
MOON ON THE WATER

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Summer 2014

Zen is Understanding Yourself

Zen Master Seung Sahn

One day a student from Chicago came to the Providence Zen Center and asked Seung Sahn Soen-Sa, "What is Zen?"

Soen-sa held his Zen stick above his head and said, "Do you understand?"

The student said, "I don't know."

Soen-sa said, "This don't know mind is you. Zen is understanding yourself."

"What do you understand about me? Teach me."

Soen-sa said, "In a cookie factory, different cookies are baked in the shape of animals, cars, people, and airplanes. They all have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same dough, and they all taste the same."

See Zen is Understanding Yourself

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Every Day and Every Moment

Zen Master Wu Kwang



"Flowers in Springtime, Moon in Autumn, Cool Wind in Summer, Snow in Winter. If you don't make anything in your mind, for you it is a good season."

I often use this poem to teach both new and more experienced Zen students. Quite often, when I ask a student during a private Zen interview to read the poem, I see a spontaneous smile or "Aha" reaction emerge, and a kindling of the student's "faith mind" or original confidence. It's as if he or she were saying, "Yeah, the True Way is like that."

The central point of this poem is essentially a restatement of the third and fourth of the Four Noble Truths, i.e., that there is an end to suffering and that there is a way or path of practice which actualizes the end of suffering. "If you don't make anything in your mind, for you it is a good season."

The poem comes from Case Nineteen of the *Mu Mun Kwan* and is titled "Everyday Mind is the Path." The case is an interchange or dialogue between Zen Master Nam Cheon and his student JoJu, who later became a great Zen Master in his own right. At the time of this Dharma combat JoJu is still an inexperienced student. He asks Master Nam Cheon, "What is the true way?" Nam Cheon responds that "Everyday mind is the true way."

Then, there follows a series of questions by JoJu and answers by Nam Cheon which, one by one, undo JoJu's conceptual orientation. For example, JoJu asks, "Then should I try to keep it or not?" Nam Cheon responds, "If

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“In the same way, all things in the universe – the sun, the moon, the stars, mountains, rivers, people, and so forth – have different names and forms, but they are all made from the same substance. The universe is organized into pairs of opposites: light and darkness, man and woman, sound and silence, good and bad. But all these opposites are mutual, because they are made from the same substance. Their names and their forms are different, but their substance is the same. Names and forms are made by your thinking. If you are not thinking and have no attachment to name and form, then all substance is one. You don’t know mind cuts off all thinking. This is your substance. The substance of this Zen stick and your own substance are the same. You are this stick; this stick is you.”

The student said, “Some philosophers say this substance is energy, or mind, or God, or matter. Which is the truth?”

Soen-sa said, “Four blind men went to the zoo and visited the elephant. One blind man touched its side and said, ‘The elephant is like a wall.’ The next blind man touched its trunk and said, ‘The elephant is like a snake.’ The next blind man touched its leg and said, ‘The elephant is like a column.’ The last blind man touched its tail and said, ‘The elephant is like a broom.’ Then the four blind men started to fight, each one believing that his opinion was the right one. Each only understood the part he had touched; none of them understood the whole.

“Substance has no name and no form. Energy, mind, God, and matter are all name and form. Substance is the Absolute. Having name and form is having opposites. So the whole world is like the blind men fighting among themselves. Not understanding yourself is not understanding the truth. That is why there is fighting among ourselves. If all the people in the world understood themselves, they would attain the Absolute. Then the world would be at peace. World peace is Zen.”

The student said, “How can practicing Zen make world peace?”

Soen-sa said, “People desire money, fame, sex, food, and rest. All this desire is thinking. Thinking is suffering. Suffering means no world peace. Not thinking is not suffering. Not suffering means world peace. World peace is the Absolute. The Absolute is I.”

The student said, “How can I understand the Absolute?”

Soen-sa said, “You must first understand yourself.”

“How can I understand myself?”

Soen-sa held up the Zen stick and said, “Do you see this?”

He then quickly hit the table with the stick and said, “Do you

hear this? This stick, this sound, your mind – are they the same or different?”

The student said, “The same.”

Soen-sa said, “If you say they are the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will still hit you thirty times. Why?”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa shouted, “KATZ!!!” Then he said, “Spring comes, the grass grows by itself.”

Every Day and Every Moment

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you try to keep it, already you are mistaken.” Finally, Nam Cheon exclaims, “If you completely attain the true way of not thinking, it is like space, clear and void. So why do you make right and wrong?” At this, JoJu got enlightenment.

In the case, there is only talk of the Mind of no thinking, clear and void like space. The poem emphasizes how one with such a mind functions in contact with time, part of the phenomenal world, which is indicated by the four seasons. In a few words, it demonstrates a non-clinging way of being/becoming, a way of encountering the events of life. In this sense, it is in accord with Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching of “Don’t make anything, don’t hold anything, don’t attach to anything. Then you will realize that you have everything.”

And a similar point is made in Zen Master Yun Men’s case in the *Blue Cliff Record*, “Every Day is a Good Day” (Case Number Six):

Yun Men, instructing, said, “Don’t ask me before the fifteenth day of the month (Borom). After Borom, you must bring me one word.” He answered himself, “Every day is a good day.”

Our teaching in the Kwan Um School of Zen proceeds from “every day is a good day” to “every moment is a good moment.” So a number of important questions for practice appear from the four seasons poem and Yun Men’s case.

1. How can you demonstrate the meaning of, “if you don’t make anything in your mind, for you it’s a good season?”
2. What is the true meaning of “Every day is a good day?”
3. How can you demonstrate your understanding of “every moment is a good moment?”

And finally: A good season, a good day, and a good moment, how are all of these different? Which one is the best?

Calendar of Upcoming Events

June 2014

- Introduction to Zen
Monday, June 2, 7:30 - 9:00 PM
- GLZC's Locust St Festival Open House
Sunday, June 8, 11:00 AM - 8:00 PM
- Public Talk with Zen Master Wu Kwang
Friday, June 20, 7:30 PM
- YMJJ Saturday – Sunday
June 21 - 22
- Dharma Talk
Wednesday, June 25, 7:30 - 9:00 PM

July 2014

- Introduction to Zen
Monday, July 7, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
- Dharma Talk
Wednesday, July 23, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

August 2014

- Introduction to Zen
Monday, August 4, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
- Extended Practice
Friday, August 22, 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM
- Dharma Talk
Wednesday, August 27, 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM

Public Talk with Zen Master Wu Kwang Friday, June 20, 7:30 PM

Please join us for a free Public Dharma Talk by Dharma Teacher, Andy Yenchu, followed by Q&A with Zen Master Wu Kwang. Zen Master Wu Kwang, (Richard Shrobe) is guiding teacher of the Chogye International Zen Center of New York and lives in New York with his family. Before he began practicing Zen he studied intensively with Swami Satchidananda, living with his wife and children for four years at the Integral Yoga Institute in New York. He has a Master's degree in Social Work and did six years of postgraduate study in Gestalt, including training with Laura Perls. He has been director of a drug program, and has served as an instructor in psychiatry and Gestalt therapy. He started practicing with Zen Master Seung Sahn in 1975 and was given inka in 1984. He received dharma transmission on August 1, 1993. A former professional musician, his undergraduate training was in music theory, and he also studied with jazz pianist, Barry Harris. Currently he has a private practice in psychotherapy specializing in the Gestalt approach. He has written three books: *Open Mouth Already a Mistake, Don't Know Mind: The Spirit of Korean Zen*, and *Elegant Failure: A Guide to Zen Koans*, all available from Amazon.com.

YMJJ Retreat Led by Zen Master Wu Kwang

Saturday, June 21 – Sunday, June 22

GLZC is excited to announce that Zen Master Wu Kwang will lead a two-day YMJJ retreat, beginning at 6:00 am on Saturday, June 21 and ending at noon on Sunday, June 22.

The retreat will be held at GLZC. In addition to leading the retreat, Zen Master Wu Kwang will be conducting interviews. Vegetarian meals are provided. Sleeping space is available at no extra charge at GLZC or members' homes. Those planning on staying at GLZC should bring a sleeping bag, pillow and washcloth/towel. You may register for this YMJJ by signing up at GLZC or [contact us](mailto:info@glzc.org) (info@glzc.org).

Great Lake Zen Center Open House June 8, 11:00 am – 8:00 pm

Join us for our annual **Open House**, held in conjunction with **Locust Street Festival of Music and Art**. As part of the festivities members of our Sangha will be staffing a booth outside the GLZ Center. Stop by to say hi or learn more about GLZC or about Zen in general. We will be giving tours of our Center and free introductions to Zen Meditation throughout the day. See you there!

Waiting for Poppy

Chris Rundblad, DT

I get really impatient with waiting. I hate wasting time just hanging around waiting for someone else to show up, or finish a job, or get to the point. I sometimes feel like I spend half my life waiting in waiting rooms, waiting for the dog to poop, waiting in line. What is the absolute worst, though, is waiting at Metro Market while my ninety-year-old-plus mother spends two or more hours picking out groceries. It is the worst because I also feel guilty about my lack of patience. I really try to be patient, but there are those thousand-and-one things I should be doing. Unfinished business and projects agitate in the gut for attention. I have discovered that to “try to be patient” is an attempt already doomed. I was reminded this week that sometimes paying attention to the natural world reveals the obvious truth of a situation that I, distracted, miss.

My friend, another Chris, invited me for tea in her poppy garden. In spite of my to-do list, I went. I will copy here what I wrote down in my notebook when I got home:

The poppies in Chris' garden wore sun smacked red-orange crepe-paper petals swishing around like dresses in the breeze. This was their first day. Others were still tucked inside pale green pecan-size bud cases with soft silver fuzz. We spotted one bobbing case with a thin wound of red, like split skin. At second glance, the bud case split wider as if the petals within were getting too big for their clothes. We watched the petals strain and strain for release. We watched for nearly an hour, this little birth in slow motion. Finally the casing fell to the ground and the petals unfurled the way newborn butterfly's wings do as they fill and spread. Finally: a full out poppy flower just in time for the last of the day's full sunlight. Its neighbor, an older poppy, perhaps a day old, had finished its dance and dropped its petals leaving a seed pod vase topped with the darkest richest royal purple velvet.

In the midst of all our busy-ness and obligations and schedules, we spent a whole hour just watching a poppy open! All our attention. Time just stopped. It was just the poppy. In all its glory. It was like getting hit over the head with a Zen stick. But nicer.

There is a rock in the park near my house with these words engraved, attributed to Jane Hirshfield, but actually with an origin in Buddhist writing: “*Everything Changes. Everything is connected. Pay Attention.*” I told Zen Master Dae Kwang about the quote on the rock when it was installed a few years ago. He told me that most important of all was the function that those words point to. Help all beings. I believe that “pay attention” is the beginning of correct function. It means attend to another with your ears and eyes and hands and heart. The kind of attention we practice while sitting on our cushions or watching a poppy

unfold is the attention we need to give to whatever situation we find ourselves in.

Yesterday I took my mother to Metro Mart. I watched her meticulously hunt for the very best produce and ask other shoppers for advice on which wine was the best. She actually flirted with the meat guy and got extra samples from the bread counter. She does the cute little old lady thing well, for good reason. I gave up on patience and just paid attention. If I can spend an hour watching a poppy, I can spend an hour watching my mother. It was the best waiting time I have experienced in a long time. Attention is another word for patience.



Abbot's Corner

Be Kind

Pete Neuwald, Abbot

At a breakfast during a Dharma Teacher Retreat in late September of 2001, someone asked Zen Master Soeng Hyang how we should respond to the then current events of 9/11. She responded, “Be kind.” At the time, I remember thinking that this answer was somehow inadequate. A response to a terrible act and all the hatred and sorrow that both caused the act and responded to the act surely would not be something so simple as “be kind.”

Lately, I've been paying more attention to this “be kind” kong-an. It doesn't seem too simple now. To be kind is something that we can practice each and every day with whomever is around us, at work, at home, while grocery shopping, everywhere. It's not always so easy to be kind. When we see drivers who go too fast or too slow, or don't use directional lights or leave them flashing, or whatever, there are far too many times when my anger rises up and I put them in the jerk box.

Be Kind

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Maybe it's not a large anger, but it is anger nonetheless. To be kind we need to attain the interconnectedness of all of us. How many times do we react negatively to people upon first sight, even before we have had any interaction with them? Maybe they seem cold and unfriendly, or maybe they seem too flighty and flamboyant for our taste. The fact is that we don't know the back-stories of everyone we encounter. We all have "stuff." To be kind, we need to let go of our judging mind, which is really letting go of preconceived notions of what we think we should all be like. So being kind takes some effort and practice.

One of the "be kind" practices I've been doing involves being very aware of pedestrians crossing the streets. There are a number of crosswalks that are marked with yellow signs indicating that they are crosswalks. Some even have flashing lights that indicate when pedestrians are crossing. In Wisconsin, it's a state law that drivers must yield the right of way when there are pedestrians in the crosswalk. Apparently, that doesn't register for many drivers. There are many who fail to yield. Just today, I was stopped while three people were crossing on Kilbourn Avenue, flashing lights and all. One driver went around me into the parking lane so he could sneak through in front of the pedestrians. Yet other drivers did not hesitate to stop and wait. It may be anecdotal, but it does seem like more people are practicing being kind to pedestrians over the past several months. Being kind is something that can be nurtured and passed along from being to being.

As Zen Master Soeng Hyang said, "All I can say to you is just try to be kind. That's the biggest kong-an. How can I be kind in this moment? That's correct relationship, function, and situation. That's what all these kong-ans are trying to point to. All of them."

Just Like the Very First Time

Frank Pauc

Perhaps it is normal for a person to be nostalgic, at least about some things. I think that most people have fond memories of some periods in their lives, and they often wish that they could experience those times again. People sometimes go to great lengths to relive some event. The past event could be almost anything. It could

have been the first kiss, a ride in their first car, or a trip to an exotic place. People want to have the same feeling again, that same thrill. They want it to be just like the very first time.

This is a recipe for suffering. Zen teaches us that what's done is done, and we can never relive a particular moment in our lives. However, it's hard to believe that. Some things in our lives were so intense and so enjoyable that we want very much to relive those experiences. When we try to relive what is now only in our memories, we are usually cruelly disappointed. It's never the same.

I think of the first time I listened to the album "Tommy" from The Who. It was back in 1971. The music shook to my core, and I can still remember being overwhelmed by the emotions I felt as listened to the songs. I have a copy of the record at home, and I still listen to it now and then. It feels different somehow. The notes are now familiar, and there is no longer the shock and elation and wonder that I felt all those years ago. The music is the same. However, I've changed. I can never again hear it like it was the first time. There is some sorrow in that. I can't have that initial experience again. That can only happen once.

Avoidance is the flip side of attachment. A person might do everything possible to keep from re-experiencing a hurtful event. That is not necessarily all bad. It's probably a good idea to refrain from placing your hand on hot stove a second time. However, people often avoid anything that reminds them of the unpleasant experience, and in doing so, miss out on a part of life that could be useful.

After I got out of the Army, I was angry and bitter about my military years, and I wanted to eradicate those memories. I tried to do everything I could to keep our children from living that kind of life. Karma had its own ideas, and our oldest son, Hans, joined the Army. He asked my wife and I to attend his graduation from boot camp at Fort Knox, KY. We went there. It was a trying time for me, but our son needed us to be with him. Much of the ceremony disturbed me, but some of it I found oddly inspiring. I remembered some things, good things, about the Army that I had forgotten. The experience was cathartic, and it helped me to be more accepting of Hans' deployment to Iraq and his experiences in that war. To my relief, Hans' graduation was not like my experience thirty years prior. There were similarities, but it wasn't like the first time.

The main problem with trying to relive or to avoid the past is that it keeps a person from truly living in the present moment, our only moment. The truth is that whatever I do right here and right now is like the very first time. It is really the only time. If I reach out and hold my wife's hand, it is like I never did it before. If I kiss her now, it is like the first kiss. If I can live in the present, everything is new.

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

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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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