

MOON ON THE WATER

Volume 9, Issue 2

Newsletter of the Great Lake Zen Center, Milwaukee, WI

April/May, 2007

Why Do We Practice?

Susi Childress, SDT

This is a question newcomers to the Zen Center sometimes ask our teachers. I suppose the answer is different for everyone, but I'd like to share with you how I've experienced the value of Zen practice.

I first came to a public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang about eleven years ago. At the time I was searching for answers. On the outside I probably looked O.K., but on the inside there was chaos. I felt like I was in a small boat on the high seas, and with each approaching wave, I held on tight to keep from falling overboard. At first I looked for someone or something to rescue me, and I became depressed when no life preserver was tossed in my direction. I had tried many things to try to get some stability, but each time I thought I had found something that helped, it would all come crashing down around me again. One day I was in the bookstore, looking for yet another self-help book that would give me the answer to all my problems when I inadvertently crossed over to the psychology and philosophy book section and found a book on Zen. This was the beginning of my journey on the path, yet at the time, I don't think I really believed that anything would help me. I was fascinated by the ideas in the book, which mostly detailed how to sit and practice Zen. It was enough to get me started, and when I saw an ad in the newspaper about a Zen Master coming to Milwaukee to give a public talk, I promised myself that I would attend.

The talk given by the teacher was entertaining and helpful, and Zen Master Dae Kwang's words were very clear: "The most important thing is to practice!"

The next week I came to practice for the first time and was given instructions. When we chanted, I was overcome by a desire to giggle. It all seemed so funny to me, and I was so hopelessly lost when it came to chanting, but I kept trying. After I had a few practices under my belt, I quit worrying about how silly it all seemed and about how bad I was at chanting, and started concentrating on just doing it. Over time the outside conditions began to fall away, and I was just doing together action with the other Zen students. Practice became a refuge for me. I no longer combed the bookshelves for answers to my problems. In fact I stopped thinking about solving problems and just focused on my practice.

After a year or so of regular practice, my daughter surprised me by saying, "I can't believe how much you've changed!"

"In what way?" I asked her.

"Well, you seem so much calmer, and you don't get upset so easily," she replied.

I was surprised because I hadn't really noticed the change, but after she mentioned it, I realized that my focus was what had actually changed. I wasn't so concerned about fluctuating situations and trying to control outcomes. I also wasn't constantly checking myself and others. Perhaps some of the teachings were beginning to sink in: "Everything is created by mind alone;" "All things are inherently empty;" "Who is this for?" "Just do it;" "Only don't know;" "Try, try, try for 10,000 years non-stop;" "Everything is always coming and going." These teachings permeated my consciousness as I sat meditation, and they began to replay in my mind from time to time throughout the day. They gave me direction, encouragement, and focus. My "boat" was no longer rocking wildly on the high seas, but instead I had picked up a paddle and begun to row towards the shore.

I continued to sit with "What am I? Don't know." Ironically this practice helped me develop a sense of self that I had never experienced before. When I was feeling lost and everything in my life was chaotic, I was very hard on myself. My inner thoughts were quite negative and hurtful. Who would have expected that inwardly repeating a phrase that on first examination may seem nihilistic would in fact repair my fragile self-esteem? What happened was that I began to realize that I wasn't my job, my thoughts, or my body, nor was I just a mom, daughter, wife, teacher, or woman. So if I wasn't these things, then what was I? This was a most puzzling question! At some point I began to get a clue. What I was could not be expressed in words and could not be described in any way. It had to be felt from within. I began to see that I was part of something bigger than just "me" when the concept of "Big I" vs. "Small I" was introduced in a Dharma talk. So the irony is that I first repaired my self-esteem by developing a sense of self based on what I wasn't, then accepting that I didn't know what I was. This was followed by an initial realization of a larger concept of self, and then by giving up Small I in favor of Big I.

I continue to struggle with this last one, but at least I recognize the truth of these teachings. Delusion can be insidious, and this is where continuous practice comes in. Practicing at the Zen Center can be very helpful in cutting through delusions because when we interact with others, our likes and dislikes often become apparent. We help others, and they help us to see our attachments. Awareness is the first step in learning how to let go and put it all down.

We are taught in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition to realize our true nature and use this realization to save all sentient beings. Our practice helps us to peel back the layers of likes/dislikes, attachments, and deluded thoughts in order to uncover a core of Great Love and Compassion, and to develop Prajna (wisdom). Then we begin to see how to save this world.

So... Why do I practice? For you.

Great Lake Zen Center Open House

Sunday, June 10, 10:00am – 4:00pm

June 10th is Locust Street Days where the businesses on Locust Street open their doors to the public to enter and see what is being offered. This year GLZC will be opening our doors to friends, neighbors and families on this day. There will be treats, introductions and conversation. This will offer a chance for the public, as well as, newer members to meet other members of the sangha, ask questions in an informal atmosphere, and provide a chance to get to know GLZC better. We are hoping that all sangha members can join us for the open house and bring your family members and friends, also.

Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat

July 20 - 22

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for July 21 - 22, 2007. 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, July 20th. 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.**

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.

April in May

Due to work related issues the April issue of *Moon on the Water* was delayed until May. The regular every other month schedule for the newsletter will continue again in June. I apologize for the delay.

Michael Zinke

Public Talk and YMJJ Retreat

September 28 - 30

A YMJJ retreat has been scheduled with Zen Master Dae Kwang for September 29 - 30, 2007. 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, September 28th. 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.**

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.

Calendar of Upcoming Events

June, 2007

Sunday, June 10. Open House. GLZC. 10:00am – 4:00pm.

July, 2007

Wednesday, July 4. No Practice due to holiday.

Friday, July 20. Public Talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Saturday – Sunday, July 21-22. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, Saturday 6:00am – 9:40pm, Sunday, 6:00am – 3:30pm.

September, 2007

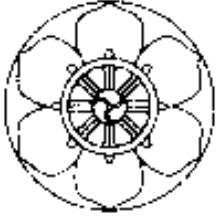
Monday, September 3. No Practice due to holiday.

Friday, September 14. Extended Practice. GLZC 7:00pm – 10:00pm

Friday, September 28. Public talk with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, 7:30pm.

Saturday – Sunday, September 29-30. YMJJ with Zen Master Dae Kwang. GLZC, Saturday 6:00am – 9:40pm, Sunday, 6:00am – 3:30pm

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
Web-Site: www.glzc.org
Kwan Um Web-Site: 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
Treasurer: Dee Schwaiger, DTT
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.

