sales is interesting. People take whatever they don't want or need anymore and sell it to someone who decides it is just exactly what they have been looking for. A lot of times the objects for sale are so old they don't work properly anymore, are broken, have missing parts, and a host of other problems. It's fun to sit and watch people sort through one person's discards and seeing the excitement on their faces when they find that perfect "thing" that they feel is priceless. If you could watch the faces of both the buyer and the seller at the moment the transaction is closed monetarily you would see the seller's face full of relief and the buyer's face full of excitement. The seller feels like "Thank God I got rid of that thing" and the buyer feels like "What a deal, this guy is really stupid for letting this go so cheaply". Everyone is happy, for the moment anyway.

And now you're asking, "what's a rummage sale have to do with Zen?". Well, rummage sales are a good example of letting go of your attachment to specific things. We hold on to things for a long, long time and then one day we decide that we don't really need that item anymore and it goes on top of a makeshift table in your driveway some Saturday morning and the attachment is broken in exchange for some cash. Well, that's what it looks like on the surface. Usually the driving force behind a rummage sale is the desire to obtain cash to purchase a new item of interest. So, in essence, we are simply trading one attachment for a new attachment. And, as we all know (but usually refuse to believe) that new thing we are getting attached to will someday end up on a rummage sale table, also. The cycle of forming, being, disintegrating, and disappearing continues because that process cannot be controlled by us. New attachments are formed, obtained, interest is lost, and then the rummage sale signs come out because desire mind causes new attachments to be formed and the cycle just keeps repeating and repeating.

So rummage sales offer a lot of Zen teaching. We see the objects of some earlier attachment being broken by the seller, attachments being created by the buyers, new attachments being formed in the seller's mind while counting the newly acquired cash, desire mind on the part of the buyers, and the condition of many of the items for sale provide clear insight into impermanence. We also see a lot of checking mind. The seller's mind checks things that sell quickly -- Did I price that too low? Should I have asked for more money on that item? The seller's mind also checks things that aren't selling so quickly -- Did I price that item too high? Why doesn't someone buy that really neat lamp? It is so pretty. It should have sold quickly. The same time the seller's mind is checking, checking, checking; the buyer's mind is checking, also. Do I really need this? Is it worth the money they're asking for it? Does it work? Can I get them to go lower on the price?

All that Zen teaching going on in some stranger's driveway and no one even realizes it because minds are focused entirely on the desire to either get rid of an item or to obtain an item. The buyers at a rummage sale don't realize that the item they desire at that very moment will soon be the item they desire to get rid of in a future moment. Their mind is off thinking about the object of their current desire and how they can obtain it for the least amount of money. Desire mind usually wins and new treasures are piled into cars and taken to new homes. And you thought it was just a rummage sale.

Is there a way to stop the cycle of wanting, using, disposing, and wanting something else? Sure. All you have to do is realize the impermanence of objects and stop your desire mind. Stop your desire mind and you'll stop a large part of suffering in your life. Sounds pretty easy in theory but is it easy to actually apply in your life? What would you say if the Buddha came up to you on the street one day and told you that if you gave up your worldly possessions and stopped wanting more and more and more; you would have a lot less suffering in your life? Most people would laugh and walk away. So, here's an experiment for you; a way to ease into this gradually. Take something that you have had for a long time. Something that you really like and give it away. Don't think about it. Just give the item you have selected to someone else. It will be difficult, but after a while you'll find that you don't really miss it and you aren't worried about it anymore. Then you'll experience just a little less suffering in your life.



Zen Master Dae Kwang

YMJJ Retreat

July 22 - 23

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for July 22-23, 2006. 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 \$80 for both days, or \$40 for Saturday only and \$30 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, and washcloth/towel.

The retreat will begin with a free public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang at 7:30 PM on Friday, July 21st. 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.**

Calendar of Upcoming Events

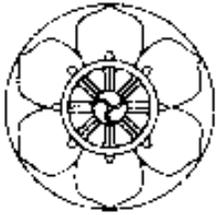
July, 2006

Monday, July 3 – No Introduction to Zen or Practice. Enjoy the holiday.

Friday, July 21: Public Talk by Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm

Saturday and Sunday, July 22 – 23. YMJJ Led by Zen Master Dae Kwang.

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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.

