

### Enlightened and Unenlightened Are Empty Names

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Is an enlightened man’s behavior different from an unenlightened man’s?”

Soen-sa said, “One two three four five six. This begins with one. Where does one come from?”

“Mind.”

“Mind? Where does mind come from?”

The student couldn’t answer.

Soen-sa said, “Now your mind is don’t-know mind. You only don’t know. Where does mind come from? What is mind? I don’t know. This don’t know mind is your true mind. This true mind cuts off all thinking. So mind is no mind. Why? True mind is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking there are no words and no speech. So mind is no mind. Mind is only a name; it is made by thinking. If you cut off thinking, then there is no mind. If you are thinking, you have opposites: good and bad, enlightened and unenlightened. But if you cut off thinking, there are no opposites, there is only the Absolute. Opposites words are dead words. Absolute words are live words. Buddha said, ‘All things have Buddha-nature.’ But Zen Master Jo-ju, when somebody asked him if a dog has Buddha-nature, said, ‘No.’ Which answer is correct, Buddha’s or Jo-ju’s?”

“I think I see that. They’re just words.”

“Yah, just words. Then they are the same?”

“It doesn’t matter. But what I want to know is how a man with empty mind differs in his behavior from a man with thinking mind.”

“So I ask you: are Buddha’s answer and Jo-ju’s answer different or the same?”

“Well, all things have Buddha-nature. Some people know they have Buddha-nature and some people don’t know they have Buddha-nature. Maybe the dog doesn’t know.”

Soen-sa said, “That is a very good answer. The dog doesn’t know Buddha-nature, so he has no Buddha nature. But if you gave me this answer during an interview, I would hit you thirty times. Why?”

“Uh... I’m not answering to play a game.”

“And if you asked your question about an enlightened man’s behavior during an interview, I would also hit you thirty times. Do you understand?”

“I understand the question has no answer.”

“It has many answers.” (Laughter from the audience.) “But if you have not attained enlightenment, everything is different. If you attain enlightenment, all things become one. You must understand this.”

The student bowed and said, “Thank you very much.”

### Small Love and Big Love

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "You always speak of thinking. I would like to know how the Way of the Heart fits into your teaching. In the Christian path it is said that without love all attainments are worthless."

Soen-sa said, "There are two kinds of love. The first is small love. This is desire love, opposites love, attachment love. The second is big love. This is absolute love. It is freedom. If you have desire for yourself, your love is not true love. It is dependent on many conditions; if these change, you suffer. Suppose I love a girl very much, and she loves me. I go away to Los Angeles, and when I come back she has another boyfriend. My love changes to anger and hatred. So small love always contains suffering. Big love has no suffering. It is only love, absolute love, so there is no happiness, no suffering. This is Bodhisattva love."

"I was under the impression that Zen masters don't care particularly about love."

"If I did not love, why would I be teaching? Teaching is love. Hitting my students is true love."

"Why?"

"True teaching means true love. A true teacher sometimes gets angry, sometimes hits, sometimes does bad actions. Why? Because he loves his students very strongly. It is like a mother who loves her child very much. But the child doesn't listen to the mother's good teaching. So sometimes it is necessary for the mother to get angry or hit her child. This is love action. There is no desire for herself; everything is for the child's sake, to teach him the true way. With big love, I have no desire for myself, I only give my love to other people. If I love you and you don't love me, that's okay. I will still give you as much love as if you loved me in return. If I love God and get bad karma in return, that's okay. I will not be angry at God, I will still love as much as before. So Big I is true love. It is only for all people."

"Do you love all people?"

"Of course. All people and all things .... Okay, I will tell you a story. Once, a long time ago in China, there was a monk who went out begging and was on his way back to the temple. On the way, some robbers held him up and took all his money, food, and clothes. They they threw him on his back and tied his hands and feet to the ground with braided strands of the long grass that was growing in the fields. He stayed there, naked, for hours. Finally, the emperor passed with his servants, on their way to the temple. He was shocked to see a naked man near the highway and went up to him to ask what had happened. The monk explained. The emperor said, 'Why haven't you just gotten up?' The monk said, 'Please untie the grass.' The emperor began to pull it up by the roots. 'Stop!' said the monk. 'You mustn't pull it up. Please untie it.' At this the emperor realized that the naked man was a great monk, whose

love extended even to the grass in the fields. So he accompanied him to the temple and took him for his own teacher. So we see that big love doesn't kill anything. Some people think that killing humans is wrong, but killing animals is okay. 'Fishing—ah, it is very interesting.' But Buddhist love is very wide love. Even killing grass is no good, so of course we mustn't kill fish or animals or people. But sometimes killing is big love. If one person wants to kill all people, then killing that person means saving all people."

**Don't-Know Mind**

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "If when you're driving you're just driving, when you sit Zen and ask 'What am I?' are you just the question?"

Soen-sa said, "Just the question. The *name* we give to clear mind is don't-know mind. So you must understand don't-know. Don't-know is don't-know. This is very important."

"But if I understand, then I don't have a don't-know mind, do I?"

"*Who* doesn't know?" (Laughter from the audience) "When you keep don't-know mind—this is don't-know. You are don't-know. All people are given names, like Georgie, Roger, Stephen. But when you were born, you had no name. So mind is no mind. What is mind? I don't know. Your mind's name is don't-know."

"When you're driving, is your mind don't-know or are you just driving?"

"Only driving *is* don't-know." (Laughter) Only keep don't-know mind. Don't-know, okay?" (Laughter)

"*What* don't you know? (Laughter) "I mean, if you're just driving, there's no knowing or not knowing."

"When you are driving, do you have mind?"

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, "Now your mind is don't-know mind. If you are not attached to don't-know, there is only don't-know."

"Don't-know what?"

"What color is this door?"

"Brown."

"You say brown. This is don't-know. Do you understand?"

"I don't-know." (Laughter)

"Yah, you understand don't-know. (Laughter)

"Are you attached to don't-know?"

“*You* are attached to don’t-know! Attachment to words is no good. Only don’t-know. When I drink water, I just drink water, I don’t know, okay? So don’t-know can drink water. Do you understand?”

“Why not say just that you’re drinking water?”

“Now you are speaking. *Who* is speaking?”

The student was silent.

“Don’t know. This don’t-know is speaking.”

“But if I’m just speaking, you don’t need to say don’t-know.”

“Originally there is no name and no form. Its name is don’t-know.”

“Some Zen masters say you must keep great doubt, which is don’t-know mind, I guess. But they say there must come a point where you break through the great doubt into great enlightenment.”

“Great doubt is don’t-know. The names are different—great doubt, great question, great don’t-know. There are many names. My first name is Duk In, my monk’s name is Haeng Won, my enlightenment name is Seung Sahn. I have many names. But none is my true name. When I was born, I had no name. The true name is no name. So great doubt, great question, don’t-know—they are all the same.”

“But when you are a baby, if your mother asks, ‘What are you?’ you don’t answer, ‘I don’t know.’”

“Go ask a baby.” (Laughter)

“A baby doesn’t think ‘know’ or ‘don’t-know’—it just is.”

“Yah, it just is. Only don’t-know. The baby is not attached to the question. You are attached to the question. Don’t-know is clear mind. Don’t-know is before thinking. Don’t-know is like this. You ask me now, ‘What is don’t-know?’”

“What is don’t-know?”

Soen-sa picked up a cup of water and drank. “Do you understand? This is don’t-know.”

“But why say don’t-know? If you’re thirsty, you just drink. Why does a Zen person go around thinking, ‘I don’t-know?’” (Laughter)

“If you are thinking, this is not don’t-know.” (Laughter) “Don’t-know is not-thinking. There is only don’t-know. Socrates used to go around Athens saying, ‘You must know yourself.’ Once a student of his asked him, ‘Do you know yourself?’ Socrates said, ‘I don’t know, but I understand this don’t-know.’ I don’t-know, but when I am thirsty I drink. I don’t know, but when I am tired I sleep. Only this.”

“The original question is ‘What am I?’ and your answer is ‘I don’t know.’ *Who* doesn’t know? You’re still stuck in the question. You’re on one end of it. Either I know or I don’t know, and they’re opposites. What if you throw the whole thing away and just live?”  
(Laughter)

Soen-sa laughed and said, “You’re thinking, thinking, thinking. So I will hit you thirty times!” (Laughter) “What are you?”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “You don’t know. *This* mind. If you keep this mind, and are not attached to the words ‘I don’t-know,’ you will soon understand.”

### Shikan Taza and Kong-an

One evening, after a Dharma talk at the Boston Dharmadhatu, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What is the difference between shikan taza and kong-an practice?”

Soen-sa said, “When I was in Los Angeles last month, many people asked me about the difference between Soto and Rinzai Zen. I answered, ‘They are the same.’ Only the externals are different. Soto uses awareness of breathing to cut off thinking. Kong-an Zen uses the kong-an to cut off thinking. Only the method is different. Cutting off thinking and becoming clear mind is the same. They are two doors into the same room. So if I am attached to shikan taza or to the kong-an, then they are different. But if I am not attached, then they are the same.”

The student said, “Sometimes you hear of people struggling with kong-ans for years. That bothers me. The implication is that either they’re on the wrong path or it takes all that time to realize you shouldn’t struggle at all. Are you saying there shouldn’t be a struggle?”

Soen-sa said, “Keeping the mind that desires enlightenment is the wrong way to use the kong-an. Only keep the great question. The great question means cutting off all thinking, becoming empty mind. So the mind that keeps the great question *is* enlightenment! You are already enlightened, but you don’t know it. So after much hard training: ah, *this* is enlightenment! It is very easy. Can you see your eyes?”

“No.”

“You have no eyes? You have eyes. Can you hold your mind?”

“No.”

“You have no mind? It is the same. Can you see this cup? Can you hear my voice?”

“Yes.”

“This is your mind. My eyes can’t see my eyes. To try to see my eyes is the wrong way. My mind can’t understand my mind. So to try to understand my mind is the wrong way. If you cut off this mind, you will soon attain enlightenment. I can see this cup; so I have eyes. I can hear this sound; so I have mind. What am I? I am asking I. So there are no opposites. Having no opposites is the Absolute. So all thinking is cut off. Only don’t know, only empty mind. This is my true self. It is very easy.”

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What does Zen teach about sex?”

Soen-sa said, “There is a famous sutra called the Hua-yen sutra, which tells the story of a prostitute. Every day she sold her body many times. Every day different men came and had sex with this woman. But any time a man would have sex with her, he would become enlightened. So she was only using sex to teach Buddhism. When a man came to her, he had many desires. But after being with her, he had no desires, he understood his true self, and he went away with a clear mind. This sex is saving-all-people sex. But if I have sex because I like it, because of my own desires, it will result in suffering. So sex itself is neither good nor bad. What is important is your intention. Why are you having sex? This mind is very important. This woman was having sex many times a day, with different men, but her intention was to save all people. But if I want sex, if I am thinking, ‘Ah, what a beautiful girl! I want her!’, then I will suffer, I will be making bad karma. So when you are involved with sex, it is very important to check your mind. Why do you want sex?”

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Hello from Cambridge. Things are going very well. We all enjoyed your last visit very much. Here there are many laughter, many hard training. I now lead the chanting every day and Richard is ready to do it also. Jonnie, Richard and I take turns. They know the bell chant too.

We opened our Monday evening house meetings to all members and about 15-20 people came. Many want to use Sunday for sitting, so we now have people come and sit Sunday from 9:00 in the morning until 9:00 in the evening.

Enclosed are two student letters. I know you like to answer right away.

Question: why is 90 degrees called “karma I”? Isn’t there karma at 0 degrees?

The mouse is getting very fat  
Soon no more food left—  
I must say good-bye and return to the Zendo.

Love,

Byon Jo (Larry)

Love to Mu Gak, Linc and Jerry

New York

April 11, 1975

Dear Byon Jo,

Thank you for your letter. I am very glad that things are so good at the Cambridge Zen Center and that you have learned the chanting. I was also happy to hear about the open house meetings and the Sunday sittings. These are very good ideas.

About your question: At 90° there is no attachment to name and form, but there *is* attachment to karma, to thinking. From 0° to 90° there is only attachment to name and form. For example, somebody desires money or sex. Of course, this is his karma, but since he doesn’t realize that, he is not attached to his karma, only to the object of his desire. True karma is, for example, when you are dreaming or just thinking. Name-and-form does not exist for you then, and time and space are no hindrance. So the karma I is attached to its own perceptions or ideas, attached to good feelings or interesting thoughts.

You said that the mouse is getting very fat. You are very attached to this mouse! Why have you thrown away the cat-bowl? You must find “cat-bowl” and “broken”. Then you will attain the true meaning of this kong-an. A quarter is twenty-five cents.

Nowadays we are all doing hard training fixing the Zen Center. We hope to have most of the work finished before the opening ceremony. It will be a very good Zen center.

You must come to the opening ceremony and bring as many people from Cambridge as you can. This is very important. Cambridge, Providence, the International Zen Center of New York, and New Haven are all one big Zen Center. So together action is necessary. It is very important for you to be at the opening ceremony. Different action, action for yourself, is no good. This time you made plans before you knew about our ceremony. But in the future you must try to avoid this kind of conflict. It is okay for you to come just for the ceremony and to leave right after. Please tell all people in Cambridge the same. I would like all of them to come.

See you soon.

S.S.

Hello to the Cambridge family from our New York family.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for your reply to my last letter. I have been trying to do as you advised, keeping don't-know mind in every activity, but with difficulty. Often, the difficulties involved get me down, for it seems next to impossible to clear out all the rubbish I've accumulated over the years. As my mind returns to the question of whether the mountain and I are the same or different, I often cry and often leave the question. It seems an overwhelming question.

At the beginning, I was very enthusiastic and cheerful and industrious. My enthusiasm wanes and I am not very cheerful or industrious and realizing this makes me less cheerful. What advice for a failing spirit?

I look forward to the opening of a Zen Center in New Haven. Perhaps the fellowship and opportunity to speak with you and others will revitalize my practice.

Most sincerely,

Patricia

April 11, 1975

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter. You say that keeping don't-know mind is difficult. If you check your thinking mind, then it is difficult. You mustn't check your thinking mind. Thinking is okay; don't worry about it. If you are not upset by your thinking, then it is not difficult to keep don't-know mind. At first you will be able to keep it only for a short time. But if you practice with sincerity, it will keep growing by itself. Your mind is like the sea. When the wind comes, there are very big waves, when the wind dies down, the waves become smaller and smaller, until finally the wind disappears altogether and the sea is like a clear mirror. Then mountains and trees and all things are reflected on the surface of the sea. There are many thought-waves now in your mind. But if you continue to practice don't-know mind, this thinking will become gradually smaller, until finally your mind will always be clear. When the mind becomes clear, it is like a mirror: red comes and the mirror is red; yellow comes and the mirror is yellow, a mountain comes and the mirror is the mountain. Your mind is the mountain, the mountain is your mind. They are not two. So it is very important not to be attached either to thinking or to not-thinking. You mustn't be upset by anything that goes on in your mind. Only don't worry and keep don't-know mind.

You say that at the beginning you were enthusiastic and now you are discouraged. Both extremes are no good. It is like a guitar-string: if you make it too tight, it will be out of tune and will soon snap; if you make it too loose, it will still be out of tune and will not play. You

must tune it just right. Too enthusiastic is no good, too discouraged is also no good. Zen mind is everyday mind. You must keep this mind during every action—eating, talking, playing tennis, watching television—always keep don't-know mind. How you keep your mind at this very moment—just-now-mind—this is very important. If you have free time, it is good to sit. If you don't have free time, then just do action Zen. But be very careful about wanting enlightenment. This is a serious Zen sickness. When you keep a clear mind, the whole universe is you, you are the universe. So you have already attained enlightenment. Wanting enlightenment is just thinking. It is something extra, like painting legs on the picture of a snake. Already the snake is complete. Already the truth is right before your eyes.

Our New Haven Zen Center will be opening soon. It is very true that contact with other Zen students will help your practice. Together-action is very important for Zen students. Bowing together, chanting together, sitting together, eating together—this means that your own situation, your condition, and your opinions can disappear much more easily. Zen work is becoming empty mind. Becoming empty mind means having all my opinions fall away. Then you will experience true emptiness. When you experience true emptiness, you will attain your true situation, your true condition, and your true opinions. I hope that you will come often to the New Haven Zen Center, do hard training, soon attain enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

April 23, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

It is really good to get a letter from you!

Thank you for your comments on my “three pots of water” speech and for pointing out the weakness in its transition from absolute emptiness to like-this. Before, I thought that was properly covered but on rechecking it in the light of your examples, I can see where it is difficult to understand and I will correct it.

Homework

Three worlds simultaneously interpenetrate and do not interfere with each other:

-1-

The mouse fills his stomach and satisfies his hunger.

-2-

( )

-3-

Taste of catfood.

The cat bowl is broken: better throw this away before someone steps on it and cuts his foot.

Thank you for your teaching. Weekend after next, I have been invited to go to Phoenix Arizona to give a talk about meditation at a martial arts conference in that city. In order to encourage them to practice, I will tell them that meditation will help them to learn to keep the kind of single and undistracted mind that will make them more proficient in their martial arts. Then maybe I will describe correct sitting posture and what to do with the mind while sitting and end by giving a short Dharma speech along the lines of the example of correct teaching you sent me in your last letter.

I also hope to see you soon but the chances of my getting away from California are slight so that will probably be when you again visit Tahlma Sa.

Sincerely,

An Hanh (Michael)

April 25, 1975

Dear An Hanh,

Thank you for your letter. My student Mu Gak tells me that there has been some difficulty with the mail, so I am glad to know that you received my last letter. I hope that you will also be receiving the Providence newsletters.

About your homework: Please refer to my letter of February 12. In it I told you that all four words—mouse, cat-food, cat-bowl, and broken—point to the same thing and that you must not separate them. In your letter you give four separate answers. This is not the right way. You must find the one answer that all four words point to.

I am sending you a recent kong-an. One of my students was in New Haven and heard a Dharma talk by a well-known Japanese Zen master from Los Angeles. He came back to New York, and our discussion resulted in this kong-an. I hope that it is helpful to you.

I hope that you will soon finish your homework, attain enlightenment, become a keen-eyed lion, and save all people!

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

### Why We Chant

One Sunday evening, after a Dharma talk at the International Zen Center of New York, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “Why do you chant? Isn’t sitting Zen enough of a practice?”

Soen-sa said, “This is a very important matter. We bow together, chant together, eat together, sit together, and do many other things together here at the Zen Center. Why do we practice together?”

“Everybody has different karma. So all people have different situations, different conditions, and different opinions. One person is a monk, another is a student, another works in a factory; one person always keeps a clear mind, another is often troubled or dissatisfied; one person likes the women’s movement, another doesn’t. But everybody thinks, ‘My opinion is correct!’ Even Zen masters are like this. Ten Zen masters will have ten different ways of teaching, and each Zen master will think that his way is the best. Americans have an American opinion; Orientals have an Oriental opinion. Different opinions result in different actions, which make different karma. So when you hold to your own opinions, it is very difficult to control your karma, and your life will remain difficult. Your wrong opinions continue, so your bad karma continues. But at our Zen Centers, we live together and practice together and all of us abide by the Temple Rules. People come to us with many strong likes and dislikes, and gradually cut them all off. Everybody bows together 108 times at five-thirty in the morning, everybody sits together, everybody eats together, everybody works together. Sometimes I don’t feel like bowing; but this is a temple rule, so I bow. Sometimes I don’t want to chant, but I chant. Sometimes I am tired and want to sleep; but I know that if I don’t come to sitting, people will wonder why; so I sit.

“When we eat, we eat in ritual style, with four bowls; and after we finish eating, we wash out the bowls with tea, using our index finger to clean them. The first few times we ate this way, nobody liked it. One person from the Cambridge Zen Center came to me very upset. ‘I can’t stand this way of eating! The tea gets full of garbage! I can’t drink it!’ I said to him, ‘Do you know the Heart sutra?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Doesn’t it say that things are neither tainted or pure?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘Then why can’t you drink the tea?’ ‘Because it’s filthy!’” (Laughter from the audience.)  
“‘Why is it filthy? These crumbs are from the food that you already ate. If you think the tea is dirty, it is dirty. If you think it is clean, it is clean.’ He said, ‘You’re right. I will drink the tea.’” (Laughter)

“So we live together and act together. Acting together means cutting off my opinions, cutting off my condition, cutting off my situation. Then we become empty mind. We return to white paper. Then our true opinion, our true condition, our true situation will appear. When we bow together and chant together and eat together, our minds become one mind. It is like on the sea. When the wind comes, there are many waves. When the wind dies down, the waves become smaller. When the wind stops, the water becomes a mirror, in which

everything is reflected—mountains, trees, clouds. Our mind is the same. When we have many desires and many opinions, there are many big waves. But after we sit Zen and act together for some time our opinions and desires disappear. The waves become smaller and smaller. Then our mind is like a clear mirror, and everything we see or hear or smell or taste or touch or think is the truth. Then it is very easy to understand other people's minds. Their minds are reflected in my mind.

“So chanting is very important. At first you won't understand. But after you chant regularly, you will understand. 'Ah, chanting—very good feeling!' It is the same with bowing 108 times. At first people don't like this. Why do we bow? We are not bowing to Buddha, we are bowing to ourselves. Small I is bowing to Big I. Then Small I disappears and becomes Big I. This is true bowing. So come practice with us. You will soon understand”

The student bowed and said, “Thank you very much.”

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for your latest letter.

You're attached to words and descriptions, so I hit you. Now let's go drink tea.

The sky is blue, the mountains are white in the winter, green in the summer.

Sincerely,

Jack

April 11, 1975

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your good answer.

Everything that goes up must come down. You only understand going up; you don't understand coming down. Your answer is very good. But "like this" and "just like this" are different. You have already found your way. But how can you teach this way to other people? If you are attached to your way, then you can't understand how to teach others. That is why I gave you two kong-ans for homework: the cigarette kong-an and the mouse kong-an. For both kong-ans, you always give a "like this" answer. This is not bad, not good. But I already understand your mind. these answers cannot save all people. It is possible to teach ordinary people in this way. But how can you teach somebody who has Zen sickness? Somebody who has Zen sickness is very attached to his way. So this is not complete teaching, and he cannot turn his head. So it is very important that you understand the cigarette kong-an and the mouse kong-an.

I will give you an example: "Is this a bell or not a bell?" In answer to this kong-an, some people hit the floor, some shout "KATZ!!!", some give a "like this" answer, as you did, such as, "The sky is blue, the mountain is green." But these answers are not complete. The completely correct answer is to ring the bell. Shouting or hitting the floor is being attached to emptiness, the next answer is being attached to "like this". A "like this" answer is good by the language-route, but not by the Dharma-route. Ringing the bell is answering by the Dharma-route, which means it is a complete answer. So in your answers you understand "like this", but you don't understand "just like this".

So I will ask you again: 1) Somebody comes into the Zen Center smoking a cigarette and blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. What can you do? 2) The mouse eats cat-food, but the cat-bowl is broken. What does this mean?

I hope you will have good answers for me.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

### A Dharma Speech

given by Zen Master Seung Sahn at the opening ceremony of the  
International Zen Center of New York on April 20, 1975

(Holding up his Zen stick and hitting the table, slowly, three times)]

Is this closed? Is this open?

If you say “closed”, you fall into the hell without doors. If you say “open”, you are dancing with all demons.

Why?

(Holding up the Zen stick and tracing a circle in the air; then holding the stick perpendicular on the table)

One two three four; five six seven eight.

(After a few moments) Thank you very much for coming to our ceremony even though you must be very busy. It is not an accident that we are gathered here today. It is the result of our past karma. It is very good karma that has brought us to meet here in front of the Buddha’s altar.

This karma means finding our true self and attaining the Absolute. It means leaving behind the world or corruption and journeying to the pure land of true freedom and peace.

That is why we founded Won Gak Sa one year ago and are opening the International Zen Center of New York today.

But the sutra says, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” So all names and all forms are emptiness. Won Gak Sa, the International Zen Center of New York, this opening ceremony—these also are emptiness.

The sutra says, “ All beings are already Buddha.” So why is Yom Bul or reading sutras or sitting Zen necessary?

But we don’t know ourselves. Desire, anger, and ignorance cover up our clear mind. If we cut off all thinking and return to empty mind, then your mind, my mind, and all people’s minds are the same. We become one with the whole universe.

Therefore an eminent teacher said, “All things in the universe return to the One.”

True empty mind is before thinking. So thinking does not appear and does not disappear. This is the realm where nothing appears or disappears.

In the realm where nothing appears or disappears, there is no life and no death, no suffering and no happiness, no good and no bad, no you and no I. So it is said that all things in the universe return to the One.

But where does this One return?

Once somebody came up to the great Zen Master Mang Gong and asked him, “If all things return to the One, where does this One return?” Mang Gong said, “The spring geese are flying North.”

What do you think this means—“the spring geese are flying North?”

Even though you may understand enough to smash Mount Sumeru into a million pieces and swallow the ocean in one gulp, you will not understand this.

Even though you may understand enough to kill or give life to all the Buddhas of the three time-worlds and all eminent teachers and all people, you will not begin to understand this.

Then how can you understand the true meaning of “The spring geese are flying North”? Only keep don’t-know mind. This don’t-know mind is the mind that is stuck and cannot budge. It is like trying to break through a steel wall or trying to climb a silver mountain. All thinking is cut off. But as soon as you penetrate this condition, your mind will explode. Then you can see the stone lion run across the waves and devour the sun.

But you will still be bewildered. Go one more step. Then you will arrive at your true home, where spring comes and the flowers are blossoming everywhere. If you arrive here, not only will sutras and bibles be true, but also the sound of water and wind, the color of the mountain, the barking of a dog in the street—everything that you see or sense, everything as it is will be the truth.

Therefore Zen Master Mang Gong said, “The spring geese are flying North.” The truth is just like this.

All things in the universe return to the One; where does the One return? Throw away Small I and enter Empty I. Then, when you open your eyes, everything that you can see and hear will be like this.

A little while ago I hit the table three times. Mang Gong said, “The spring geese are flying North.” The meaning of my action and the meaning of Mang Gong’s words—are these the same or different?

If you say “the same”, I will hit you thirty times. If you say “different”, I will still hit you thirty times. Why?

KATZ!!!

Open the front door to Broadway.

### Sex Mind, Zen Mind

One day a student of Seung Sahn Soen-sa's heard a well-known Zen master speak in New Haven. When he returned to the International Zen Center of New York, the student said to Soen-sa, "This Zen master's teaching is a little strange. He says that sex mind is Zen mind, because when a man and a woman are having sex, they lose their particular identities and become one. So he said that everyone should get married. Is this correct teaching?"

Soen-sa said, "Your mind when you are having sex and your mind when you are driving a car—are they the same or different?"

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, "I will hit you thirty times."

"Why?"

"You must understand the true meaning of my hitting you. This Zen master said that during sex you lose your Small I. This may be true. But outside conditions are taking away the Small I. When the outside conditions change, you again become Small I. When you are driving a car with a clear mind, you don't lose yourself. Outside and inside become one. Red light comes and you stop; green light comes and you go. But if you have sex on your mind, red light comes and you don't understand red. You lose everything."

The student said, "So what is the difference between sex mind and Zen mind?"

Soen-sa said, "We can talk about three separate minds. The first is attachment mind. This is called losing your mind. Next is keeping one mind. The third is clear mind."

"What is losing your mind?"

"For example, you are standing in a train station and suddenly there is a loud whistle blast. You are startled out of yourself: no self, no world, only the whistle. This is losing your mind. Or if you haven't eaten for three days and then someone gives you food, you gobble it down without thinking. There is only the eating. Or when you are having sex, there is only the good feelings, the absorption in the other person. This is losing your mind. But afterwards, when you stop having sex, your small mind is just as strong as ever. All these actions are attachment actions. They come from desire and must end in suffering."

"What is keeping one mind?"

"When somebody is reciting a mantra, there is only the mantra. He sees good, and there is only Om Mani Padme Hum; he sees bad, and there is only Om Mani Padme Hum. Whatever he does, whatever he sees, there is only the mantra."

“Then what is clear mind?”

“Clear mind is like a mirror. Red comes, and the mirror is red; white comes, and the mirror is white. When all people are sad, I am sad; when all people are happy, I am happy. The mind that only tries to help all people is clear mind. So the mind that is lost in desire is the small mind. One mind is empty mind. Clear mind is big mind, which is infinite time and infinite space.”

“It’s still not completely clear. Would you please give another example?”

“Okay. Suppose a man and a woman are having sex. They have lost their minds and they are very very happy. Just then, a robber breaks in with a gun and says, ‘Give me money!’ All their happiness disappears and they are very afraid. ‘Oh help me, help me!’ This is small mind. It is constantly changing, changing, as outside conditions change.

“Next, somebody is doing mantra. This is one mind. His mind is not moving at all. There is no inside or outside, only true emptiness. The robber appears. ‘Give me money!’ But the person is not afraid. Only Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum. ‘Give me money or I’ll kill you!’ He doesn’t care. Already there is no life and death. So he is not in the least afraid.

“Next is clear mind. This person always keeps Bodhisattva mind. The robber appears. ‘Give me money!’ This person says, ‘How much do you want?’ ‘Give me everything!’ ‘Okay,’ and he gives the robber all his money. He is not afraid. But his mind is very sad. He is thinking, ‘Why are you doing this? Now you are all right, but in the future you will have much suffering.’ The robber looks at his face and sees he is not afraid, that there is only motherly compassion on his face. So the robber is a little confused. The person has given him money and is now teaching him the correct way. This is true Zen mind.”

The student bowed deeply and said, “Thank you very much.”

Soen-sa said, “There are four difficult things in this life. The first is to receive a human body. The second is to encounter the Dharma. The third is to meet a keen-eyed Zen master. The fourth is to attain enlightenment. Number three is very important. A Zen master may not be deeply enlightened; he may not be a clear teacher. If you meet the wrong Zen master, you will go the wrong way. It is like one blind man leading another blind man into a ditch. So I hope you will be able to tell the difference between a keen-eyed lion and a blind dog.”

The student said, “How can I tell the difference?”

Soen-sa said, “There is not enough time this morning. We will continue tomorrow.”

The student bowed.

### Keen-eyed Lions and Blind Dogs

The next morning, the student said to Soen-sa, “You were talking yesterday morning about different kinds of teachers. How can I recognize a keen-eyed Zen master?”

Soen-sa said, “It is difficult if you stay only in one place. You should go around and hear many Zen masters. Then you will soon understand. In the Avatamsaka sutra, there is a story about a young boy who studied with fifty-three teachers. He would learn what he could from one teacher, and then travel on to another. Finally, he met Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of wisdom. Manjushri asked him, ‘What have you learned from fifty-three teachers?’ The boy said that this teacher had taught him this, and that teacher had taught him that. Manjushri hit him. Everything that he had learned disappeared. As soon as he realized this, he decided to begin his travels again in search of a teacher. At that moment, Manjushri, who himself had disappeared, reached out across ten thousand worlds and touched the boy on the forehead. ‘This beginner’s mind,’ he said, ‘is the true mind of enlightenment.’ Upon hearing this, the boy became enlightened.

“Some people study Zen for five or ten years without attaining enlightenment. They become very attached to their teacher, and this teacher cannot help them understand. If you study with only one teacher, even if he is a great teacher, it is difficult to meet Manjushri. So Zen students should travel from teacher to teacher until they find a keen-eyed Zen master. This is very important.”

The student said, “But how will I know?”

Soen-sa said, “At first you may not know. But if you practice Zen for a while and listen to many Zen masters, you will soon understand what is correct teaching and what is not. If you don’t taste sugar, you can’t understand sweet; if you don’t taste salt, you can’t understand salty. No one can taste for you. You have to do it yourself.”

“But aren’t all Zen masters enlightened?”

“There are different levels of enlightenment. There is first enlightenment, original enlightenment, final enlightenment. First enlightenment is attaining true emptiness. Original enlightenment is attaining ‘like this.’ Final enlightenment is ‘just like this.’”

“Would you please explain some more?”

“Okay. Here is an apple. If you say it is an apple, you are attached to name and form. But if you say it is not an apple, you are attached to emptiness. So is this an apple or not? If you hit the floor or shout KATZ, this is a first-enlightenment answer. If you say, ‘The sky is blue, the grass is green,’ or ‘The apple is red, the wall is white,’ you are giving a ‘like this’ answer. But if you take a bite of the apple, your answer is ‘just like this’. In the same way, you would ring the bell or open the book and read it. So first enlightenment, original enlightenment,

and final enlightenment all have different answers. Some Zen masters do not make these distinctions. Some only understand KATZ or silence. Some distinguish between KATZ and 'like this', but don't understand 'just like this.' A keen-eyed Zen master distinguishes among the three kinds of enlightenment. But he uses all three kinds with complete freedom."

"This Zen master is New Haven said there is no such thing as complete enlightenment. He said that you can never finish. Is that correct?"

"Buddha said, 'All beings are already enlightened.' An eminent teacher said, 'Without thinking, just like this is Buddha.' Without thinking is clear mind. So if you keep a clear mind, then any action is just like this. To say that you attain more enlightenment, more, more, more, is thinking. Thinking is desire. Desire is suffering. So Zen Master Nam Chan said, 'Everyday mind is the Way.'"

The student said, "I have one more question. You said that a keen-eyed Zen master distinguishes three separate kinds of enlightenment. But isn't Zen mind precisely the mind that doesn't create distinctions? Didn't the Third Patriarch say, 'The Great Way is not difficult for those who do not discriminate?'"

Soen-sa said, "First enlightenment, original enlightenment, final enlightenment—are these the same or different?"

The student thought for a moment, then smiled and said, "The wall is white, the rug is blue."

Soen-sa said "You are attached to color!"

"*You* are attached to color"

"The dog runs after the bone."

"Then are they the same or different?"

Soen-sa said, "The wall is white, the rug is blue."

The student bowed and said, "Thank you very much."

April 17, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you so much for your reply to my letter. It was encouraging and has helped steady my practice and mind. I must also thank your student Mu Gak for his open ear and kind suggestions on practice.

I am still having some difficulty in practice, however. When I first became keenly interested in Zen, about four months ago, it was after reading some books about Zen. These books served to shatter most remaining structural beliefs for my life and set me adrift. I realized then that I did not understand anything, so everything became a question. Now, in practice, if I ask "Who am I?", I *know* I do not know. It is, therefore, difficult to question in that particular sense with much intensity. I can listen and watch, but it is difficult to question specifically because I have no particular point from which to direct a question. I guess I am worrying about the form of the question, which is irrelevant, and should, instead, just question, in whatever form, with all my being. Is this correct?

There is one more thing I would like to comment upon. Now that I am more fully accepting Zen as a natural function of my life, I feel a strong infusion of love: through your letters, through Mu Gak and other students I have talked with, and in and through myself. I love my family and friends as never before, and this world seems more wonderful than I will ever know. If I never attain enlightenment, Zen practice will still have granted me so much for which to be grateful.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia

May 3, 1975

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter. Please excuse my lateness in answering, but I was in New York until a few days ago, for the opening of our Zen Center there, and your letter was not forwarded. So I didn't receive it until yesterday.

You said that I and Mu Gak have helped your practice. This is very good. Zen practice is of the greatest importance. You must decide to practice and very strongly keep this decision. This requires great faith, great courage, and great questioning.

What is great faith? Great faith means that at all times you keep the mind which decided to practice no matter what. It is like a hen sitting on her eggs. She sits on them constantly, caring for them and giving them warmth, so that they will hatch. If she becomes careless or negligent, the eggs will not hatch and become chicks. So Zen mind means always and everywhere believing in myself. I vow to become Buddha and save all people.

Next—what is great courage? This means bringing all your energy to one point. It is like a cat hunting a mouse. The mouse has retreated into its hole, but the cat waits outside the hole for hours on end without the slightest movement. It is totally concentrated on the mouse-hole. This is Zen mind—cutting off all thinking and directing all your energy to one point.

Next—great questioning. This is like a child who thinks only of its mother, or a man dying of thirst who thinks only of water. It is called One Mind. If you question with great sincerity, there will only be don't-know mind.

If you keep these three—great faith, great courage, and great questioning—, you will soon attain enlightenment. You said in your letter that practice is difficult. This is thinking. Zen is not difficult. If you say it is difficult, that means that you have been checking yourself, examining your situation, your condition, your opinions. So you say Zen is difficult. But if you keep the mind that is before thinking, then Zen is not difficult. And it is not easy. The truth is only like this. Don't make difficult, don't make easy. Just practice.

You said that the Zen books which you read shattered your beliefs. That's very good. But shattered is not shattered. Before, your view was a deluded view. Now it is a correct view. What you believed before was like wanting to hold the rainbow. But the rainbow soon disappears. It never really existed. All things are like this. Before, you believed that all things existed. But now you understand that all things are emptiness. Even so, you must take one step further. Believing or not believing, shattered or not shattered—this is still the area of opposites. You must throw all these opposites away. Then the truth will be only like this. You said that everything was shattered. But this "shattered" is still an attachment to name and form. Originally, there is only emptiness. There is neither shattered nor not shattered. This is the area of the Absolute. The Absolute is true emptiness. True emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking is like this. Form is form, emptiness is emptiness. So your don't know mind is true emptiness, is before thinking, is the Absolute, is your true self. The names are all different; they are all names for clear mind. But originally clear mind had no name and no form. There are no words for it. So if you open your mouth, you are wrong. This is why whenever Zen Master Lin-chi was asked a question, he only shouted, "KATZ!!!" Duk Sahn would answer only by hitting the questioner. Ku Ji would always hold up one finger. If you are not attached to KATZ or HIT or ONE FINGER, then you will understand that the meaning behind these actions is only clear mind. It is impossible to explain clear mind in words, so the Zen masters used shouting and hitting and holding up one finger to explain. You must put it down! KATZ is only KATZ, HIT is only HIT, one finger is only one finger. You must understand this. When you say, "I know I don't know", this is no good. Don't examine your don't-know mind.

Life is Zen. But some people say that life is suffering. How are these different? If you make "my life is Zen," then your life becomes Zen. If somebody else makes "my life is suffering", then that person's life becomes suffering. So it all depends on how you are keeping your mind just now, at this very moment: This just-now mind continues and becomes your life,

as one point continues and becomes a straight line. You like Zen, so your life has become Zen. Now you think the world is wonderful. Your *mind* is wonderful, so the whole world is wonderful. If you attain enlightenment, you will understand that all people are suffering greatly, so your mind also will be suffering. This is big suffering. So you must enter the great Bodhisattva way and save all people from their suffering. I hope that you only keep don't-know mind, always and everywhere. Then you will soon attain enlightenment and save all beings.

Here is a question for you: Somebody once asked the great Zen Master Dong Sahn, "What is Buddha?" Dong Sahn answered, "Three pounds of flax." What does this mean?

I will wait for a good answer.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

### The 84,000 Degrees of Enlightenment

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the Cambridge Zen Center, a student said to Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “I have a question about enlightenment. Now enlightenment is very good...”

Soen-sa said, “It is very bad!” (Laughter from the audience)

The student said, “The perfected virtues of enlightenment were outlined by the Lord Buddha himself. He said that enlightenment has seven limbs.”

“Seven?”

“Seven.”

“Yah, many many more than that!” (Laughter)

“My question is, if one has awakened, is that enough? Is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi, the unexcelled perfect enlightenment, enough? Is that the same as Nirvana? Or is Nirvana a provisional form? Some teachers say there are two degrees of enlightenment, some say there are three. What do you teach about degrees of enlightenment? Are there one, two, three, or more?”

Soen-sa said, “There are many degrees of enlightenment. About 84,000 degrees. How many do you want?” (Laughter)

“That’s very interesting.”

“I will teach you all of them.” (Laughter)

“I’ve heard this teaching before. This comes from Tien-t’ai philosophy.”

“How many do you want? One, two, three, 84,000?”

“I’m aware of the teaching. But could you describe what are the two stages...”

Soen-sa handed the student a cup of water and said, “Drink this.”

The student drank.

“How did it taste?”

“As water should.”

“You have already attained the 84,000 degrees of enlightenment.” (Laughter)

The student said, “That’s more than I expected.” (Laughter) “Thank you.”

Soen-sa said, “Okay, now I will explain. In Zen, we teach that there are three kinds of enlightenment.” Then, holding up the moktak (a gourd-like instrument used in chanting), “This is a moktak. But if you say it is a moktak, you are attached to name and form. And if you say it is not a moktak, you are attached to emptiness. So is this a moktak or not? This is one of the elementary kong-ans we use. If you answer by hitting the floor or shouting KATZ or hitting me, this is first enlightenment. Everything becomes one. Buddha, you, me, the moktak, the sound, KATZ, hit—all becomes one. The ten thousand Dharmas return to the One.”

The student snapped his fingers.

“That’s correct. This is first enlightenment. Next is original enlightenment. Is this a moktak or not? This time, you answer, ‘The wall is white, the moktak is brown,’ or ‘The sky is blue, the grass is green,’ or ‘Three times three equals nine.’ Everything is like this. This is original enlightenment. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Next is final enlightenment. This is very important. What is final enlightenment?” Soen-sa hit the moktak. “Only this. Only one point. The truth is just like this. So we teach that there are three kinds: first enlightenment, original enlightenment, and final enlightenment. At first they seem to be the same. But they are not the same. Is it clear now?”

“Much clearer than usual.”

“Only this. If you do hard training in Zen, you will soon understand.”

“Thank you.”

“Okay, then I ask you: Once Zen Master Dong Sahn was weighing flax. Somebody came up to him and asked, ‘What is Buddha?’ He answered, ‘Three pounds of flax.’ What does this mean?”

The student thought for a few moments, then said, “Three pounds of flax means just what three pounds of flax are.”

Soen-sa said, “Only this?”

“That’s all I can think of tonight.”

“Yah, that’s a good answer. Not bad, not good.”

The student was silent.

Soen-sa said, “Okay, next question. Somebody asked Zen Master Un-mun, ‘What is Buddha?’ Un-mun answered, ‘Dry shit on a stick.’ Both Zen masters were asked, ‘What is

Buddha?’ But Dong Sahn said, ‘Three pounds of flax’ and Un-mun said, ‘Dry shit on a stick.’ Are these two answers the same or different?

The student said, “When you understand with the one mind, they’re the same.”

Soen-sa said, “Only this?”

“It’s the best I can do.”

“I thought you were a keen-eyed lion, but now I understand that you are a blind dog.”

The student said, “Maybe some day I’ll be able to see.”

Soen-sa said, “Now you are a blind dog. You must again become a keen-eyed lion.”

The student closed his eyes and bowed.

*[Newsletter of the Providence Zen Center March 1973]*

(The following is a talk prepared in Classical Chinese and delivered by the Zen master, the Venerable Suh Ku-san at the Zen Center on the 8th of February, 1973. The Venerable Ku-san is the abbot of the Song-kwang-sa monastery, located in the Southwest part of the Republic of Korea. He is the spiritual guide and teacher of Zen meditation for approximately one thousand monks and nuns in that part of Korea.)

### **An Account of Dharma Awakening**

All creatures are riding in a boat and crossing the sea. Man is one with the boat, and water is one with the land. All is constant action and movement. There is only one thing, which is majestic and quite natural. All things are at rest therein. Often we meet great crowds, but does anyone understand what this one unmoving thing is?

If they know the unmoving thing, then they have attained the realm of liberation; the four primary elements separate one from another, and the eye and vision separate one from another. Where do they go?

If you know where they go, then you have arrived at the place of jewels. Are these jewels in your own house?

Katz! Kick the earth, touch the moon and the sun with your hands, and only then will you first attain. A stanza says, "The bright moon in the night sky is only a world of sand; the deep blue sea and all its millions of waves is basically that. When we slip silently into the seas, we shall see a pillar of fire. When the rainstorm drips its waters off the eaves, silver pearls are formed."

Societies of the world are feverishly looking for new gods. Asian spirituality and Western technology are approaching a period of synthesis. Do all men know this? If they know that this is the best of times, will they tell us about it? Where are you all going? A stanza says, "The staff is hanging in both the East and in the West; the bright sun is in the heavens and the earth rejoices. The accumulated snow and ice of some two thousand years is now meeting the warm spring breezes, and all creation is lovely."

You are now all meeting the Buddha's teachings. Spring has come to the world. All creation is bursting into bloom. Do not lose this golden opportunity. Practice diligently your meditations and your wisdom. Become teachers of gods and men, and most earnestly strive for the salvation of all creatures.

The bird flies and loses its feathers; fish swim and the waters are muddied.

*[Duplicate letter withdrawn from the collection.]*

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

These are pictures of my drawings—charcoal/black on white paper. They are the inside-outside space I saw while drawing the body.

Thank you for your black ink on white paper. I stuck it on my wall.

I will begin my retreat on Thursday. Will write more later.

Where is the edge of the water?

Love,

Hae Mi

P.S. I wish I'd had teachers like you in art school!

What is strong? What is weak?  
I already know.  
So, what is it?  
Green ink on white paper.  
Only like this.

Where there is no strong, no weak & so weak, strong.  
There is no anger, desire, & suffering  
& so anger desire, & suffering.

Only like this.

May 15, 1975

Dear Hae Mi,

Thank you for your letter and the slides. They are very beautiful.

As for your questions, I have no words. You asked them, and you have already answered them. They are good questions and good answers.

But they are bad questions and bad answers.

Why did you make the edge of the water?

Put it down!

If you say “like this”, you don’t attain it. If you say “not like this”, you also don’t attain it. “Like this”, “not like this”—throw away both.

But you still don’t attain it. What can you do?

You must find it.

Don’t lose it.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

May 18, 1975

Dear S.S.

This is the middle of the 4th day of my retreat. I got your letter yesterday when I was having a hard time. It is very difficult to sit this much without the teaching. I didn’t realize before what the teaching is. It keeps me straight.

It is much harder alone because my Big I has to keep me straight, cutting through the small one constantly. There is no teacher.

This knot in my middle is the same as the edge—it is its own untying. When it unties, I breathe like the waves. There is no knot, no edge, nothing to untie or fall off of.

My only question is for me—What am I? All I can do is keep sitting.

Here’s a question—If I never had it, how can I lose it?

Carol

P.S. I went to the ocean yesterday and saw why you named me Hae Mi—I thought an edge to it when it’s not even there.

So, I must find it.

9:30 AM, 7th day—

As I crack the egg  
On the edge of the bowl  
I realize  
The bowl has no edge  
The egg has no shell

No bowl  
No egg

Only love

Hae Mi

May 22, 1975

Dear S.S.

No wall, no plant, no air, no sky  
Clinging to form  
Clinging to emptiness  
Stops the love  
We create this earth  
To teach us the love  
We are here on this earth  
To practice the love.

Hae Mi

May 27, 1975

Dear Carol,

Thank you for your letters.

I was staying at the International Zen Center of New York, and so did not see your letters until today when I returned. I am sorry to be answering them late.

In your first letter, you speak about “no teacher”. Don’t worry about that. As I said to you before, if you want Big I and enlightenment, then only let your situation, condition, and opinion disappear. This is your true teacher. A teaching based on language alone is no good. If you are thinking, even a good teacher sitting in front of you will not help you. But if you cut off all thinking, then the dog’s barking, the wind, the trees, the mountains, the lightening, the sound of the water, and so on, are all your good teacher. So, you must keep complete “don’t know” mind. This is very necessary.

You said, “This knot in my middle is the same as the edge—it is its own untying. When it unties, I breathe like the waves. There is no knot, no edge, nothing to untie or fall off of.” This speech is not bad, not good. But, you must not check your mind. This paragraph is about your condition. I already told you to throw away your condition.

If you say you haven’t lost it, you have already lost it. If you want to find it, you cannot find it.

All people use it all the time.

But, they don't understand it, because it has no name and no form.

It pierces past, present, and future, and it fills space.

Everything is contained in it.

It is apparent in everything.

But if you want to find it, it will go further and further away,  
and if you lose it, it has already appeared before you.

It is brighter than sunlight, and darker than a starless night.

Sometimes it is bigger than the universe, sometimes so small that the point of a needle  
cannot poke it.

It controls everything; it is the king of the ten thousand dharmas.

It is powerful and awesome.

People call it "mind", "God", "Buddha", "nature", or "energy".

But it has no beginning or end, and no form or emptiness.

If you want it, then you must ride the ship which has no hull;  
you must play the flute with no holes;  
you must cross the ocean of life and death.

You will then arrive at the village of "like this".

Within the village, you must find your true house, "just like this".

Then, when you open the door, you will get it.

It is only "it is".

In your second letter, you said, "no edge, no shell, no bowl, no egg." So how does love  
appear? Where does this love come from?

In your third letter, first you say, "no wall, no plant, no air, no sky." So, why do you say we  
make the earth? Why is love necessary? You say, "no wall, no plant, etc." but then you say,  
"We are here...." This is a contradiction. Put it all down. Put down, "no...., no...., no...."  
Put down, "love, love, love." Put down, "We are here...." Then you will understand the true  
earth, true us, and true love.

First you must find *it*. If you find it, you will have freedom and no hindrance. Sometimes its  
name is you, sometimes me, sometimes us, sometimes earth, sometimes love, sometimes hit,

sometimes the tree has no roots and the valley has no echo, sometimes three pounds of flax, sometimes dry shit on a stick, sometimes like this, and sometimes just like this.

What is it?

See you soon,

P.S. It is not correct to address letters to "S.S.". You should always use the title, "Soen Sa Nim".

May 12, 1975

Dear Rev. S.S. Lee,

Thank you very much for your letter and a box of ginseng.

On early January of this year I have been to Honolulu for a few days. At the first time I planned to go to main land and also to visit you. Due to something happen in Taiwan that makes me must go back immediately, so I don't have time to call on you.

The calendar was sent from the Buddhist Association in Honolulu just as a present to you. My address now change as follow:

“4-3, Lane 32, Kwang Fu S. Road, Taipei, Taiwan,  
Republic of China”

Please write me on above address next time.

On about one or two years later I will go to States again. At that time I should visit you as my wish.

From the pictures you sent me, I understand you have a lot of American students, I am admire you.

Looking forward to here you soon.

Yours in the Dhamma,

Shih Wu Yi

June 3, 1975

Dear Rev. Shih Wu Yi,

Thank you for your letter.

In your letter you said you will visit me. I am waiting for you. If you had visited me in January, I would have been very happy. But if you had soon left for Taiwan, I would have been sorry, and missed you.

How is the Buddhist Association in Taiwan? And how is Reverend Pai Sheng? If you see him, please give him my regards.

My friend, Professor Pruden, has gone to Taiwan to study Chinese. He used to live in Providence, and he helped us start the Providence Zen Center. He was, at that time, a professor at the well-known school, Brown University. He is a very good friend. If you are in the area, perhaps you will stop in and see him.

I have four temples here, in Providence, New Haven, Boston, and New York. My students number about 300. Of those, about 100 have taken the five precepts. Among them there are 15 Dharma teachers, and two monks. Almost all of them are American young people, and university professors. They like Zen very much. If you visit here I will show you my temples and introduce you to my students. Please come!

I have visited Chinese temples in San Francisco and New York. In the Cold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco, there are many American students, but in the temple in New York, there are only Chinese students. The temple in New York is run by Ven. Mew-Fung. He is now buying a big building and making a new temple. It is very beautiful and very big. All the Chinese Buddhists there like him very much. Our New York Zen Center and his temple are very close. Sometimes I visit him, and we have a good time talking about Chinese Buddhism, you, and Rev. Pai Sheng.

All the young American Buddhists admire the great Chinese Zen Masters of the past, and they also want to meet the great Chinese monks of the present. So, we are waiting anxiously for your visit. We hope you will come and give a great Dharma speech.

I hope you will always have good health, remain in the Buddha's realm, and save all people.

Sincerely,

S.S.

April 29, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

You say I gave you four separate answers.

I say that I gave you one answer four times.

Which of us is correct?

KATZ!!!

Four quarters are four quarters.

Four quarters make a dollar.

(Line drawn across the page)

The Buddha said that Samsara is Nirvana. But that is true for people only when they *know* that Samsara and Nirvana are not different and that Samsara and Nirvana are not the same. So even though all beings are already enlightened, there is nothing for us to do but to save all beings from suffering by helping them to see that already they are enlightened.

Above the line across the page is my answer (together with the one in the last letter) to the mouse kong-an. All this is unnecessary explanation. Already it is understood but I keep explaining so that you will correct my style of speaking so that I can be a better teacher and more effectively save all beings.

The four words to the kong-an all point to “myself”, to my own nature which is already from the very beginning Buddha. The *mouse* is myself functioning from the viewpoint of small-I. But a mouse is itself *catfood* when it is eaten by the cat and the small-I is food for the big-I because that is how the big-I functions. So both mouse, cat and catfood are myself. The *catbowl* is the container for the catfood: the appearance of boundaries containing or limiting myself to small-I. This container is nothing but something made by my own thinking and thus is also an aspect of myself. It is *broken* when these illusory boundaries disappear and that is the big-I aspect of myself. So all of these are myself.

But all of this talk really misses it. If someone other than a teacher like yourself heard it they might be misled into thinking that such conceptualizing was what Zen is about and take the finger for the moon. That is why I added that it is “better to throw this away before someone steps on it and cuts his foot.”

Thank you for your teaching. I can only hope to repay you by saving all the beings who are already saved.

Sincerely,

An Hanh (Michael)

May 14, 1975

Dear An Hanh,

Thank you for your letter.

Your answer was not bad, not good. You must understand the difference between a “like this” answer and a “just like this” answer. “Like this”, there are many possible answers, many words. “Just like this”, there is only one point, one word.

For example, I have a quarter. This quarter is twenty-five cents. I am feeling a little tired, so I take the quarter and buy an ice-cream cone. When I eat the ice-cream, all my tiredness disappears. I shout, “I’m feeling great!” So the quarter, the twenty-five cents, the ice-cream, and the eating all equal my good feeling. There is only the good feeling. Just like this.

Your teaching is very good. But it is not Zen-master style; it is sutra-master style. You and I already understand, so it is not necessary to explain. But if you give me a “just like this” answer, that will already contain the explanation. So please send me a “just like this” answer. Only one word is necessary.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

### Not Difficult, Not Easy

In May, 1975, a student decided to move into the newly-formed New Haven Zen Center. He wrote to a man with whom he had studied Zen and asked him what he thought of the decision. The Zen teacher wrote back at length and said, among other things, “Zen training is hard work. Make no mistake about this. There is no easy way. Dogen says, ‘Those who seek the easy way do not seek the true way.’”

The student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa for his advice. Soen-sa said, “If you want the easy way, this is desire. But if you want the difficult way, this is desire also. Zen is letting go of all your desires. Then you will find the true way.”

“This teacher says that Zen is difficult. I say that Zen is very easy. But we are saying the same thing. Buddha said, ‘All things have Buddha-nature.’ Jo-ju, when he was asked if a dog has Buddha-nature, said, ‘No!’ Is Buddha right and Jo-ju wrong? These are just two different ways of teaching.”

“Why do I teach that Zen is easy? Many students in the United States have Difficulty Sickness. ‘Oh, Zen is very difficult! We must do zazen and sesshins all the time. Then maybe in ten or twenty years we will attain enlightenment.’ So when I show them that Zen is easy, I cure their attachment to difficulty. When Jo-ju was teaching, many students were attached to Buddha and Buddha-nature. So: ‘Does the dog have Buddha-nature?’ ‘NO!!!!!!’ This is Jo-ju’s way.”

“But if you think that Zen is difficult or easy, these words become a hindrance and you can’t understand Zen. I always teach that only without thinking, just like this is Buddha. ‘Difficult’ is thinking; ‘easy’ is thinking. You mustn’t be attached to words. If you are attached to Jo-ju’s No, you can’t understand Jo-ju’s mind. If you are attached to my words, you can’t understand my ‘easy way’.”

“Once there was a famous Buddhist layman named Busol. He was a deeply enlightened man; his wife was also enlightened, and so were his son and daughter. A person came up to him one day and asked, ‘Is Zen difficult or not?’ Busol said, ‘Oh, it’s very difficult. It’s like taking a stick and trying to hit the moon.’”

“The person was puzzled and began to think. ‘If Zen is so difficult how did Busol’s wife attain enlightenment?’ So he went and asked her the same question. She said, ‘It’s the easiest thing in the world. It’s just like touching your nose when you wash your face in the morning.’”

“By now the person was thoroughly confused. ‘I don’t understand. Is Zen easy? Is it difficult? Who is right?’ So he asked their son. The son said, ‘Zen is not difficult and not easy. On the tips of a hundred blades of grass, the Patriarchs’ meaning.’”

“Not difficult? Not easy? What is it then?’ So he went to the daughter and asked her. ‘Your father, your mother, and your brother all gave me different answers. Who is right?’ She said, ‘If you make difficult, it is difficult. If you make easy, it is easy. Without thinking the truth is just as it is. Tell me now—how are you keeping your mind at this very moment?’

“The person was totally confused. Suddenly the daughter hit him and said, ‘Where are difficult and easy now?’ He understood.

“So you mustn’t think that Zen is difficult or that it is easy. Zen is just as it is.”

May 22, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

See the attached page for the one-word answer to my homework.

Most of my time lately has been spent on the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees at Camp Pendleton and at the camp in Arkansas. They are about 60% Buddhist but had no monks or priests to minister to them until our Center sent two to Arkansas and three to Pendleton. They are working on contracts with the military as official Buddhist Chaplains to the refugees.

We have also formed a committee called the International Buddhist Refugee Relief Aid Committee to provide help and assistance of a material sort to the refugees. Many Buddhist leaders have permitted us to use their names as supporters of this committee. May we use yours? It would not require any specific commitment to help in any particular way but only permission to list your name as one of the supporters of the committee.

There are also lots of political problems. For one, there is a ministerial group that has gotten control over placement of many Vietnamese orphans—mostly from Buddhist homes originally—with families in California and they are making belonging to a fundamentalist Christian church a prerequisite for adopting any of these children. Lots of work. I will see you later.

Sincerely,

An Hanh (Michael)

YES!

June 2, 1975

Dear An Hanh,

Thank you for your letter. I think that nowadays you are very busy.

When I think of the situation now in Vietnam, I am very troubled. The Korean war was quite similar. People suffered a lot. People came to the south from North Korea, and there were shortages of food and supplies. Many European countries sent supplies, but the Catholic churches controlled them all. So, only Christians received aid, while Buddhists did not. Soon many people converted to Christianity, but only from a materialistic motive. Now that times are not so hard, many are returning to Buddhism.

I think the Vietnamese and Cambodians have very strong Buddhist karma. Though they may be becoming Christian now, I think many will eventually return to Buddhism.

I hope the Vietnamese and Cambodians will soon get jobs, make money, and find happiness. I wish that Buddha will give them good fortune.

About the problem with the children: this is their karma. Buddha said, "All matter appears from karma, and disappears from karma." But I think Buddha's seeds have already been planted in the children's minds. Someday the seeds will sprout, and there will be trees, flowers, and finally fruit. Someday they will receive the great fruits of Buddhism.

Please go ahead and use my name in support of the International Buddhist Refuge Relief Aid Committee. How can I help? I don't know. Now I have four temples here on the East coast. If there is anything we can do to help, please tell me.

I check your answer on the attached sheet. I hope you will soon get a good answer for me.

Sincerely,

S.S.

NO!

You are scratching your right foot when  
your left foot itches. Give me another  
answer.

May 31, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I am agitated, I suppose, with what occurred during my sitting tonight and thought first of communicating with you. For one thing, please forward some more questions to me. For another, I think I see why you and all Zen literature say that one cannot think or say what Buddha is. To think what Buddha is, is to be a step removed. To say what Buddha is, is to be two steps removed. I read a book that helped me fit some things together; *The Magic Animal* by Philip Wylie. When I looked at the questions you presented me, fresh from the reading of that book, I saw the trick, clear as rain, I guess, anyway. But that's why I want more questions.

Tell me quickly, wherein lies your hope? Because, if what I have perceived this night is true, I am nearly overwhelmed. What a mess! and to know that I am part and parcel of it and my children, too. What do I do?

But I am leaping where a slow walk is more appropriate. I await your answer.

Most sincerely,

Patricia

June 7, 1975

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter.

In your letter you said you were agitated. As I told you in my last letter, if you think you are agitated, then you are. If you cut off thinking in your mind, there is no agitated, no happy, and nothing at all. So Zen mind is how to keep just-now mind. When the agitated mind appears, you must soon return to don't know mind: What am I? Then the agitated mind soon disappears.

But, when agitated mind appears, you hold onto it, and say in your letter, "I am agitated." This is very bad, and I hit you thirty times.

And you said you would like more questions. What are you? If you don't know, then only keep don't know. Keep complete don't know mind. This don't know mind is bigger than the universe. In this don't know mind there are ten thousand questions. The ten thousand questions return to the one question.

How old are you? What is your name? Why are you alive? After you die, where will you go? Only KATZ! Only hit! Only one finger! What does it all mean? Three pounds of flax. Dry shit on a stick. What does it all mean?

If you don't know, then only keep don't know mind. Don't want many questions. Only: What am I?

If you understand your true self, then you will understand all the above question. You want more questions. This is thinking and desire, so I will hit you thirty times. Put it all down!

You say, "...one cannot think or say what Buddha is." You are very attached to words and to the writings of Zen Masters. If you follow the sayings and writings of the Buddha and of Zen Masters, then you go to hell and cannot be helped. If you are thinking, all Zen Masters' writings and all sutras become demon's words, but if you are without thinking, sutras and Zen Masters' writings are not necessary. The crowing of the roosters, the barking of a dog, and the honking of car horns are all better than a Dharma speech. They are true Dharma, and your true teacher.

From now on you must not read Zen books. Don't be attached to words! The Buddha taught the Dharma in order to save all minds. If you have no thinking, what use is there for the Dharma?

I gave you some homework: once somebody asked Zen Master Dong Sahn, "What is Buddha?" He answered, "Three pounds of flax." What does this mean? You must finish this homework.

If you don't understand this, *only* keep don't know mind. Only this don't know mind can help you. Nothing else can.

I hope your don't know mind will soon become clear, and you will soon get enlightenment and save all beings.

Sincerely,

S.S.

June 9, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for your letter. I am trying to follow the advice you gave and to complete the homework. I thought I had much to discuss and many questions, but those all passed away. So this is a letter of thanks, only.

Sincerely,

Patricia

June 17, 1975

Dear Patricia,

You're welcome.

You said in your letter that all your questions have disappeared. This is very good. Words are not important. For example: suppose you have some honey and a banana. Both are sweet. But how is the sweetness of honey different from the sweetness of a banana? Can you explain this in words? It's not possible! So if somebody asks you to explain the difference, you should say, "Open your mouth" and let the person taste how honey is sweet and how a banana is sweet. The only correct teaching here is action teaching. Even if Buddha or God tried to use words to explain the difference, it wouldn't be possible.

So in Zen teaching, words are not complete. Only practice is important. Then you will attain your true self.

One more example: Last night I heard bells tinkling outside. When I first heard them, I didn't understand, so I asked somebody what they were. He said, "That's the ice-cream man." So I understood. "Ah, this is the ice-cream man." When the children hear the bells, they all run out to buy ice-cream. The ice-cream man gives his transmission of ice-cream mind to the children. He doesn't need to say a word. He just uses the bells. In the same way, Zen Master Lin-chi only shouted KATZ!!! He used KATZ to transmit clear mind to his students. Zen Master Dok Sahn would always hit the person who asked him a question. He was using HIT to transmit clear mind. If you are attached to these actions, you won't be able to understand clear mind. Lin-chi used KATZ, Dong Sahn used HIT, the ice-cream man uses bells—but these are all transmissions of mind.

So I will ask you again: A monk once asked Zen Master Dong Sahn, "What is Buddha?" He said, "Three pounds of flax." What does this mean?

I hope you soon attain the true meaning of “three pounds of flax.” I am waiting for a good answer.

Yours sincerely,

S.S.

June 8, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Here's my latest thought on how to teach the man with ashes for the Buddha:

“When a bird flies over and shits on your head,  
what is the bird's intention?  
Are you like the bird when you drop ashes?”

Thank you very much for your last letter. It has helped. I meditated in my sleep for the first time the other night.

Sincerely,

Carol

June 17, 1975

Dear Hae Mi,

How are you? How is your practice nowadays?

Your answer is not bad, not good. But it is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches.

I will repeat the kong-an for you: Somebody comes to the Zen Center smoking a cigarette, blows smoke in the Buddha's face and drops ashes in his lap. If you are there, what can you do?

You must clearly understand the meaning of this question. This is not Zen talk. How can you fix his mind? You already understand “like this” and “just like this”. He doesn't understand “like this”. So his action is wrong. How can you fix his mind and correct his action? This is the point.

I am asking you for your teaching style. I hope that you will find out how to teach him. Then you will soon fix his mind.

About your sleeping meditation—this is very good. If you can always keep clear mind, even in your dreams, then you have already finished the Great Work. This is very difficult. But you have already started to meditate in your dreams. How wonderful! If you do more hard training, then it will also be possible to have interviews in your dreams.

Here is a poem for you:

Dream is not-dream; not-dream is dream.  
Who made dream? Who made not-dream?  
One mind is clear; infinite time.  
The sun is shining everywhere and all the time.

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

June 13, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I am sorry that I have not written, but I have nothing to say. I haven't been sitting well enough to answer your kong-ans. No games. I am feeling awful. My life is meaningless to me. I feel an indescribable anguish all the time. I try and practice on my own, but somehow I am too weak to make any progress. I don't have any faith in my Buddha-nature. I really shouldn't be writing this letter because a Zen Master should not have to deal with sick fools. Master Hearn told me to get in touch with you while he was gone, because you are a great Zen Master. I am afraid that I am not much of a man or Zen student, but anything you could tell me would help. Also if you have Ven. Song Ryong Hearn's address in Korea or Japan, could you send it to me? He was going to give it to me before he left, but when his brother died he left earlier and I did not get it. I have contacted no one since he left or since I wrote to you because I believe you can't jump around to different masters. I am no longer going up to the International Buddhist Meditation center because there is no real practice there and a lot of nonsense. I have no poems left in me, only doubt and anguish.

In gassho,

Steve

June 17, 1975

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter. You have written me many letters this year. These letters were not bad, not good. But the letter which you just sent me is a very wonderful letter. It is a true Zen letter. Thinking is only thinking. Suffering is only suffering. If you were to think. "I want my mind to become clear," this would be bad thinking. When you are suffering, you must only suffer.

So you must understand the true meaning of your letter. It told me the truth. You want to become enlightened. Without thinking, enlightenment is not possible. Thinking *is* enlightenment: An eminent teacher said: "Mind is constantly changing. This changing mind is itself entirely the truth. If you are not attached to your changing mind, then you will attain your true nature. Then you will understand that there is neither good nor bad."

You said that you are feeling very bad. If you *make* bad, it is bad. If you don't make bad, it is not bad. Don't make good and bad. Then everything will be good.

You said, "I am not a good man, not a good Zen student." But if you understand good and bad, then good and bad have already disappeared. Please read the Heart sutra once more. Then your mind will be clear. What is good? What is bad? You want to be a good Zen student; you want to be a good man. This is thinking. Put it down! Put it all down! If your mind is not clear, you must ask a tree or the sky to help you. Then the tree or the sky will give you a good answer.

If you are always examining your mind, that is very bad. Don't examine your mind. You say that you have no faith in your Buddha-nature. I too have no faith in my Buddha-nature. And I have no faith in Buddha or God or anything. If you have no faith, you must completely have no faith, you must not believe in anything at all. Then your mind will become true emptiness. But this true emptiness is only a name. This true emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking is like this. It is very good that you don't have faith in our Buddha-nature. But when you see red, there is red; when you see white, there is only white. You must let go of both faith and non-faith. Things are only as they are.

I don't know Ven. Song Ryong's address in Korea. I am sorry. But he told me that he would meet me in Japan in August. The address there is Ko Bo temple, 2-23-5 Kasuga Bunhyoku, Tokyo, Japan.

I think that it would be good for you to visit other Zen Masters. If you have already made a strong decision in your mind about who is your teacher, then you can meet ten thousand other teachers and there will be no problem. And it would be good also to visit the International Buddhist Meditation Center sometimes. Don't be concerned with the practice there. If you are free, then you can go there and only sit by yourself. You must always keep Big Mind.

I am sending you copies of some of the letters that I wrote to a student in New Haven. I hope that these letters will help you.

You mustn't worry about how your practice is, whether you are making progress or not, whether you are in anguish or not. All these things are not important. They are like clouds passing in front of the moon. You must not be attached to anything that appears in your mind. Then you will attain freedom thinking. No attachment thinking is just like this.

I hope that you soon attain enlightenment and save all people from their suffering.

Yours sincerely,

S.S.

Zen Master Jung Gang, a student of Mang Gong's, was one of the great Zen Masters of our time. He died in 1974.

When he was twenty-four years old, he went to see Zen Master He Bong at Ma Gok Sa temple. He bowed to the Master and said, "I have never met a Zen Master who really understands Jo-ju's Mu. Please teach me. But only teach me half of Mu."

He Bong said, "Mu."

Jung Gang said, "This is the whole Mu. I asked you for half of Mu."

"Then what is half of Mu?"

Jung Gang said, "Mu."

The Master said, "Not bad. Let me ask you a question now. When Zen Master Yong Un attained enlightenment, he wrote the following poem:

'My poverty of last year was not true poverty.  
This year it is poverty indeed.  
In last year's poverty there was room for the point  
of an awl.  
In this year's poverty even that has disappeared.'

When Zen Master Ang Sahn, his Dharma-brother, heard this poem, he said, 'You may have attained Tathagata Zen, but as for Patriarchal Zen, you haven't even dreamt of it.' My question is, What is Patriarchal Zen?"

Jung Gang said, "The awl is very sharp."

Next he went to Dae Gak Sa, to visit Zen Master Yong Son, a student of Kyong Ho's.

Yong Son asked him, "What is the first word?"

Jung Gang said, "Euuuuuuuuuuuu."

"Is this the first word?"

Jung Gang laughed and clapped his hands.

The Master shook his head and said, "No no."

"Then what is the first word?"

“Jung Gang ahhhhhhhhhhh.”

“Yesssssssss.”

“This is the first word.”

Jung Gang again laughed and clapped his hands.

Yong Song said, “Have you attained enlightenment?”

“Why not ask me for an enlightenment word?”

“What is an enlightenment word?”

“The sun is setting over the western mountain, the moon is rising in the east.”

Then he turned around and left.

Yong Son said to himself, “I’ve been cheated!”

**A First Lesson in Dharma-combat**

One evening, after a Dharma talk at Yale University, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “What is clear mind?”

Soen-sa held up his watch and said, “What is this?”

The student said, “A watch.”

Soen-sa said, “You are attached to name and form. This is not a watch.”

“What is it?”

“You already understand.”

The student was silent for a moment, then again asked, “What is it?”

Soen-sa said, “You already understand! You can see it, I can see it.” (Laughter from the audience)

The student said, “Thank you.”

Soen-sa said, “That’s all?” (Laughter) “What did you understand?”

“I don’t know.”

Soen-sa pointed to a cup and said, “This is a cup. But the Diamond sutra says, ‘All things that appear in the world are transient. If you view all appearances as non-appearance, then you will see the true nature of everything.’ So if you are attached to the form of this cup, you don’t understand the truth. If you say this is a cup, you are attached to name and form. But if you say it is not a cup, you are attached to emptiness. Is this a cup or not?”

The student was silent. Then he said, “I’m stuck.”

Soen-sa said, “Okay, I will answer for you.” He picked up the cup and drank the water in it. “Only this.” Then, after a few moments, he said, “All things have names and forms. But who made these names, who made these forms? The sun doesn’t say ‘My name is sun.’ People say, ‘This is the sun, this is the moon, this is a mountain, this is a river.’ Then who made names and forms? They are made by thinking.”

“Who made thinking?”

Soen-sa laughed and said, “Just *you* made thinking!” (Laughter)

“So Zen mind means returning to original mind. Original mind is before thinking. After thinking, there are opposites. Before thinking, there are no opposites. This is the Absolute. There are no words or speech. If you open your mouth, you are wrong. So before thinking is clear mind. In clear mind there is no inside and no outside. What color is that wall? White. This mind. Only white. My mind and this white become one. What is this? This is a watch. You answer was correct. But when I said, ‘You are attached to name and form,’ you soon began to think. ‘Oh, what was wrong with my answer? What answer can I give that won’t be attached to name and form?’ This kind of thinking. You were attached to what I said. But I said that only to test your mind. If you weren’t attached to my words, you could have said to me, ‘You are attached to my words.’ This is a good answer. I say to you, ‘You are attached to name and form.’ Then you say to me, ‘*You* are attached to my words.’” (Laughter) “When you asked me, ‘What is it?’ I answered, ‘Already you understand.’” Soen-sa laughed and said, “This is before thinking.

“So if you cut off all thinking, the universe and you become one. So your substance and the substance of the whole universe are the same. So this cup is you, you are the cup. They are not two. If you are thinking, they are different.

“Now I have explained everything. So I ask you: Are this cup and you the same or different?”

The student said, “You already know.”

Soen-sa said, “I don’t know. So I am asking you.”

“You already understand.”

“So I ask *you!*”

“There’s clear water in it.”

“You are attached to clear water.”

“*You* are attached to clear water!” (Laughter)

Soen-sa laughed and said, “Very good! Now you understand. The cup is filled with clear water. The wall is white. Zen mind is everyday mind. That’s all.”

**When the Lights Go Off, What?**

One evening, after a Dharma talk at Yale University, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, "If form is non-form and non-form is form, is Buddha-mind thinking and thinking Buddha-mind?"

Soen-sa said, "Yes."

There was a long silence. Some people in the audience began to giggle.

Then Soen-sa said, "You already understand Buddhism. So I ask you: Who made thinking? Who made Buddha?"

The student was silent for a moment, then said, "I'm already thinking."

Soen-sa said, "Where does thinking come from?"

"From questioning."

"Questioning? Then where does questioning come from?"

"It comes from Buddha-mind."

Soen-sa laughed and said, "Don't make Buddha. Okay?" (Laughter from the audience) "You say Buddha. Then what is Buddha?"

The student walked over to the light-switch and turned off the lights. Then he turned them on again.

Soen-sa said, "Oho! Very good! But I have one more question for you: If you turn off the lights, what? If you turn on the lights, what?"

"Turning off the lights is nature before thinking."

Soen-sa laughed and said, "I hit you thirty times." (Laughter) "When the lights go off, what? When the lights go on, what?"

"The lights off are Buddha-nature. The lights on are thinking."

Soen-sa said, "Okay, one more question. Buddha said, 'All things have Buddha-nature.' But when somebody asked Jo-ju, 'Does a dog have Buddha-nature?', Jo-ju answered, 'No!' Which one is correct?"

"I don't know."

Soen-sa said, “You must understand this. Then you will understand Buddha-nature. You say Buddha, Buddha-mind, Buddha-nature. These are only names. What is true Buddha-nature? You must understand Jo-ju’s answer. Why did he say, ‘No’? Before, I asked you, ‘When the lights go off, what? When the lights go on, what?’ When the lights go off, it is dark. When the lights go on, it is bright. Only like this. It is very simple. (Laughter)

### The Story of Chang Shik Kim

In 1958, when he was seventeen years old, Chang Shik Kim decided to become the greatest Zen swordsman in the world.

The art of Zen swordsmanship had been lost in Korea for many centuries. So, because there were no masters who could instruct him, Chang Shik went to Seung Sahn Soen-sa and asked for his help. Soen-sa gave him a mantra and told him to go off into the mountains for a hundred-day retreat. There would be one of three possible results: he would die, go insane, or succeed.

Chang Shik found a cave in the mountains, set up his altar, and began chanting the mantra, continuously, for twenty-four hours a day, until he would keel over from exhaustion. When he woke up, he would begin again, until he again collapsed.

On the first night, at about one in the morning, he had a vision of a gigantic, menacing figure stepping out of the fire and walking slowly towards him. He backed away, but the figure kept coming. Just as he was against the wall, chilled to the bones with terror, the figure almost on top of him, he shouted KATZ at the top of his lungs, and the figure disappeared into the fire.

On the second night, the same thing happened. The figure approached, he shouted, the figure vanished. He was slightly less frightened this time.

On the third night, he was rather looking forward to the figure's appearance. Nothing happened.

On the fourth night, he had a vision of the Buddha, who told him to reach behind and take up his walking-staff. He did this, and his gesture—unthinking, totally intuitive—later became the basic movement in the whole art of his swordsmanship.

On the fifth night, he began to have visions of swords flying around in the air, directed by unseen hands. For the next forty-five nights, between midnight and three in the morning, he would have these visions. During the days, he would go over the motions he had seen the night before—he would practice them once physically and many times mentally.

By the end of fifty days, he had mastered three hundred thirty thousand sword motions and was the greatest Zen swordsman in the world.

On the fiftieth day, he had a vision of Seung Sahn Soen-sa. Soen-sa pointed to the wall of the cave and said, "Look." A large, brilliantly shining sword appeared, then detached itself and floated into the center of the cave. Soen-sa took his wooden Zen staff, swung it around, and shattered the sword into a hundred pieces. Then he turned to Chang Shik and said, "Do

you know what this means?” Chang Shik said, “No.” Soen-sa said, “It means ...” and the vision disappeared.

For many days Chang Shik meditated on the meaning of this vision. Finally, one day he understood. Although he had by now mastered the physical art of swordsmanship, he hadn't been aware of its deeper, Buddhist meaning. The sword was the mind-sword. What it was meant to cut off was desire and attachments. Every one of the sword movements that he had learned corresponded to an inner movement. The perfect master of Zen swordsmanship is a perfect master of himself, for the sake of all people. Physically he teaches how to use the sword with total clarity; but his real teaching is total clarity at all times and at all times Bodhisattva action.

When the hundred days of the retreat were over, Chang Shik packed his few belongings and started down the mountain. As he approached the village at the foot of the mountain, he noticed a peasant walking toward him, parting the long grass with his walking-staff. He was stunned. This peasant, moving intuitively, without any thought, was making the perfect motions of a master swordsman! Chang Shik continued down the path until he came to the village. The first person he saw there was a peasant woman, who was lifting a large urn onto her head with both arms. Again he was stunned. She was flawlessly making a perfect double-sword movement! And every villager that he saw, each one moving casually and without thought, was making one or another of the movements which had cost him so much effort to learn.

He began to feel depressed. What was the point of learning all these movements when everybody knew them already? What did he have to teach? But soon he understood. Although all people, when they act spontaneously, know the alphabet of movements, they don't know how to combine these letters into words, then into sentences, then into ordered wholes. Although all people are born with the mind sword, they don't know how to use it effectively. So there was, after all, much to be taught, much work to be done.

Chang Shik Kim later attained enlightenment, and Soen-sa gave him the name Won Kwang, which means “circle of light.”

In 1974 he came to the United States, and he is now teaching Shim Gum Do, the “Mind-Sword Path,” in Cambridge and Providence.

**Inside, Outside**

One Thursday evening, after a Dharma talk at the New Haven Zen Center, a student asked Seung Sahn Soen-sa, “It seems that in Christianity God is outside me, whereas in Zen God is inside me, so God and I are one. Is this correct?”

Soen-sa said, “Where is inside? Where is outside?”

“Inside is in here; outside is out there.”

“How can you separate? Where is the boundary line?”

“I’m inside my skin, and the world is outside it.”

Soen-sa said, “This is your body’s skin. Where is your *mind’s* skin?”

“Mind has no skin.”

“Then where is mind?”

“Inside my head.”

“Ah, your mind is very small.” (Loud laughter from the audience) “You must keep your mind big. Then you will understand that God, Buddha, and the whole universe fit into your mind.” Then, holding up his watch, Soen-sa said, “Is this watch outside your mind or inside it?”

“Outside.”

“If you say outside, I will hit you. If you say inside, I will still hit you.”

“I don’t care—I say it’s outside!”

“If it is outside, how do you know that this is a watch? Does your mind fly out of your eyes and touch the watch and fly back inside?”

“I see the watch. I’m inside, and the watch is outside.”

There were a few moments of silence. Soen-sa said, “Don’t make inside or outside. Okay?”

The student, looking somewhat doubtful, bowed.

New Haven

May 26, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

It was very good to see you last night, even if for a few minutes. The whole New Haven family enjoyed your visit. Many smiles and laughter after you left.

People were also grateful for your letter to Richard Clarke, the Zen teacher. They feel that it is important for us to have strong, clear relations with other American Zen centers.

I heard from Eido-roshi today. I had written him several weeks ago about our book and asked him to recommend an illustrator for the cover. One of his students is an artist and will soon send me some trial drawings. So in the future many people will meet your cigarette-man. Big problem!

Thank you for your letter, which I received this morning. My problem in the dialogue with Jian was that he didn't seem to understand Dharma-combat at all. It's not hard to puncture a balloon, but how do you puncture a punctured balloon or knock over a wet noodle?

You said that I mustn't tell dreams to a fool. Do you mean that I shouldn't have asked him the cigarette kong-an?

Here is a re-play:

Mu Gak: (tells the cigarette kong-an)

Jian: I will answer when you come to Mt. Baldy.

M: I don't believe you.

J: You may not believe me now, but wait till you come.

M: The dog runs after the bone.

J: What does that mean?

M: A second offense is not permitted.

J: (confused silence)

M: I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow.

J: (silence)

M: (explains “The dog runs after the bone”. Then explains “like this” and “just like this” in the bell kong-an)

Is this going all the way to New York? Please check the dialogue and send me your corrections. Somehow the explanations don't fit in smoothly.

Or how about this:

.....M: The dog runs after the bone.

J: What does that mean?

M: (explains)

J: I am a cigarette monk, a beer monk, a dog monk.

M: You are a dead monk.

Thank you for your poem. In it you say “to open the mouth is wrong”. But I never reached that line; there were too many words before it, and my eyes hurt.

Here is a poem for you:

A baby sparrow on the sidewalk,  
its neck slack, crawling with ants.  
I bury it beside a tree.  
Namu Amita Bul.

See you soon.

With love,

Mu Gak

Dear Mu Gak Su Nim,

Thank you for your letter. I think everyone in New Haven is very happy, and likes you. I think in the future New Haven Zen Center will be a very good Zen Center.

Nowadays you are doing hard training making the book. Thank you very much.

About your dialogue with Jian, if you say the balloon is already punctured, this is your opinion. Jian is not like a punctured balloon. He is still like an inflated balloon. He said, “I am a cigarette monk, I am a beer monk, I am a dog monk.” This is very good speech! Since you sat in silence, he already killed you.

So, all the time don't think of other people's minds. During Dharma dialogue, only keep a clear mind. Only correct teaching. You said he is already a punctured balloon. This is thinking. It is not correct teaching.

About telling dreams to a fool, I meant you shouldn't have explained the meaning of "the dog runs away with the bone." If you had given him a correct teaching, he wouldn't have responded by saying, "I am a cigarette monk, a beer monk, a dog monk."

You sent me another dialogue. It is not necessary. The arrow has already passed downtown.

Then you wrote one more dialogue. Put it all down! Writing and rewriting dialogues is not Zen mind. It is only wanting to understand language mind. It is no good. The ship has already left the port, and yet you wave and wave goodbye. Be very careful. Don't check only words. Only keep clear mind!

If you never reached the line saying, "to open the mouth is wrong," then how did you know how to copy that line? So, I hit you thirty times. You said your eyes hurt. Your eyes are very attached to words. I never said one word. If your eyes hurt a lot, then go to the doctor. You must keep clear mind. Then you will have no hindrance in everything. I have a big net. If you are thinking, I'll catch you. If you are not thinking, I cannot catch you. Don't touch my net.

New York

June 4, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I just spoke with the Korean Consulate. In order to get a Student Visa (48 months—the regular visa is 2 months, renewable), I need a letter from you stating that I am going to be studying Buddhism at Su Dok Sa for one year. This should be in Korean.

I am having an application form for the visa sent to Mu Bul and to Byon Jo. Mu Bul will need a letter too.

The publisher is very very pleased with our book. He would like to have a calligraphy for the frontispiece. Could you please do a nice "Buddha is like this", or something else suitable, and bring it when you come to New Haven?

Your last letter was a good slap in the face. Thank you. It's a beautiful day in New York.

Your student,

Mu Gak

June 5, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I hope the June Yong Maeng Jong Jin went well. I had hoped to come down and see you on the last day, but business prevented me. I especially wanted to come down and give you an answer for the kong-an you gave me. You said, "The mouse eats cat food, but the cat's bowl is broken. What does this mean?" Then you told me of spending a quarter on ice cream, and so on.

So I sat with the kong-an, and one morning I saw it. But, as to an answer for you, anything I could say would miss the point. I hope to see you soon, so I can give you my answer.

Here is a poem for you:

Basho's frog  
And Bodhidharma's beard  
Speak to all  
Buddhas and Patriarchs—  
And to little children, too.

Love,

Stephen (Gak Lim)

June 7, 1975

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter.

Your answer is like marring good flesh. What is mouse? What is cat food? What is cat bowl? What is broken? Those four questions are directed to only one point. Don't scratch your right foot when your left foot itches. Again I will tell you, a quarter is twenty-five cents. Twenty-five cents buys ice cream. The ice cream is all eaten, so it becomes energy. Only "wonderful!" Now, the quarter is what? Twenty-five cents is what? Ice cream is what? The ice cream is already gone. What appears? Only just like this. There is only one point: "wonderful!"

In the same way, the mouse is what? The cat food is what? The cat bowl is broken. What appears? Only just like this. Only one point. You must find it!

Your answer has too many words. They are not necessary. I hope you will only keep clear mind, and soon you will get a good answer for me.

Sincerely,

S.S.

**A Dharma Speech**

given by Seung Sahn Soen-sa at the International Zen Center of New York on Buddha's birthday, May 18, 1975

(Holding up the Zen stick and hitting the table)

An eminent teacher said, "Before Buddha was born and came to the Kapila Empire, he had already saved all people."

(Hitting the table)

When Buddha was born, he took seven steps, looked in the four directions, pointed with one hand to the sky and with the other hand to the ground, and said, "In the sky above and the sky below, only I am holy."

(Hitting the table)

Somebody once mentioned these words of the Baby Buddha to Zen Master Un-mun and asked what they meant. Un-mun said, "As soon as Buddha said this, I hit him and killed him and fed his body to a hungry dog. The whole world was at peace."

Today we are celebrating Buddha's 2519th birthday. These three sentences are all in praise of the true Buddha. If you discover the true meaning of Buddha's birthday, then you will become the same as Buddha, and you will finish the great work.

We say that Buddha was born. But what is the true Buddha? Is Gautama Shakyamuni, who was born long ago in India, the true Buddha? Is the golden Buddha just behind me on the altar the true Buddha?

The Diamond sutra says, "All things that appear in this world are transient. If you view all appearances as non-appearances, then you will see the true Buddha."

The historical Buddha, who was born, became enlightened, and died and the golden statue behind me—is either of them the true Buddha?

The Diamond sutra says, "All things that exist are like a dream, a phantom, a bubble, a reflection; they are like dew or lightning; thus should you view them."

If you view all things in this way, then you will see the true Buddha. This is the true meaning of our celebration today.

Then what is Buddha? Zen Master Ma-jo once answered, "Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind." Another time he answered, "No mind, no Buddha." When Zen Master Lin-chi was

asked what is Buddha, he only shouted, “KATZ!!!” Duk Sahn only hit the person who had asked. Dong Sahn answered, “Three pounds of flax.” Kyong Ho said, “Before you came, did you wash out your bowl?”

Which of these answers is correct?

The Diamond sutra says, “If you are attached to color and sound and want to see your true nature, you are on the wrong path.”

If you are attached to the words of eminent teachers, then you cannot understand the true Buddha. You must cut off all thinking and return to before thinking. Then your mind will be clear. A clear mind has no hindrance at all. Everything you see, hear, smell, taste, touch—everything just as it is—this is the true Buddha.

So just like this, mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind. Just like this, no Buddha, no mind. Just like this, KATZ!!! Just like this, HIT. Just like this, three pounds of flax. Just like this, did you wash your bowl. All this is the true Buddha.

So just like this, Gautama Shakyamuni, who was born 2519 years ago today, is the true Buddha. Just like this, the golden statue behind me is also the true Buddha.

All things are equal. There is no holy or unholy. But Buddha said, “In the sky above and the sky below, only I am holy.” So I will hit Buddha thirty times.

In original nature, there is no name or form, no life or death. But Un-mun said, “As soon as Buddha said this, I hit him and killed him and fed him to a hungry dog.” So I will hit Un-mun thirty times. But already there is nothing. Whom can I hit? So I will hit myself thirty times.

Where is the mistake?

KATZ!!!

In front of Buddha, the paper lanterns are shining.

*[Duplicate letter withdrawn from collection.]*

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I know that you recently received a similar letter from Steve Eckhart. However, he feels Ven. Hearn is his teacher. I agree that he is a *good* teacher, but *you* are *my* teacher.

As you know, we have severed relationship with Dr. Thien-an of the Int. Buddhist Meditation Center, for two basic reasons—first, practice there is too erratic—not solid sitting working practicing—, second, so many of the residents there are into *drugs*. Drugs are not good Zen practice, plus being illegal, and I cannot jeopardize my integrity or my job by being associated with these people. (If I were in another job, or an un-attached monk, I would try to work with them to overcome drug abuse—but this would entail full time.)

I see by the newsletter that “Dropping Ashes” will be a book. This is the best thing to do with this person—write about him in a book. When the book *is* available, I want a copy. Then I can burn the book and kill the Buddha. If the mouse is there, I’ll throw the book at him first.

Really—it is hard work on kong-ans without seeing you periodically.

I have been sitting at the Long Beach Zen Center with Soyu Matsuoka Roshi and at the Long Beach Vihara. Good solid practice, but no dokusan interview available. Matsuoka just doesn’t do this; he teaches shikan-taza only. I also sit at home, and *try* to practice zazen all day long, at work, etc. The practice seems to go well, but I really need dokusan with you—

When will you return to L.A. for a while? If you *do*, as you know, I have taken the Ten Precepts from Matsuoka and from Thien-an, but my real loyalty is Chogye. So is there a way to formally enter the Chogye Order at that time?

It is 9:15 A.M. and a grey gull said, “squawk squawk.”

As ever,

Jack

July 1, 1975

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter.

You say that while Song Ryong Hearn is Stephen’s teacher, I am *your* teacher. But there is no difference! Song Ryong is also a Zen Master of the Chogye school, so he is teaching the same

way. What is most important, however, is that you soon attain enlightenment and receive the Transmission. Then the Transmission will be your true teacher.

You say that you have severed relationship with the International Buddhist Meditation Center. This is not so good. But if you can't help them strengthen their practice and cut off their attachment to drugs, then it is all right. I think that the IBMC is a good place with a good situation. But if there is no correct teaching there, then none of the students can find the true way. An eminent teacher said that there are four difficult things in this life: 1. to be born in human form, 2. to hear of the Dharma, 3. to meet a keen-eyed Zen Master, 4. to attain enlightenment. To hear of the Dharma is quite difficult, and to meet a keen-eyed Zen Master is even more difficult. In the United States, there are many Zen Masters. How can you tell which are keen-eyed Zen Masters? A Keen-eyed Zen Master is one who teaches correctly. What is correct teaching? I have already explained to you the three kinds of enlightenment in Zen: first enlightenment, original enlightenment, and final enlightenment. Only when you have attained final enlightenment is it possible to teach with perfect freedom. Many Zen Masters stop at original enlightenment, so they cannot separate original and final enlightenment. So I hope you soon attain complete enlightenment and test all the Zen Masters in the United States.

Your latest answer to the kong-ans is not bad, not good. But you like the cigarette-man very much, and you like the mouse very much. The Great Way is not difficult only if you throw away all your likes and dislikes. So throw away the homework. Only keep don't-know mind. Then you will soon get a good answer. Don't make "difficult"!

You say you are sitting at the Long Beach Zen Center. That is better than sitting by yourself at home. Not having interviews is a little no good, but it can't be helped. But you have our kong-an book. So it would be a good idea for you to give yourself an interview once a week by testing your mind with the kong-an book. This would be very helpful.

I will be in L.A. around Aug. 20th, on my way to Korea. I hope to see you then.

About your becoming a Chogye monk: You are already twice a monk. This is enough. It is much more important just to do hard training. You already understand the true way. But if other people are taking the wrong way, how can you teach them, how can you correct their minds? This is the great Bodhisattva way. You must continue on the great Bodhisattva way. Then you will attain enlightenment and receive the Transmission.

Your last sentence is very good. Always keep this mind.

Here is a poem for you, written by an eminent teacher:

The four elements disperse as in a dream.  
The six senses, perceptions, and consciousnesses are  
originally emptiness.  
To understand that the Buddha and eminent teachers  
return to the place of light;  
The sun is setting over the western mountains;  
the moon is rising in the East.

If you have some free time, please examine these four sentences, one by one. What does each one mean?

And you must finish your homework!

See you soon,

S.S.

9th day, 5th moon, 4694

Soen-sa-nim,

I have been encouraged by a very dear friend of mine and correspondent of yours, Patricia Manny, to write to you. As she said, "...you introduced *me* to Zen, so I will not now allow you to drift off without a real taste...so write *to him* once, even if you never write again." She inquired of Mu Gak if this was indeed allowable and relayed via letter that it was. This prompting on her (their?) part was initiated some three months ago: I have done nothing.

Because I have done nothing regarding writing to you—and even less and worse than nothing regarding my daily life—I am, so to speak, scattering and squandering what little I have: a once firm desire to be truly at home in the world. This evening while I was reading Dogen's *Shobogenzo* I came across the sentence that read: "To make the Truth clear and enter the Way, one must study with a Zen master." I believe I am now ready to underline the "must".

Because I do not yet have the force of character or the determination (guts?) to put down the banality of my present way of life and travel empty handed to San Francisco, Rochester, or Cambridge and stand face to face with a person who really knows (and would see right through my series of cheap personas), I hope you will allow this letter to serve as a first step in that direction.

For the past eight months I have been engaged in a fairly intensive study of Zen literature. I am weary of it and figure that I may as well read and memorize a random numbers table. I have for the most part quit reading the modern commentators and talkers and spend my time on the older texts if they are not encumbered with textual notes and explanations (Charles Luk). I like to feel that this encourages me to move to the detail of real life rather than getting caught up in conceptual nonsense. With the little bit of Zen reading I also mull over three old Chinese friends that I have for years found to help me stay 'here & now' rather than 'then & there': Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu, and I Ching. I also spend a great deal of time with recent Western philosophy and C.G. Jung.

What I think the above really says is that I am what some people call a 'bookworm' and have been since I was eight (21 years now!). I am beginning to realize that I am involved in a very vicious, ever decreasing, constricting circle: people say, "O'Hara, you think too much, you read too much, you talk too much; we aren't interested in pursuit of spirit—we just want to drink beer, go water skiing, watch television." This of course drives me right back to the books, and it obviously builds an arrogance in me that drives me out of being-at-home-in-the-world. How, sir, do I break this very vicious circle without becoming a television addict—to say it unkindly—a numbskull, a phillandering fool, a seeker after cheap debilitating thrills?

I believe that I am now at a point where I am more than willing to listen to some one who knows what is going on: I just don't know (and this has gotten to be a much used phrase lately). What *will* you tell me? If you say, "Give up good and bad, stop making judgements, go beyond dualistic thinking", etc. etc. etc., I fear that you will be merely pushing around well worn counters in a tattered matrix. What directions, concrete directions, can you give me that will set me moving on the right way? What do I need to do, to begin doing (not thinking), that will culminate in my sitting face to face with you so you can clout some good sense into this skull of mine. Where do I begin listening for that "lion's roar that bursts the wild dog's brain"? What is the initial step, the very difficult first step, in quieting this "monkey mind" of mine? Don't eat after 11 AM? Quit smoking? Lay off the garlic and onions?

I just can't see being told to stop such and such a kind of thinking when I am in an environment that is continually demanding that I continue it. I would prefer that you write to me something like "List of rules to be adhered to strictly while at home alone." If I could gather up the scattered bits while by myself it seems that it would be an effective beginning. But would *this* be a beginning. I just don't know...

These are not questions arising out of any sense of frivolity: I am deadly serious—it is dawning on me that time *truly* does "travel like an arrow"!

Son-sa-nim, sir,

I feel that in this abyss of doubt there is a glimmer of hope, a glimmer of faith and a glimmer of courage: it may be this letter. I will leave this letter unrevised and handwritten so that the errors will be genuine. Not to sit face to face must put you in a very awkward position of trying to figure out just what I am up to and I genuinely want you to figure this out and look into me and say, "Tim, do this..."

I suppose I have been accused pretty often of "putting people on" and because of this I fear that most of what I say, anytime to anyone, is generally regarded as pretentious nonsense. It would be a great insult to me if that could be said of this letter. Further it would be a great insult to Pat Manny for encouraging such: I don't do that. I can only ask you to bare with a rather verbose, unsophisticated, disjointed style of writing and get below the veneer—and show me the first step to "make the Truth clear and how to enter the Way."

My genuine and heart felt thanks in advance.

Sincerely,

Tim

June 24, 1975

Dear Tim,

Thank you for your beautiful letter.

You already understand everything. In fact, your cognitive understanding is better than mine. But, this is only understanding. You still read many books. What have you attained? Attainment means “before thinking”. Understanding means “after thinking”. You must show me before thinking. If you don’t understand, you must ask a tree on a mountainside. If you are thinking, the tree cannot talk to you. But if you keep before thinking, the tree teaches you.

You must make your situation, your condition, and your opinion disappear. That is very important. You already understand that your intestines are full of shit. Is it dirty or pure? If you don’t have roughage and shit, you can’t function. In your mind there is a lot of thinking. If you have no thinking you can’t understand anything and can’t attain enlightenment. For your body to live, it must produce shit. If you want to understand, you must think more. Then all thinking will come out. That will take away all thinking. Then finally your mind will be empty. So, you must find true emptiness. What is true emptiness? If you open the mouth, I will hit you. If you move, I will also hit you. What can you do? Don’t make a shitbag.

If you don’t understand, you must ask that tree. A Zen Master is not your true teacher. All Zen books, all sutras, Taoism, and the I Ching are all demon’s speech and cannot help you. Throw them all away. Only ask the tree: “Please teach me. What am I?” If you keep complete don’t-know mind, then it is possible to talk with the tree.

You say, “If I could gather up the scattered bits while by myself it seems that it would be an effective beginning. ... These are not questions arising out of any sense of frivolity: I am deadly serious... I feel that in this abyss of doubt there is a glimmer of hope, a glimmer of faith, and a glimmer of courage: it may be this letter...” and so on. You are checking yourself. Why do you check yourself? All this is only your condition. Your condition and your opinion come from *where*? You must find this. If you are thinking, your mind, my mind, and everybody’s minds are different. If you cut off all thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people’s minds are the same. This is also thinking. So, now I ask you, are thinking mind and not thinking mind the same or different?

If you say the same, I will hit you. If you say different, I will also hit you. What can you do? If you don’t understand, only keep don’t know mind. Then ask the tree: “What am I?” Then the tree will teach you. You must not want a Zen Master, and don’t read any books. *Only* ask the tree.

The Heart sutra says, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” Already you understand this. So, as far as precepts and rules go, whether you keep them or break them, any action is fine. Any bad action is also fine. Originally precepts and rules come from emptiness. So outside actions are not important. Only how to keep a “just now” mind is very important.

So now I ask you, is your body emptiness or form? Maybe you will say “form” or “emptiness” or “both”. Who makes “form”? Who makes “emptiness”? Who makes “both”? “Form”, “emptiness”, and “both” are all made by your thinking.

So, Descartes said, “I think therefore I am.” But, if you are not thinking, what are you therefore? Some people say “nothing”. But “nothing” is also thinking. Complete not

thinking is before thinking. Before thinking means no speech and no words. Open the mouth is wrong.

So, I again question you: Is your body form or emptiness? If you say you understand, I will hit you thirty times. If you say you don't understand, I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

If you don't understand, ask the tree: "What am I?" Then the tree will give you a complete teaching.

All Buddhas and eminent teachers would be unable to teach you. Of course, I cannot teach you either. People like you can only be taught by trees.

I hope you will get a good answer from a tree and become a great man.

Sincerely,

S .S.

S.S.,

I would like to thank-you again for your kind reply to my letter. I intend to take your advice; but before working on keeping my mouth shut, there is one question I would like to ask of you. If the question you ask is critical (“are thinking mind and not-thinking mind the same or different”) and then go on to say “Of course, I cannot teach you either,” then just WHO do you teach?

That final question done with, I’ll begin throwing away all those books.

Many thanks,

Tim

July 5, 1975

Dear Tim,

Thank you for your card.

In my last letter I said that if you are thinking, all Buddha’s speech, eminent teacher’s speech, all sutras and my speech are demon’s speech. If you cut off all thinking, then the dog is barking, the chicken is cackling, the sky is blue and the trees are green. All “like this” is truth. That is better than sutras, Buddha’s speech and my speech. So, you must cut off all thinking and only keep a complete don’t-know mind. That is why I told you to ask a tree. A tree is better than me, better than Buddha, and better than the sutras.

Long ago in Korea there lived a famous Zen Master named Mang Gong. One day when he was in the yard in front of his temple, someone asked him, “To what do you transmit the Dharma?” Zen Master Mang Gong said, “I have already transmitted it to a tree.” So, the tree is a Zen Master. It is possible for it to teach Zen.

Once someone asked Zen Master Jo-ju: “Why did Bodhidharma come to China?” The Zen Master said, “The pine tree in the front yard.” So, the tree is Bodhidharma’s mind, and Bodhidharma’s mind is “teaching Zen” mind.

Someone asked a great Zen Master, “What is Buddha-nature?” The Zen Master replied, “The tree is green.” The tree has already taught Buddha-nature. All trees are your teacher. You ask the tree: “What am I?” Then the tree will teach you. If you are thinking, you cannot understand. If you cut off all thinking, then you will attain the tree’s true answer.

I am very glad you are throwing away your books.

In my last letter I said, "I cannot teach you either." The meaning of these words is that in your first letter you were very attached to words, books, and thinking. This kind of person all Buddhas and eminent teachers cannot teach. I cannot teach that kind of person either. But now you say that you are throwing away your books, and that you want to understand yourself. Your mind is keeping "What am I?" "What am I?" means complete don't-know mind. Complete don't-know mind means cutting off all thinking. When you're thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are different. When you cut off all thinking, your mind, my mind, and all people's minds are the same. So, don't-know mind has already cut off all thinking. My don't-know mind, your don't-know mind, and all people's don't-know minds are the same. So, don't-know mind is cutting off all thinking mind, and cutting off all thinking mind is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking is your substance. Your substance, my substance, all people's substance, universal substance, and the tree's substance are all the same. The universe is you. You and everything become one. So, you are the tree, and the tree is you.

Then I ask you, "Are you and the tree the same or different?" If you say "the same", I'll hit you thirty times. If you say "different", I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

If you don't understand, only keep don't-know mind. This don't-know mind is called "clear mind", "empty mind", "before thinking", "substance", and "the Absolute". But since this don't-know mind is before thinking, there are no words, no speech, no name, and no form. If you open your mouth it is wrong.

I hope that you will everywhere and at all times only keep the don't-know mind, and that you will soon get enlightenment and find a good answer for me.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Note: You should not address your letters to "S.S."

Please use "Soen-sa-nim".

—The typist

TEMPLE RULES

By Zen Master Seung Sahn

1. On Keeping the Bodhi Mind

You must first make a firm decision to attain Enlightenment and help others. You already have the five or the ten precepts. Know when to keep them and when to break them, when they are open and when they are closed. Let go of your small self and become your true self.

In original nature  
There is no this and that.

The Great Round Mirror  
Has no likes or dislikes.

2. On Mindfulness

Do not cling to your opinions. Do not discuss your private views with others. To cling to and defend your opinions is to destroy your practice. Put away all your opinions. This is true Buddhism.

Do not go where you have no business. Do not listen to talk which does not concern you.

Do not make bad karma of desire, anger, or ignorance.

If in this lifetime  
You do not open your mind,

You cannot digest  
Even one drop of water.

3. On Conduct

Always act with others. Do not put yourself above others by acting differently. Arrogance is not permitted in the temple.

Money and sex are like a spiteful snake. Put your concern with them far away.

In the Dharma Room always walk behind those seated in meditation. At talks and ceremonies, keep the proper posture and dress. Do not talk or laugh loudly in the Dharma Room.

If you have business outside the temple which causes you to miss ceremonies or meals, notify one of the temple officials before you leave.

Respect those older than you. Love those younger than you. Keep your mind large and open.

If you meet sick people, love and help them.

Be hospitable to guests. Make them welcome and attend to their needs.

When respected people visit the temple, bow to them and speak considerately to them.

Be courteous. Always let others go before you.

Help other people.

Do not play games with other people.

Do not gossip.

Do not use other people's shoes and coats.

Do not cling to the scriptures.

Do not oversleep.

Do not be frivolous.

Let older and more respected people be seated before you.

Do not discuss petty temple matters with guests.

When visiting outside the temple, speak well of the temple to others.

Drinking to produce heedlessness, or acting out of lust will only make bad karma and destroy your practice. You must be strong and think correctly. Then these desires cannot tempt you.

Do not delude yourself into thinking you are a great and free person. This is not true Buddhism.

Attend only to yourself. Do not judge the actions of others.

Do not make the bad karma of killing, stealing, or of lust.

Originally there is nothing.

But Buddha practiced unmoving under the  
Bodhi tree for six years.  
And for nine years Bodhidharma sat  
silently in Sorim.

If you can break the wall of yourself,  
You will become infinite in time and space.

#### 4. On Speech

You evil tongue will lead you to ruin. You must keep the stopper in the bottle. Only open it when necessary.

Always speak well, in the manner of a Bodhisattva. Do not use vulgar language in the temple.

If you come upon two people fighting, do not provoke them by angry speech. Rather use good words to soothe their anger.

Do not make the bad karma of lying, exaggerating, making trouble between people, or cursing others.

Once a man spoke incorrectly and was reborn  
a fox for 500 generations. After he heard  
the correct speech, he lost his fox's body.  
What is correct and incorrect speech?

If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.  
If you close your mouth, I will still hit you thirty times.  
You must grab the word-head (kong-an) and not let go.  
The dog is barking. Wong, wong, wong!  
The cat is meowing. Meow, meow, meow.

#### 5. On Eating

An eminent teacher said, "A day without work is a day without eating."

There are two kinds of work: inside work and outside work. Inside work is keeping clear mind. Outside work is cutting off selfish desires and helping others.

First work, then eat.

Eat in silence. Do not make unnecessary noise.

While eating, attend only to yourself. Do not be concerned with the actions of others.

Accept what is served with gratitude. Do not cling to your likes and dislikes.

Do not seek gratification in eating. Eat only to support yourself in your practice.

Though you may eat good food all your life, your body will die.

The Great Way is not difficult.  
Simply cut off all thought of good and bad.

Salt is salty.  
Sugar is sweet.

## 6. On Formal Practice

During formal practice act with other people

Do not be lazy.

During chanting, follow the moktak.

During sitting, follow the chugpi.

Perceive the true meaning of chanting and sitting and act accordingly.

Understand that you have accumulated bad karma which is like a big mountain. Keep this in mind as you bow in repentance.

Our karma has no self-nature, but is created by our mind. If our mind is extinguished, our karma will be extinguished. When we see both as empty, this is true repentance. We bow to see true nature and help others.

Shouting into a valley.  
Big shout: big echo.  
Small shout: small echo.

## 7. On the Dharma Talk

When you listen to the words of the Zen Master, keep your mind clear. Do not be attached to his words. Cut off all thought and pierce the true meaning of his speech.

Do not think, "I already have great understanding; I have no use for this speech." This is delusion.

If you have a question, put it to the Zen Master after he is finished speaking.

If a snake drinks water, the water becomes venom. If a cow drinks water, the water becomes milk. If you cling to ignorance, you create life and death. If you keep clear, you become Buddha.

In the great work of life and death, time will not wait for you.  
If you die tomorrow, what kind of body will you get?  
Is not all of this of great importance?

Hurry up! Hurry!

Blue sky and green sea  
Are the Buddha's original face.

The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song  
Are the great sutras.

Where are you going?  
Watch your step.

Water flows down to the sea.  
Clouds float up to the heavens.

### The Story of Kyong Ho

Seventy-five years ago, when Seung Sahn Soen-sa's great-grandteacher, Zen Master Kyong Ho, was a young man, Korean Buddhism was very weak. There was only one line of Transmission, and it seemed probable that Zen would entirely disappear from Korea. Then Kyong Ho attained enlightenment and became the teacher of many great Zen monks. He is now known as the Patriarch of Korean Zen.

When Kyong Ho was nine years old, his father died. Since his mother was too poor to bring him up, she sent him to a temple and he became a monk. At the age of fourteen, he began to study the sutras under sutra Master Ge Ho. He was a brilliant student; he heard one and understood ten. Within a few years he had learned all he could from Ge Ho, so he moved on to the great sutra temple Tong Gak Sa. There he advanced to the highest level. By the time he was twenty-three years old, he had mastered all the principal sutras. Soon many monks began to gather around him, and he became a famous sutra master.

One day, he decided to pay a visit to his first teacher. After a few days of walking, he passed through a small village. Something seemed wrong. There were no people in the streets. Kyong Ho began to feel an overwhelming sense of disaster. He opened the door of one of the houses. There were five corpses lying on the floor, in various states of decomposition. He opened the door of the next house, and there were more corpses rotting on the floor. As he walked through the main street, dazed and terrified, he noticed a sign. "Danger. Cholera. If you value your life, go away."

This sign struck Kyong Ho like a hammer, and his mind became clear. "I am supposed to be a great sutra master; I already understand all of the Buddha's teachings. Why am I so afraid? Even though I understand that all things are transient, that life and death are aspects of one reality, I am very attached to my body. So life is a hindrance, and death is a hindrance. What can I do?"

On the way home, Kyong Ho thought very deeply about these questions. Finally, he summoned all his students and said, "You have all come here to study the sutras, and I have been teaching you. But I know now that the sutras are only Buddha's words. They are not Buddha's mind.

"As many sutras as I have mastered, I still haven't attained the Buddha-mind. I can't teach you any more. If you wish to continue your studies, there are many qualified sutra masters who will be glad to teach you. But I have decided to understand my true self, and I will not teach again until I attain enlightenment."

All the students left except one. Kyong Ho shut himself in his room. Once a day the student brought him food, leaving the platter outside the closed door. All day long, Kyong Ho sat or did lying-down Zen. He meditated on a kong-an which he had read in a Zen book: "Zen

Master Yong Un said, 'Before the donkey leaves, the horse has already arrived.' What does this mean?" "I am already as good as dead," he thought; "if I can't get beyond life and death, I will never leave this room." Every time he began to feel sleepy, he would take an awl and plunge it into his thigh.

Three months passed. During this time, Kyong Ho did not have a moment of sleep.

One day, the student went to a nearby town to beg for food. In town, he happened to meet a Mr. Lee, who was a close friend of Kyong Ho's. Mr. Lee said, "What is your master doing nowadays?"

The student said, "He is doing hard training. He only eats, sits, and lies down."

"If he just eats, sits, and lies down, he will be reborn as a cow."

The young monk became very angry. "How can you say that? My teacher is the greatest scholar in Korea! I'm positive that he'll go to heaven after he dies!"

Mr. Lee said, "That's no way to answer me."

"Why not? How should I have answered?"

"I would have said, 'If my teacher is reborn as a cow, he will be a cow with no nostrils.'"

"A cow with no nostrils? What does that mean?"

"Go ask your teacher."

When he returned to the temple, the student knocked at Kyong Ho's door and told him of his conversation with Mr. Lee. As soon as he had finished, to his amazement, Kyong Ho opened the door and, with great luminous eyes, walked out of the room.

This is the poem which he wrote upon attaining the great enlightenment:

I heard about the cow with no nostrils  
and suddenly the whole universe is my home.  
Yon Am Mountain lies flat under the road.  
A farmer, at the end of his work, is singing.

Soon afterwards, he went to Zen Master Man Hwa for an interview. Man Hwa gave him Transmission and the Dharma name Kyong Ho, which means Empty Mirror. He thus became the seventy-fifth patriarch in his line of succession. In turn, five great Zen Masters received the Transmission from him: Yong Son, Han Am, Sa Wol, and Mang Gong, the teacher of Ko Bong, who was the teacher of Seung Sahn Soen-sa.

Just before Kyong Ho died, he wrote the following poem:

Light from the moon of clear mind  
drinks up everything in the world.  
When mind and light disappear,  
what... is... this...?

A moment after he had finished the poem, he was dead.

### The Story of Mang Gong

Zen Master Mang Gong, Seung Sahn Soen-sa's grand-teacher, became a monk when he was a young boy, and for several years studied the Mahayana sutras at Dong Hak Sa temple. One day, when he was thirteen years old, there was a great ceremony to mark the beginning of the long vacation. The sutra Master got up and said, "You must all study very hard, learn Buddhism, and become like great trees, from which temples are built, and like large bowls, able to hold many good things. The sutra says, 'Water becomes square or round according to the shape of the container it is put in. In the same way, people become good or bad according to the friends they have.' Always have the Buddha in mind and keep good company. Then you will become great trees and containers of Dharma. This I sincerely wish."

The next speaker was Zen Master Kyong Ho, who happened to be visiting the temple. He was already known all over Korea as a very great Zen Master and, clothed in rags, with long hair and a long, thin beard, he was a striking figure among the neat, shaven-headed monks. He said, "All of you are monks. Monks are free of petty personal attachments and live only to serve all people. Wanting to become a great tree or container of Dharma will prevent you from being a true teacher. Great trees have great uses; small trees have small uses. Good and bad bowls can all be used in their own way. None are to be discarded. Keep both good and bad friends. You mustn't reject anything. This is true Buddhism. My only wish for you is that you free yourselves from all conceptual thinking."

Everyone was filled with deep admiration. As the Zen Master walked out of the Dharma room, Mang Gong ran after him and pulled at his robe. Kyong Ho turned around and said, "What do you want?"

Mang Gong said, "I want to become your student. Please take me with you."

Kyong Ho shouted at him to go away, but the boy would not leave. Then he said, with great severity, "You are only a child. You are incapable of learning Buddhism."

Mang Gong said, "People may be young or old, but is there youth or old age in Buddhism?"

Kyong Ho said, "You bad boy! You have killed and eaten the Buddha! Come along now."

He took the boy to Chung Jung Sa temple, introduced him to the abbot and left him there.

Mang Gong studied hard for the next five years. One day, when he was eighteen, he heard the kong-an "The ten thousand dharmas return to the One; where does the One return?" Immediately he was plunged into the great doubt. Heat or sleep or think of anything but that one question. All day long, and far into the night, he would keep the question in his mind, wherever he was, whatever he was doing.

One day, as he was sitting Zen, a large hole appeared in the wall which he was facing. He could see the whole landscape! Grass, trees, clouds, and the blue sky appeared through the wall with total clarity. He touched the wall. It was still there, but it was transparent like glass. He looked up, and he could see right through the roof. At this, Mang Gong was filled with an inexpressible joy. Early the next morning he went to see the Zen Master, rushed into his room, and announced, "I have penetrated the nature of all things. I have attained enlightenment."

The Master said, "Oh, have you? Then what is the nature of all things?"

Mang Gong said, "I can see right through the wall and the roof, as if they weren't there."

The Master said, "Is this the truth?"

"Yes. I have no hindrance at all."

The Master took his Zen stick and hit Mang Gong on the head. "Is there any hindrance now?"

Mang Gong was astonished. His eyes bulged, his face flushed, and the walls became solid again. The Master said, "Where did your truth go?"

"I don't know. Please teach me."

"What kong-an are you working on?"

"Where does the One return?"

"Do you understand One?"

"No."

"You must first understand One. What you saw was an illusion. Don't be led astray by it. With more hard work on your kong-an, you will soon understand."

Mang Gong came out of this interview with renewed aspiration. For the next three years he meditated continually on the great question. Then, one morning that was no different from other mornings, he sang the words of the morning bell chant: "If you wish to understand all Buddhas of the past, present, and future, you must perceive that the whole universe is created by the mind alone." Having sung this, he hit the great bell. Suddenly his mind opened, and he understood that all Buddhas dwell in a single sound.

Dizzy with joy, Mang Gong ran to the Dharma room and kicked the monk who used to sit next to him. The monk cried out and said, "Are you crazy?"

Mang Gong said, "This is Buddha nature!"

"Have you attained enlightenment?"

"The whole universe is one. I am Buddha!"

During the next year, Mang Gong kicked and hit many other monks and became very famous. People said, “He is a free man. He has no hindrance at all.”

One day, a year later, there was an important ceremony at which Kyong Ho was present. Mang Gong went to his room thinking, “This Zen Master and I are the same. We have both attained enlightenment. He is Buddha, so am I. But, since he was my first teacher, I will bow to him, just as an ordinary monk would do.”

After Mang Gong had bowed, Kyong Ho said, “Welcome. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you. I heard that you have attained enlightenment. Is that true?”

Mang Gong said, “Yes, Master.”

“Wonderful. Now let me ask you a question.” Kyong Ho picked up a fan and a writing brush and put them in front of Mang Gong. “Are these the same or different?”

Mang Gong said, “The fan is the brush; the brush is the fan.”

For the next hour, with grandmotherly compassion, Kyong Ho tried to teach Mang Gong his mistake. But Mang Gong wouldn’t listen. Finally Kyong Ho said, “I have one more question for you. In the burial ceremony there is a verse that says, ‘The statue has eyes, and its tears silently drip down.’ What does this mean?”

Mang Gong was stunned. He could find nothing to say. Suddenly, Kyong Ho shouted at him, “If you don’t understand this, why did you say that the fan and the brush were the same?”

In great despair, Mang Gong bowed and said, “Forgive me.”

“Do you understand your mistake?”

“Yes, Master. What can I do?”

“Long ago, when Zen Master Jo-ju was asked if a dog had Buddha-nature, he said, ‘No.’ What does this mean?”

“I don’t know.”

Kyong Ho said, “Always keep the mind that doesn’t know and you will soon attain enlightenment.”

Mang Gong understood what a great gift this teaching was. For the next three years, he did very hard training and always kept don’t-know mind. One day he heard the great bell ring and understood Jo-ju’s answer. He returned to Kyong Ho, bowed, and said, “Now I know why the Bodhisattva faces away: because sugar is sweet and salt is salty.”

June 26, 1975

Dear Soen-sa:

That all things are empty, is known to all men, because “how can there be something out of nothing?”

Why is this nothingness then worthy of study, when most men step beyond its fascination into the world of suffering and pleasure?

Also, what is this wholeness of the emptiness of personality?

Also, how is it that emptiness is subject to mutual causes and conditions?

Please show me in what direction lies the path.

Sincerely,

Leigh

July 16, 1975

Dear Leigh,

Thank you for your letter.

In your letter you asked some very important questions. First you said, “That all things are empty, is known to all men, because ‘how can there be something out of nothing?’” All people understand emptiness, but don’t attain emptiness. What is true emptiness? Understanding is thinking; attainment is before thinking. So, you must attain true emptiness.

Here is a question for you: The Heart sutra says, “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form.” Then, is your body form or emptiness? If you say it is form, I will hit you thirty times. If you say it is emptiness, I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

If you are thinking, you won’t understand. If you don’t understand, only keep a “don’t know” mind. This don’t know mind has already cut off all thinking. The “cut off all thinking” mind is true emptiness, and true emptiness is before thinking. Before thinking means no speech and no words, and so no form and no emptiness. Then you understand that “form is emptiness, emptiness is form” is no form and no emptiness. No form and no emptiness means that your substance and universal substance are the area of becoming One.

This is the Absolute. Emptiness and form are opposites words. Opposites are thinking. The Absolute is before thinking.

In your second question you said, “Why is this nothingness then worthy of study, when most men step beyond its fascination into the world of suffering and pleasure?”

Many of these people are thinking. Thinking means desire; desire means suffering. So, first, it is very important that you understand your true self. This is very important. Then only keep “What am I?” Don’t know! Big question!

In your third question you said, “What is this wholeness of the emptiness of personality?”

Don’t make everything. “Wholeness”, “emptiness”, and “personality” are all names. Names and forms are made by thinking. If you keep before thinking mind, that is a complete don’t know mind. then there is no “wholeness”, no “emptiness”, and no “personality”, and that is true wholeness, true emptiness, and true personality.

So, you must make your situation, your condition, and your opinion disappear. Then in your mind there will be no object, no subject, no conditions, no causes, and no results. All of the above are opposites words. If you are thinking, there are opposites. If you cut thinking, there are no opposites.

So you must keep complete don’t know mind. Then your mind is not moving. Not moving mind is one mind. Its name is “emptiness”, or “before thinking”, or “the Absolute”, or “substance”, or “your true self”. But since it is before thinking there are no words, no speech, no name, and no form. If you open your mouth it is wrong. You must always, everywhere, keep don’t know mind. Then you will soon get enlightenment. This is the true path.

You will truly attain first “form is emptiness, emptiness is form”. Next, you will attain “no form, no emptiness”. Then finally you will reach the complete attainment of “form is form, emptiness is emptiness”. The words in these three sentences are different, but the meaning is the same if you keep a don’t know mind. Don’t know mind is before thinking. Before thinking is clear like space. That is the “like this” mind. The sky is blue; the trees are green. Only “like this”.

I hope you will do hard training and soon become a great man.

Sincerely,

S.S

July 7, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I am now employed at U.C.L.A. in the Department of Anthropology, as head of the audio-visual equipment and supplies. This is the department that Carlos Castenades, author of "The Teachings of Don Juan" and three other books came from, so it has a history of being a place where Zen-like teachings have come from.

What I want to do is start a class about Zen, as a way of power and clarity, of effort and seeing clearly, taught out of the Department on an informal basis, perhaps, in the future, to become a bona-fide course. I will bring various Zen teachers to this course, so that the students at UCLA will become exposed to the various styles.

To help this come to pass, I would like to decorate my office with various Zen artifacts and calligraphies, so that students and faculty begin to ask questions as to what they are. From there, it will be a matter of playing it by ear.

Also, I am attempting to get a radio or T.V. show on one of the 14 public radio and T.V. stations in the L.A. area, with the same format: a forum for the exposition of the non-mystical teachings of Zen.

As you can see from the above address, I no longer live at the Center.

Also, I am now studying kong-ans under a not-too-good Japanese Rinzai Roshi, who doesn't seem to know much except kong-ans and sitting. To answer his kong-ans, it helps to know Japanese and Chinese poetry, for it is not enough to get the spirit of the kong-an, you must also answer with the exactly correct words. Yet, even then, the answers are extraordinarily simple, and, wrong. The answers he requires are conceptual, not answers about how the world is, but based on Buddhist doctrine and Chinese common sense in the form of traditional poetry.

But, he is a very nice man, very compassionate, and relatively unperterbable, and, after being here over a year, he has only five or six regular students. He does not like Los Angeles, and would like to leave. I want to help him if I can. Already, I've written to almost 30 Zen groups without teachers in America to see if they were interested, and they are not. If a course at UCLA is started, I'd like to have him come and get more exposure.

If this course at UCLA gets started (sometime in October after the students return on Sept. 28) would you please come at least once? (if you are in L.A. then.) If the radio or T.V. show gets started, it will probably be when you are not here, but it probably could be arranged to show a video-tape if T.V., or an audio tape or cassette, if radio. I would appreciate it.

Referring back to the decorating of my office, so that students ask questions, would you please send me one of your excellent calligraphies? Enclosed is some money to cover the cost of material and postage.

I still plan to come to Providence for the one-hundred day retreat when it starts (summer of next year?), or even sooner if my efforts here fail to be productive

Yours in the Dharma,

Ed

P.S. Also, please put me on the mailing list for the Providence Zen Center newsletter. In the past I made copies of the one sent to Paritrata or Suhita, but I no longer live at the Center.

July 14, 1975

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter; I was very glad to receive it. Carl was in New York a while ago and told me that you had moved, but I didn't know where you were. Now that I have your letter, I know.

I am glad about your new job. This is your correct job. A many-thinking job can be a very good one.

Everything that you said about your Zen course is correct. But you must first understand your true self. This is very important. Your course is like a Zen department store. This is not bad. Buddha sometimes taught Hinayana-style; then, to people who could understand, he taught Mahayana-style; then, to people who really understood, he taught Zen-style. So your idea is very good. Also your plans for a TV or radio program are wonderful. So I think that all is good as far as your outside job is concerned. But what is more important than this is your inside job: understanding your true self. If you understand your inside job, you won't be attached to any thinking. You must let go of all your likes and dislikes. Then your situation, your condition, and all your opinions will disappear. This is very important.

The Rinzai Zen Master whom you are studying with—I think he is a very good Zen Master. But you say he is not so good. If your mind is no good, you make this Zen Master no good. You mustn't pick out his no good kong ans and teaching. Only pick out his good teaching. You say he is a very nice man. So I think he is a very nice man and a true Bodhisattva. But your opinions are very strong, and sometimes your opinions and his opinions differ. Then you have a problem. But if you throw away all your opinions, there are no problems at all.

You say that you will help this Zen Master by inviting him to teach in your Zen course. This is very kind of you and very good Bodhisattva action. But that thirty Zen centers wrote saying "No thanks" to your offer—this is not so good. Why did they say "No thanks"? They didn't believe you. If they believed you, they would have said Okay. They were refusing you, not the Zen Master. So I think it would be good to try again and write a better letter of

introduction. You must say that you are not his student but that you have been learning with him and think that he is a very fine Zen Master.

I will be in Los Angeles maybe around August 20. I hope to see you then. I don't know if I will have time to do the TV or radio program. But if you come see me at Tahl Mah Sah, we can discuss these matters.

I am also enclosing a calligraphy by Poep-An Su Nim, a famous Korean monk and the former vice-president of Dong Guk University. He is also one of the greatest calligraphers in Korea. I hope that many people will see this calligraphy and get happy and clear minds from it.

We will talk about the long retreat when I am in Los Angeles.

I already sent you the Providence newsletter.

One more thing: I gave you some homework a few months ago. "The ten thousand Dharmas return to the one; where does the one return? If you don't understand, just ask a tree. The tree will give you a good answer." You haven't sent me an answer. Where did you lose my homework? You must find it and soon send me a good answer!

Sincerely yours,

S.S.

July 12, 1975

Dear Son-sa-nim,

I trust this finds you well. I have been working on my homework. I don't know how to tell you what "three pounds of flax" means because just writing this, trying to answer is an answer, no matter what I think or write. To see, to hear, to smell, to taste, to touch, to think, is in every way an answer. To question is to answer. To be answers the question.

Sincerely,

Patricia

July 29, 1975

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter.

Your letter is very beautiful. But still I will hit you thirty times. Why does your mind move around from place to place, seeing, smelling, hearing, and so on? Your answer shows thinking understanding, but you must attain instead your true self. Just now, how do you keep your mind? Only this. If you hear music, there is only music. If you see flowers, there are only flowers. If you smell, then only smell. If you taste, then only taste. Only one word. Many words are not necessary. Only *just like this*. Don't check your mind; don't check your thinking; don't check your cognition; don't check your opinion.

Again, I question you: someone once asked Zen master Dong Sahn, "What is Buddha?" He said, "Three pounds of flax." *Just like this*. Not many words. What does "three pounds of flax" mean? Don't think. There is nothing at all. Only *like this*.

If you don't understand, only keep this don't know mind. If you say, "This is this, and this is this, so that is that"—this style is no good. This is thinking.

I think if you have free time you should go to the New Haven Zen Center and sit with the students there. This is very necessary. Sitting together is like throwing a lot of potatoes in a vat and agitating them. As the potatoes rub against each other, the friction cleans off all the dirt on their skins. Sitting together is like this. The name of this simile is "Tang Ma Sang Sun" which means "touching each other and becoming clear". Sitting alone takes a long time. Sitting together takes a shorter time. So action together is very important.

I hope you will always, everywhere, keep a clear mind, and soon get enlightenment.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. Soon I'll be travelling in Korea . If you have any questions, you should ask the Providence Dharma teacher, George.

July 18, 1975

Dear Seung Sahn Nim,

First, thank you very much for the calligraphies, they are very, very beautiful; they will be much appreciated by all. There will be many calligraphies in my office now, because the Japanese Master has also given me four, and Satam one also.

Second, I will answer your kong-an at the end of this letter, but first I have something to say.

It used to be that I listened very carefully to a Zen Master when he talked, and did not agree or disagree, for I wanted to learn and did not want to cause anger for fear he'd refuse to teach me further, as did Philip Kapleau. Now, I no longer fear losing out on the teachings, and I speak what I feel at the moment with no fear of the consequences.

If the TV thing does not work out, fine; if the course fails, that is fine too. If I never become a teacher that is very fine, for I have nothing to say. But the time to be only preoccupied with answering great questions is past, at least for now, for I could question myself for a long time, forever, and still not answer to my satisfaction. In the meantime I act, doing what seems right at the time without regard for the possibility that I may be wrong or make mistakes. I make mistakes all the time, but it does not bother me, nor the things that I do—they are not important, but this does not prevent me from doing them. So when an animal is sick, I will care for it, if my brother is sick in the mind I will help him without regard to whether my help is good or bad. But none of these things can I do without thinking, without wondering when a dog is sick, "What can I do for him", or how do I help that Japanese Roshi. I do it when an idea comes to me then I think how to carry out that idea. But as long as we are alive we make mistakes, and have opinions. I have yet to meet a Zen Master who does not have opinions, or does not get angry. So I have opinions and ideas about how I will do things, but, if they do not work, it does not matter, but I try, I act.

For a long time Maezumi told me that I must not have my own opinions, but must only listen, and so I did. Yet whatever he said, I realized one day, was not mysterious at all, but things I knew and understood for years, yet this was his great wisdom—it was not much. It became very clear that it was foolish to follow anyone else for years becoming a robot of that person, doing what he or she thought and said. One must become his own teacher, and be willing to make mistakes, and to take the consequences for them.

Then this Jap Roshi, who is a very nice man, a great man perhaps, he has all sorts of opinions and even kinds of food he refuses to eat, because it is for children, and a great dislike for L.A., and of people that smoke Marijuana, and he left Japan because his teacher wanted him to be vice-abbot of a large temple, but he didn't, so he came to the U.S., to get away.

And then there is you, who is given to great fits of anger, and who punches people in the face in an argument, and who tells me I must have no opinions. Yet if I go around deliberately

trying not to have opinions, it is because I have an opinion not to have opinions. It may be truth for you, but it becomes only opinion for me. So I must make my own mistakes, and always watch myself. I will learn, and I listen, making mistakes, and correcting, but not out of fear of missing the Dharma.

This course I will teach, it is wrong to say I will teach, for I have nothing to teach, but I can see, often, not always, the delusions that others have, and sometimes can help someone to overcome them, sometimes, not. Nor am I ever satisfied with my own progress, but as long as I live here, now, I will act here and now to help, and if I cannot help, at least I will be helping others who may understand better, or more, by giving them a place to teach. But when I really practice hard, to my own satisfaction, I become lost, totally unaware of what is going on around me, and this is not good for then I am a log, or an ant's ass, and can do nothing.

Now, I am no longer so angry and I can answer your kong-an.

One thousand Dharmas return to the one; where does the one return?

It returns to the ten thousand Dharmas. The many return to the one, and the one becomes the many, becomes all things, the leaves of the tree, the brown earth, and the song of a Robin.

Caring always,

Ed

P.S. Enclosed is a copy of the letter I wrote for the Japanese Zen Master. He set many conditions before he would go elsewhere, among them, that the students have no teacher already, for he doesn't want to disturb them, and that they have a house, where he and his translator could live alone, or at least separate from the students. If you can write a letter better than this, please do, and I will send it.

On what pretext can I write another letter? No matter what I say, it will be basically the same. So now I try other ways, that way did not work.

July 29, 1975

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. I'm glad you liked the calligraphies I sent.

What you said about your way of listening to Zen masters is correct. If you don't lose clear mind, it's very good. But if your opinions appear, it's very bad. Now, I don't know your mind. So I ask you: How do you keep "just now" mind?

If you want to help others, then you must understand the means (medicine, etc.) This is very important. So doctors study for years to understand the methods of healing. In the same way Zen students diligently sit Zen in temples and Zen Centers and finally get enlightenment.

Then it is possible for them to teach. Your mind which says “I will help others” is a good and beautiful mind, but if you don’t understand methods and don’t understand Truth, then how can you help others? It is very difficult. So, first get enlightenment and then help other people. This is the purpose of Buddhism.

You are right in saying that a Zen master’s speech is not special. If you want to get enlightenment, all speech becomes special. If you keep “without thinking” mind, then all speech is “just like this”—Truth. You are right that being a robot is no good. You must keep your mind clear. A robot has no mind, but you, of course, have a mind. A clear mind is like space. No mind and clear-like-space mind are different.

You said that perhaps the Japanese Roshi is good. Don’t touch good and bad. Only catch his good actions and good opinions. Some Zen masters have many strong opinions, a lot of anger, many desires, and so on, but you must look at *why* they have these. *Why* is very important. Actions in themselves are not important. Only the intention is important. If the intention is based on desire for myself, this is very bad. But if there is no desire for myself, opinions, anger, and strong attachments are good. If it is only for all people, it is Bodhisattva action.

All Zen masters say and do many bad things. If you are attached to a Zen master’s bad speech and bad actions, then he cannot help you. If you aren’t attached to a Zen master’s speech or actions, this is truly helping you. Now I think that you half understand. If you do hard training again, you will get the second half.

Buddha once told a parable about a person walking alone at night. A bad person is holding a candle. If the traveller thinks this man is bad and rejects the light, then he will fall and injure himself or even die in the dark. He shouldn’t care whether the man is good or bad, but only be shown the way by the light.

You don’t need Zen masters or their actions; you only need their Dharma.

Your whole letter is full of talk about yourself. This is very bad. What are you? Don’t check yourself! You must understand the three kinds of Hinayana teaching: 1. Insight into impermanence 2. Insight into impurity 3. Insight into non-self. You are very attached to yourself. How can you attain enlightenment? You can’t understand even Hinayana. How can you understand Mahayana and Zen? They are very far away.

Lost mind, one mind, and clear mind are different. You say that when you do hard training, you become lost and are totally unaware of what’s going on around you. That is not correct practicing. If you are practicing correctly, you always keep a clear mind, which is like a clear mirror. When red comes, there is red; when white comes, there is white. Only “like this”. If your mind is lost, you don’t know directions, don’t know yourself, and don’t know ideas. There is nothing at all. If you keep one mind, you don’t care about good and bad, high and low, and going and coming. You only keep one mind. For example, in the practice of Om Mani Padme Hum, if somebody kills me, I don’t care. I only do Om Mani Padme Hum. This is being attached to one mind.

Lost mind is Hinayana style. One mind is Nembutsu and Shing Gong (mantra) style. Clear mind is Zen mind. Zen mind is every day mind.

You already understand. As for your answer, it is not good and not bad. But I hit you thirty times. Why? Because you only *understand*. You haven't attained the place to which the one returns. Many words are not necessary. How do you keep "just now" mind? This is very important.

Understanding and attainment are different. Understanding is thinking and attainment is before thinking. Before thinking there is no speech and no words. Only "just like this". Understanding uses dead words. Attainment uses live words. You must use, not dead words, but live words.

I hope you will do more hard training (correct hard training), and always, everywhere, keep a clear mind, soon get enlightenment, and help all beings.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. Your letter to Zen centers about the Roshi is very good. Then maybe all these Zen centers are branches of other centers and so don't need another master. I will come to Los Angeles on August 20, so I'll see you soon. I will send you a Bodhidharma picture that was painted by my classmate at Dong Guk University, Mr. Song.

August 2, 1975

Dear Ed,

I am sending you this picture of Bodhidharma made by my friend Mr. Song. he was my classmate at Dong Guk University thirty years ago. We are very good friends. He is famous in Korea for his Oriental art.

When I told him about you he did this painting and added a calligraphy of four characters, which mean "Bodhidharma silence nine years". Maybe these words will help you a lot.

I hope you'll keep this Bodhidharma picture and become a second Bodhidharma in this world.

Sincerely,

S.S.

July 24, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I started putting off writing an answer to your last correspondence and it got later and later and I never did get around to it so I will just have to wait for you to come to California to talk to you about my homework. I was delighted to hear that you are going to marry Susan and Karl because that meant that you would be staying here for awhile. Please let me know when you are arriving.

Our long Spring retreat is now formally over but really it never got started. We have had to spend so much of our spare time running back and forth between here and the refugee camps in Camp Pendleton and dealing with refugee problems that the retreat got lost somewhere along the way. Working or sitting—the flavor is really not very different.

I am now teaching a meditation class on Wednesday nights at IBMC which draws from 15 to 20 people on the average. The students begin with a mind calming practice, then breath counting and “only-sitting”. I am working up to a program of individual interviews and want to start some of them on kong-ans. Still, although I feel myself competent enough as a sutra teacher, my Zen teacher style needs polishing so I am really quite anxious to study with you for a while again.

I would like to bring up a problem that perhaps is really none of my business but which I feel concerned about anyway. As you know, our friend Chung Dal has had to leave Quan Um Sa because he got married. Whatever may be the custom in Korea regarding married Buddhist teachers, in America where we have so few good, competent teachers, to waste even one is a very bad thing. In America, whether a teacher is or is not married is not very important. What is important is whether he is a competent and effective teacher of the Dharma. Chung Dal is a very good teacher and can save many people from suffering if he continues to be a teacher. Now, however, I fear he is falling completely into the life of an ordinary layman because his head is still attached to the Korean idea of a monk. I have tried to convince him to keep his robes and his role as a teacher but I do not think I have succeeded. At the risk of being impertinent, may I urge you to write to Chung Dal and encourage him not to abandon the teaching of the Dharma. I am married and presume to teach Dharma. Why should he not do the same?

Let me hear from you soon,

An Hanh (Michael)

August 2, 1975

Dear Ven. An Hanh,

Thank you for your letter.

Since many Vietnamese people came to the United States, you, Ven Thich Thien-an, and Satam have been very, very busy. To be busy is the great Bodhisattva way. Since you were so busy I understand the lapse in correspondence between us. As has been said before, no news is good news. But, don't lose your clear mind. This is very important. You say that when I arrive in Los Angeles we can talk about your homework. That's a very good idea.

Whether you finish the homework or not is not important. How do you keep just now mind? That is most important. I think you are always helping others. This is the true way and true Zen mind.

An eminent teacher once said, "When walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, being silent, moving, being still, at all times, in all places, without interruption: What am I? One mind is infinite kalpas."

Your way of teaching your meditation class is wonderful. When I arrive in Los Angeles I'll talk with you about teaching with interviews. In Korea and China there are interviews only when they are requested by a student. They are not scheduled. But I think that if we make a schedule, then interviews are very necessary. People in the past did not have as much thinking as they do today. So through interviews the Zen master can check his students' minds and correct their mistakes. These days it is necessary to have interviews often. This is the best, quickest, and easiest way, and I think the correct way, to teach.

In your letter you are concerned for Chung Dal. So, thank you very much. I am also of the same mind. Chung Dal's getting married has troubled me quite a bit. But, this is his karma. Many people are controlled by their karma. For people to control their karma is very difficult. After sitting Zen a lot, or practicing the way of Buddhism a lot, then a person can get Dharma energy. Then it is possible for that person to control their karma. Since ordinary people have no Dharma energy, every day they are controlled by their Karma. So, it is very important for us to practice a lot, keep a not moving mind, and get Dharma energy.

Chung Dal said to me, "Soen-sa-nim, I am sorry, I am getting married, so I will leave Kwan Um Sa and go to the country. In the future what shall I do? Teach me. This is my karma. Teach me the best way."

Then I said to him, "Don't worry about whether you are getting married or not, and also don't worry about whether you are leaving Kwan Um Sa or not. You must keep the mind you had when you first started Buddhism. This is very important. An eminent teacher said, 'Starter's mind is enlightenment mind.' If you keep this mind, your getting married, and your leaving Kwan Um Sa, are only outside forms. Most important, how do you keep your mind? If you keep this starter's mind, in the future you will be able to control yourself and control your karma, so you will get great enlightenment and it will be possible for your to save all people. If you lose starter's mind, your bad karma will control you and you will get a lot of suffering. So, you must come to the Providence Zen Center and I will give you Dharma teacher precepts. You already understand Buddhism, and already understand the correct way, Zen mind, and the Bodhisattva way. I think this is the best thing for you to do."

So he said, "Thank you very much. I will come to the Providence Zen Center."

I've been waiting for him, but he still hasn't come. Maybe when I go to Los Angeles I can talk to him again. In the United States there are few teachers, as you said. Only getting married and living as a layman is not so good, as you said. So I hope that together we will meet him, talk to him, and help open his mind.

I am sending you a painting of Bodhidharma that was made by my friend, Layman Song. He was my classmate at Dong Guk University thirty years ago. We are very good friends. He is famous in Korea for his Oriental art. Do you remember the Bodhidharma painting at Tahl Mah Sah? He painted that one also. Now his is living in San Diego.

In the picture there is some calligraphy which I'm sure you understand, so I won't explain it for you. Some day you will explain these words and save all people.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. I will arrive in Los Angeles about the twentieth of this month.

July 26, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Somebody asked me the following questions: “If a Zen Master is capable of doing miracles, why doesn’t he do them? He is supposed to be a great Bodhisattva: doesn’t this mean curing both physical and mental diseases? Why doesn’t Soen-sa-nim do as Jesus did—make the blind see, or touch a crazy person and make him sane? Wouldn’t even such a showy miracle as walking on water make many people believe in Zen, so that they would begin to practice and eventually understand themselves? So why doesn’t he do miracles only for all people?”

How should I answer such questions?

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Mu Gak

August 3, 1975

Dear Mu Gak,

Thank you for your letter.

Many people want miracles, and most people are very attached to them. Some Zen masters use them; others do not. Miracles are only a technique, and are not the true way.

About five hundred years ago in Korea there lived two Zen masters named Seo Sahn and Sa Myong. They used miracles a lot. Why? Because at that time the Japanese army was overrunning the country. The Korean people had no energy to fight them, so the two Zen masters organized a monks’ army. The two Zen masters used a lot of 270 action as part of their strategy against the Japanese. Sometimes they brought on fantastic wind storms, or rainstorms with thunder and lightening, or unbearable heat waves. Sometimes they created ferocious tigers, lions, and snakes. The Japanese became terrified of them because of their special powers, and ran away. The two Zen masters and their exploits are still famous in Korea.

But, they used miracles of this kind only on very,very special occasions. Usually they didn’t use them. If a Zen master used miracles often, everyone would be very attached to this technique of his, and they wouldn’t learn the true way.

A keen-eyed Zen master already understands people's karma. The Buddha said, "Correct (or deserved) karma cannot be made to disappear. It can only disappear through each person's own practice." The Buddha also said, "Although I have many methods of curing people's bodies and minds, I can't make people use them. It's not my responsibility." The Buddha has already given instructions for someone who is blind or disabled. But most people want miracles instead. Only if they make their bad karma disappear is it possible for them to be cured. Magic alone cannot make bad karma disappear. It is only a technique.

The Buddha had ten great students. Each of them had a specialty. Ananda memorized; Mahakasyapa did difficult practice; Sariputra had a profound understanding of emptiness. Mong-nyon's specialty was magic. One day when he was sitting he saw that the Kapila Empire would soon be destroyed in a war. He thought, "If I don't do something, a week from today at 11:00 the Kapila Empire will disappear." So he went to the Buddha and said, "O Lord, did you know that next week your country is going to disappear?"

"Yes," said the Buddha.

"Then why don't you help them?"

"I cannot help them," answered the Buddha.

"You have special energy and can do magic. Why can't you help them?" asked Mong-nyon.

The Buddha said, "It is very difficult to make right (deserved) karma disappear."

But Myong-nyon didn't believe the Buddha. He was angry because he thought the Buddha wasn't keeping a Bodhisattva mind, so he said, "All right then, I'll help them myself!"

The Buddha said, "O.K. You understand magic. See if you can help them."

So Mong-nyon did magic and put the entire Kapila Empire into an eating bowl. Then he took the bowl to heaven. There are three sections in heaven. The middle one is called Do Sol, and it is the one that all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas inhabit. It is the highest of paradises, and the best place to be. There is no fighting, and it is very quiet and wonderful all the time. Mong-nyon put the bowl containing the Kapila Empire in the middle of the palace in the middle of Do Sol, where he thought no one could harm it. Seven days passed, and the day when the results of the Kapilan's karma should have occurred also passed. (If the day when a karmic event is scheduled to occur passes without its occurrence, then that event will not be rescheduled for a future day. For instance, if my leg is supposed to be broken tomorrow morning at eight, but if when that time comes I am doing hard training with a mantra, then I won't break my leg at all.)

So, the day had passed, and Mong-nyon said to himself, "Ah, everything is fine now," and he brought the bowl back from heaven. But when he looked in the bowl, he saw that the country had been devastated by a miniature civil war.

Mong-nyon was very sad that his special magic had not been able to help the Kapila Empire's inhabitants. He went and told the Buddha what had happened. Buddha said, "I already told you. It is very difficult to make correct karma disappear. So, if I give you

medicine, it is up to you to take it. It is not my responsibility. And you must not be attached to magic.”

So, magic is only a technique. But many people are attached to it, and so they don't learn the true way. Magic cannot really help them. It only makes their bad karma grow and grow.

The Buddha said, “Don't use magic. Only follow the noble eight-fold path: right views, right thoughts, right speech, right karma, right life, right practice, right mindfulness, and right meditation.”

Some people know how to do tricks with cards. It looks like they have done something magic, but actually it is only a trick. We don't see what is really happening. What we call magic is the same way. Magic is only taking people's consciousness and manipulating them. It is only a trick. It is not part of the noble eight-fold path. It cannot change karma. The only way to make karma disappear is for your consciousness to become emptiness. Then there is no magic. Then there are only correct view and correct practicing.

If you want to be able to do magic you can learn how. But this is not the correct way. Keen-eyed Zen masters usually don't use it. Only on very, very rare occasions do they use it. If you think, “I want to learn magic to save all people,” then this is the wrong way. Zen masters don't use magic like that, because it does not help the true way.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Master Seung Sahn,

I was very glad to receive your letter. I calmed down after reading it. I am trying now just to be mindful, when I think not to be attached to thinking just to be aware. I realize that until I penetrate the meaning of life and death by living full in the present, I won't be able to help others. Because of you and Ven. Hearn I know that red is red and white is white as far as Zen is concerned, I am very grateful. Even if my head is full of conceptual thoughts my belly tells me that everything is ok. The sky and trees tell me that there is wisdom and compassion even in a felled tree and smoggy sky. The Heart sutra tells me good and bad are forms that are emptiness so I must keep a humble mind and not be attached to them. If I can do this maybe good will be good, bad will be bad. I don't know any Zen but I am grateful. Your other letters you included helped me alot. August 9-16 Soen Nakagawa Roshi will be in Los Angeles for sesshin. I am going to go. Could you tell me when you plan to go to Los Angeles again?

I hope that all is well.

Yours,

Stephen

July 8, 1975

Dear Stephen,

I was very happy to receive your letter.

Sometimes thinking is good. But attachment to thinking is very bad. You already understand Zen mind. Then, only practice. That will help you. Words are not necessary.

Many people understand that red is red and white is white, and that the sky is blue and the trees are green. Speech is very easy. But, what is its true meaning? Why is the sky blue? Why are the trees green? Then what can you do?

Before I told you about "like this" and "just like this". There are many kinds of "like this". The sky is blue, the trees are green, red is red, white is white, and three times three is nine: all are "like this". But "just like this" has only one point. For example, if we have a bell and I ask, "Is this a bell or not?", the answer "the sky is blue and the trees are green" is no good. Only ring the bell! There is only one point, and one answer, which is complete. So, you must understand "just like this".

I have given you homework. If someone comes to a Zen Center, drops ashes and blows smoke on the Buddha, then what can you do?

And, a mouse eats cat food, and the cat bowl is broken. What does this mean?

You must finish this homework. If you understand “like this” you understand the True Way, but you only understand it yourself, and cannot communicate it to others. So you must get “just like this”.

In the past an eminent teacher said that there are four difficult things. The first is being born a human being, the second is hearing about Zen, the third is meeting a keen-eyed Zen Master, and the last is getting enlightenment. Among these four things, the most important is meeting a keen-eyed Zen Master. If you don't meet one, you can't get complete enlightenment.

If you don't practice, you won't understand. If you practice, you will understand yourself, as when you drink water and know that it is either warm or cool.

You said you're going to attend sesshin with Soen Nakagawa Roshi. That's very good. But you must keep *your* way. Don't lose your practice.

A great Zen Master once said, “To keep mind is to be clear as space. To use mind is to be as precise as the point of a needle.” So, keeping mind is “like this”. Using mind is “just like this”.

I hope that you will always, everywhere, keep a clear mind, soon get enlightenment, and save all beings.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. I will probably arrive in Los Angeles about August 20. I hope to see you then.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Received your letter recently. Thank you very much.

I will not try to answer “homework” this time cause I just “don’t know” the answer. All I know is the paper is white, the ink black.

I hope you will drop me a note as to the exact time you will arrive in Los Angeles, and if you will be here for—how long? Will you be at Tal Ma Sa? and will you have time for interviews etc?

You said that you will see Ven. Song Ryong Hearn in Japan, so I am enclosing a letter to him—if you have a firm address, please just mail it to him—otherwise—if you can, please hand carry it to him when you go to Japan.

Practice is going well. I just spent a week in the mountains—climbed Mount Whitney—saw what the bear saw when he climbed the mountain—the valley on the other side—five beautiful lakes, many flowers and beautiful animals, got to sit alone with nature for awhile—good.

Today the sky is blue.

Dharma blessing,

Jack

August 2, 1975

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter.

I want a “just like this” answer. You answers are always “like this”. “Like this” answers are not bad, not good. The great Zen Master Rinzai only shouted “KATZ”, and Zen Master Dok Sahn only hit. These answers belong to the area of 180 degrees. But “KATZ” or a hit can sometimes also be 360 degrees, or, all degrees of the circle having disappeared, “just like this”. If you understand “just like this”, you can use the area of True Emptiness, “like this”, and “just like this” freely.

I will arrive at Tahl Mah Sah about the twentieth of this month. I will stay about ten days. If you want an interview, it is possible for you to have one.

I don't know where Ven. Song Ryong Hearn is now, so I'll carry your letter with me to Japan, and if I meet him I'll give it to him.

What you said about going to the mountains is very good. It sounds like you had a good time. All nature is your true teacher. It is better than me and better than other Zen masters too. In the past many great Zen masters did a lot of hard training practicing in the mountains before they attained enlightenment. Nature taught them. There are stories of masters attaining enlightenment on hearing the wind blowing, on catching sight of a waterfall, on seeing a blooming flower, and on hearing the sound of a dislodged rock hitting bamboo. In all those incidents, nature was the true teacher—better than the speech of a Zen master.

In Zen there are two kinds of words: dead words and live words. Dead words have opposites. Live words have the Absolute. Opposites are made by thinking. The Absolute is before thinking, so there is no subject or object. Inside and outside become one. Just like this. Zen masters often use dead words, but nature always gives you live words. So I hope you'll go to the mountains or ocean sometimes, learn the true way from them, and become a great man.

Sincerely,

S.S

August 4, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

QUESTION: A man in funny black robes says that if I listen to him, and do as he tells me, I will get Dharma, get enlightenment, or whatever. But what is Dharma, what is enlightenment, and how do I know that he knows, especially when another man in funny green robes says that the first man doesn't know what he is talking about, that he doesn't know the 'real Dharma'? So either one or the other lies, or is mistaken, or both, or one is telling a joke about the other. What am I to do?

You say first get enlightenment. But what is enlightenment? Can it be obtained by seeking it? Is it like getting large muscles from weight-lifting, or becoming a great piano player through practice?

You say don't touch good and bad. Only catch good actions and good opinions. But how can I decide good? What is good? What is bad? Any decision is my opinion based on not knowing, or being ignorant. Do you ignore bad, close it out, push it away, and pretend it does not exist? Why do you use the words good and bad, and are you using it the same or different from me, it is not clear, since you seem to change.

You say actions are not important, only intentions. If the intention is to help all others, then anger, strong opinions, and attachments are good.

1. You said my intentions are good, beautiful, then my actions, though ignorant are good. So why do you bother to tell me I am wrong?

2. You have touched good and bad, like you said not to do, above. You use 'good and bad' all the time, but tell others not to use it. What do you mean? What are you getting at?

3. Much if not most of the violence and war in the world is caused by people with good intentions trying to do good for others, from Hitler trying to purify Germany and the world, to the Russians and Chinese trying to save the world from greed and suppression by killing Capitalists and Capitalism, and the Americans trying to save Vietnam and S. Korea from the Communists. Hundreds of religious wars have been fought in the name of God and of Truth. God, Truth, enlightenment, Dharma—they are ideas, and ideas cause suffering, and separate one from what is. If you have an idea of enlightenment and attaining it, you can not see a flower, because the mind (an idea) is bent on the ambition of attaining. And attaining is in the future, not here, not now, whatever the here and now are, for they are ideas too. Here and now is no idea, no talking, no words, only action.

4. If a man does violence, no matter what the intent, he makes the world more violent, he breeds a world where violence is accepted. How can I know what another man's intentions are, I can only know his actions, and even if I did know his intentions, and they are good, it

is possible he is mistaken, and his good intentions are productive of death, pain, and suffering, of evil. It is an old saying, that the Way to Hell is paved with good intentions.

A bad person holding a candle is not like a supposed spiritual teacher with the Dharma or Truth. Can a man be separate from his Truth? If a man like Hitler said he had the Truth, would you believe him? Who is it that believes? Belief is only an idea. An idea (I) believes that another idea is Truth. No idea, no I, no Truth, no belief. That is my idea, and this only when I write, otherwise, no talking, no thinking about truth, enlightenment, etc. Ultimately, I cannot believe anyone, but must take what they say as 'provisional truth' to be investigated.

You say first, I understand, then you say I half understand, then you say I don't understand. Then you say I half understand, but have not attained, and understanding is not attainment. How can you expect me to understand you? What are you talking about? I do not understand anything. I've practiced Zen hard for five years, and spent 15 years before that thinking about these problems and practicing various forms of meditation, and I understand nothing, I don't have the slightest idea what Zen or Mahayana or Hinayana is, nor the 50 or 150 kong-ans that I passed, I don't know what they are. To me they all are crap, but still I practice, I don't know why. (Actually sitting practice has always made my mind heavy, activity has made it light and sharp, but I do both.)

You say to have hard, correct, practice, but what is this? What is this?

You distinguish between live and dead words, between understanding and attaining, but what is this?

If you are going to instruct me, do it so I can understand it. Do not say hard practice is clear mind, because for someone who does not have clear mind, it is only an idea. Or like this. I use words like these also, but you say I do not understand, or have not attained or something, so what do you mean? Teachings should have a universality, rather than one person believing one thing, and another believing something else; otherwise, violence. Either belief must go, or teachings that are seemingly different must go.

If you can teach so that I understand, I listen gladly, but if you can't, then you are like all the other millions of teachers that say listen to me, but have no understanding themselves. Then demand faith, belief, but so do they all, and each teaches different teachings, different actions. Some say you must kill for God, others say that damns you to hell? ... So what difference does actions mean if they cannot agree? So I go my own way, and am my own teacher making my own mistakes, and taking the responsibility for them.

I think very much of you, and like hearing from you even though you don't make much sense.

ED

In a sense I do *understand* many, but I don't believe it all the way through. To accept many means to abandon intelligence, and intelligence is a (the) way to universality, to reaching all people that are in the least intelligent. If there must be belief, it should be what all can agree on, otherwise, conflict. There is too much conflict in this complex world that is always just one step from destruction.

Let me ask you a kong-an: Why do you call a hand a 'hand'.

Be seeing you.

August 11, 1975

Dear Ed,

I will hit you thirty times.

The dog runs away with the bone.

People used to ask Zen Master Jo-ju, "Does a dog have Buddha-nature?" Sometimes he said, "Yes," and sometimes he said, "No." Which one is correct?

What can you do? Don't follow the words of a Zen master.

If you don't understand, you must ask a tree.

I hope you will not check yourself, your opinion, your mind, and so on.

You said many things and asked many questions. But all that you say is from one mind. What is this mind?

You understand a lot—better than me. But understanding is thinking. You must attain before thinking. This is very important.

You asked many questions. Ten thousand questions become only one question. With the one great question, the ten thousand questions have already been cut off. If you attain this big question your mind will be "just like this". If you don't get it, your cognition will be all dead words; if you do get it, your cognition and your opinions are truth.

I just sent you a Bodhidharma painting. Maybe this painting will help you all your life.

I hope you will always, everywhere, only keep a don't know mind, soon get it, and save all people.

Sincerely,

S.S.

## The Story of Seung Sahn Soen Sa

an excerpt from *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Zen Teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn*, published by Grove Press in 1976.

Seung Sahn Soen-sa was born in 1927 in Seun Choen, North Korea. His parents were Protestant Christians.

Korea at this time was under severe Japanese military rule, and all political and cultural freedom was brutally suppressed. In 1944, Soen-sa joined the underground Korean independence movement. Within a few months he was caught by the Japanese police and narrowly escaped a death sentence. After his release from prison, he and two friends stole several thousand dollars from their parents and crossed the heavily-patrolled Manchurian border in an unsuccessful attempt to join the Free Korean Army.

In the years following World War II, while he was studying Western philosophy at Dong Guk University, the political situation in South Korea grew more and more chaotic. One day Soen-sa decided that he would never really be able to help people through his political activities or his academic studies. So he shaved his head and went into the mountains, vowing never to return until he had attained the absolute truth.

For three months he studied the Confucian scriptures, but he was unsatisfied by them. Then a friend of his, who was a monk in a small mountain temple, gave him the Diamond sutra, and he first encountered Buddhism. "All things that appear in this world are transient. If you view all things that appear as never having appeared, then you will realize your true self." When he read these words, his mind became clear. For the next few weeks he read many sutras. Finally, he decided to become a Buddhist monk and was ordained in October, 1948.

Soen-sa had already understood the sutras. He realized that the only thing which was important now was practice. So ten days after his ordination, he went further up into the mountains and began a one-hundred-day retreat on Won Gak Mountain (the Mountain of Perfect Enlightenment). He ate only pine needles, dried and beaten into a powder. For twenty hours every day he chanted the Great Dharani of Original Mind Energy. Several times a day he took ice-cold baths, and the water would freeze on his body. It was a very rigorous practice.

Soon he was assailed by doubts. Why was this retreat necessary? Why did he have to go to extremes? Couldn't he go down to a small temple in a quiet valley, get married like a Japanese monk, and attain enlightenment gradually, in the midst of a happy family? One night these thoughts became so powerful that he decided to leave and packed his belongings. But the next morning his mind was clearer, and he unpacked. A few days later the same thing happened. And in the following weeks, he packed and unpacked nine times.

By now fifty days had passed, and Soen-sa's body was very exhausted. Every night he had terrifying visions. Demons would appear out of the dark and make obscene gestures at him. Ghouls would sneak up behind him and wrap their cold fingers around his neck. Enormous beetles would gnaw at his legs. Tigers and dragons would stand in front of him, bellowing. He was in constant terror.

After a month of this, the visions turned into visions of delight. Sometimes Bodhisattvas would appear in gorgeous clothing and tell him that he would go to heaven. Sometimes he would keel over from exhaustion and Kwan Seum Bosal would gently wake him up. By the end of eighty days, his body was strong. His flesh by now had turned green from the pine needles. His hair was long and matted.

One day, a week before the retreat was to finish, Soen-sa was walking outside, chanting and keeping rhythm with his moktak. Suddenly, two boys, eleven or twelve years old, appeared on either side of him and bowed. They were wearing many-colored robes, and their faces were of an unearthly beauty. Soen-sa was very surprised. His mind felt powerful and perfectly clear, so how could these demons have materialized? He walked ahead on the narrow path, and the two boys followed him, walking right through the boulders on either side of the path. They walked together in silence for half an hour, and then, back at the altar, when Soen-sa got up from his bow, they were gone. This happened every day for a week.

Finally it was the hundredth day. Soen-sa was outside chanting and hitting the moktak. All at once his body disappeared, and he was in infinite space. From far away he could hear the moktak beating and the sound of his own voice. He remained in this state for some time. When he returned to his body, he understood. The rocks, the river, everything he could see, everything he could hear, all this was his true self. All things are exactly as they are. The truth is just like this.

He slept very well that night. When he woke up the next morning, he saw a man walking up the mountain, then some crows flying out of a tree. He wrote the following poem:

The road at the bottom of Won Gak Mountain  
is not the present road.  
The man climbing with his back pack  
is not a man of the past.

Tok, tok—his footsteps  
transfix past and present.  
Crows fly out of a tree.  
Caw, caw, caw.

Soon after he came down from the mountain, he met Zen Master Ko Bong, whose teacher had been Zen Master Mang Gong. Ko Bong was reputed to be the most intelligent Zen Master in Korea, and one of the most severe. At this time he was teaching only laymen; monks, he said, were not ardent enough to be good Zen students. Soen-sa wanted to test his enlightenment with Ko Bong, so he went to him with a moktak and said, "What is this?" Ko Bong took the moktak and hit it. This was just what Soen-sa had expected him to do. Soen-sa then said, "How should I practice Zen?"

Ko Bong said, “A monk once asked Zen Master Jo-ju, ‘Why did Bodhidharma come to China?’ Jo-ju answered, ‘The pine tree in the front garden.’ What does this mean?”

Soen-sa understood, but he didn’t know how to answer. He said, “I don’t know.”

Ko Bong said, “Only keep this don’t-know mind. That is true Zen practice.”

That spring and summer, Soen-sa did mostly working Zen. In the fall, he sat for a hundred-day meditation session at Su Dok Sah monastery, where he learned Zen language and Dharma combat. By the winter, he began to feel that the monks weren’t practicing hard enough, so he decided to give them some help. One night, as he was on guard duty (there had been some burglaries), he took all the pots and pans out of the kitchen and arranged them in a circle in the front yard. The next night, he turned the Buddha on the main altar toward the wall and took the incense-burner, which was a national treasure, and hung it on a persimmon tree in the garden. By the second morning the whole monastery was in an uproar. Rumors were flying around about lunatic burglars, or gods coming from the mountain to warn the monks to practice harder.

The third night, Soen-sa went to the nuns’ quarters, tied seventy pairs of nuns’ shoes together and put them in front of Zen Master Dok Sahn’s room, displayed as in a shoe store. But this time, a nun woke up to go to the outhouse and, missing her shoes, she woke up everyone in the nuns’ quarters. Soen-sa was caught. The next day he was brought to trial. Since most of the monks voted to give him another chance (the nuns were unanimously against him), he wasn’t expelled from the monastery. But he had to offer formal apologies to all the head monks.

First he went to Dok Sahn and bowed. Dok Sahn said, “Keep up the good work.” Then he went to the head nun. She said, “You’ve made a great deal too much commotion in the monastery, young man.” Soen-sa laughed and said, “The whole world is already full of commotion. What can you do?” She couldn’t answer.

Next was Zen Master Chun Sung, who was famous for his wild actions and obscene language. Soen-sa bowed to him and said, “I killed all the Buddhas of past, present, and future. What can you do?”

Chun Sung said, “Aha!” and looked deeply into Soen-sa’s eyes. Then he said, “What did you see?”

Soen-sa said, “You already understand.”

Chun Sung said, “Is that all?”

Soen-sa said, “There’s a cuckoo singing in the tree outside the window.”

Chun Sung laughed and said, “Aha!” He asked several more questions, which Soen-sa answered without difficulty. Finally, Chun Sung leaped up and danced around Soen-sa, shouting, “You are enlightened! You are enlightened!” The news spread quickly, and people began to understand the events of the preceding days.

On January 15, the session was over, and Soen-sa left to see Ko Bong. On the way to Seoul, he had interviews with Zen Master Keum Bong and Zen Master Keum Oh. Both gave him *inka*, the seal of validation of a Zen student's great awakening.

Soen-sa arrived at Ko Bong's temple dressed in his old patched retreat clothes and carrying a knapsack. He bowed to Ko Bong and said, "All the Buddhas turned out to be a bunch of corpses. How about a funeral service?"

Ko Bong said, "Prove it!"

Soen-sa reached into his knapsack and took out a dried cuttlefish and a bottle of wine. "Here are the leftovers from the funeral party."

Ko Bong said, "Well, please pour me some wine."

Soen-sa said, "Okay. Give me your glass."

Ko Bong held out his palm.

Soen-sa slapped it with the bottle and said, "That's not a glass; it's your hand!" Then he put the bottle on the floor.

Ko Bong laughed and said, "Not bad. You're almost done. But I have a few questions for you." He proceeded to ask Soen-sa the most difficult of the seventeen hundred traditional Zen kong-ans. Soen-sa answered without hindrance. Then Ko Bong said, "All right, one last question. The mouse eats cat food, but the cat bowl is broken. What does this mean?"

Soen-sa said, "The sky is blue; the grass is green."

Ko Bong shook his head and said, "No."

Soen-sa was taken aback. He had never missed a Zen question before. His face began to grow red and he gave one "like-this" answer after another. Ko Bong kept shaking his head. Finally Soen-sa exploded with anger and frustration. "Three Zen Masters have given me *inka*! Why do you say I'm wrong?"

Ko Bong said, "What does it mean? Tell me."

For the next fifty minutes, Ko Bong and Soen-sa sat facing each other, hunched like two tomcats. The silence was electric. Then, all of a sudden, Soen-sa had the answer. It was "just like this."

When Ko Bong heard it, his eyes grew moist and his face filled with joy. He embraced Soen-sa and said, "You are the flower; I am the bee."

On January 25, 1949, Soen-sa received from Ko Bong the Transmission of Dharma, thus becoming the seventy-eighth patriarch in this line of succession. It was the only Transmission that Ko Bong ever gave. He also received the Dharma name of Seung Sahn, "Lofty Mountain" (the mountain on which Su Dok Sah is located and where both Ko Bong and Mang Gong taught).

After the ceremony, Ko Bong said to Soen-sa, “For the next three years you must keep silent. You are a free man. We will meet again in five hundred years.”

Soen-sa was now a Zen Master. He was twenty-two years old.

Friday eve., October 17

Dear Lynn,

Thank you for your letter. How are George, Bobby, Louise, Suzie, Becky, Lee, Jacob, Ken, Peter, B. Kim, Kwan Jang Nim, Kim, Drew, the cats, and others? Please say hello to everyone for me.

I am glad to hear that the garage came down without hindrance, and that Lee is enjoying working on it. I think you will have a beautiful garden where it stood.

Soen Sa Nim left about ten days ago for Japan. I think he is in America now. We were sorry to see him go, but happy to see him escape Korea alive. While he was here he was so busy he could hardly sleep. Everyone wanted to see him and talk to him.

While he was here, though, we had the great fortune to meet Mrs. So (you remember, she visited Cambridge). She has been working for almost a year on getting a bell made for the Providence Zen Center. She went to great trouble and expense to find the right poet and sculptor and foundrymen to do the job. We happened to be here in Seoul just when everything came together, on the day the bell was to be cast. We took a long taxi ride to the town where the foundry was, and we all watched for about an hour as the men very carefully assembled the mold. The form for the inside shape of the bell was in one piece, but the outside was made up of three collar-like pieces which had to be placed over the inside form just so. The master foundryman checked each step very carefully. This bell is very big, about 6 feet tall, and a single mistake at this time would mean a whole year's work shot to hell, so the tension could almost be felt as the final piece of the mold was put in place.

Then, very quickly, the men rushed around getting the chain falls ready to carry the pot of molten bronze and to pour the bronze from the furnaces outside. Then, as they started pouring the red hot liquid from the furnaces into the pouring pot S.S. said something like this, "Originally this metal was ugly rocks. Then the rocks were heated for a long time over a very hot fire until finally they became liquid. Now this liquid will be poured into a mold and take the shape of a big beautiful bell, and when it cools someone will strike the bell and the beautiful sound will fill the whole universe."

Then everything was ready and the men started pouring the liquid bronze into the mold. They poured from two pots, from both sides, and they were very careful to pour both at the same speed, and not to spill. Two men guided each pot which was supported by a chain fall, and their faces were wet with sweating from the work. It seemed it would take forever to fill the huge mold, but finally the master foundryman gave the order to stop pouring and the men backed off the pouring pots. It wasn't quite done yet though. On a Korean temple bell, there is a tube coming out of the top of the bell which carries the air out of the bell when it is struck, making it resonate choong ...like a wa, wa, wongwongwongwong ... chong. This

had to be filled from the top, so one of the men took a long-handled ladle filled from one of the pouring pots and slowly and carefully filled the tube until the red metal overflowed onto the top of the mold.

Then it was finished. The whole room breathed a sigh of relief. The master foundryman was happy. He said the pouring had gone well.

“So,” Soen Sa Nim said, “We are all like rocks. And when we practice hard we heat up our hearts making a big hot flame which melts our Condition, Situation, and Opinion until we become like molten metal, ready to assume the shape of a great Bodhisattva, who, when struck with a cry for help, makes a big, deep sound which resonates and fills the whole universe, and makes everybody happy.”

So I hope you will keep Kwansum Bosal well, and get enlightenment, and save all people.

See you later,

Mu Bul

October 28, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? I hope you are getting lots of rest after your hard training in Korea and Japan.

We are all well, and our bodies are in good health. Mu Bul Su-nim is studying Korean and is learning fast. Byon Jo is giving a Yoga class at Hwa Ge Sa. I have been speaking (often together with Byon Jo) at several high schools and universities. People like our Dharma teaching very much. It is sad that most Korean monks are not interested in teaching. Some school teachers want us to begin a Zen Center in Seoul, so that students could practice “true American-style Buddhism”!

Byon Jo has decided *not* to go ahead with the plan. Jung Bo-sal herself is confused, and only 80% sure that she wants to go to America. Many problems. Byon Jo’s mind keeps changing. Now he likes Seoul very much. He visits many women!

Steve, the doctor in our New Haven family, has done hard training in checking diabetes medicine. Please follow his advice. He is a very very good doctor. We want your body to be strong and healthy, so you can save all people.

We will soon leave for Su Dok Sa, and I will be very happy to begin hard training. If my body is okay after Kyol Che, I will begin my 100-day retreat about Feb. 17th. So I will be finished about May 27th. I will be glad to see you.

Now the leaves are turning to red and yellow, and the days are bright and crisp. In the early morning, there are only the stars overhead and only the sound of wind and water. Today, I found two dead mice and buried them beneath a tree. Namu Amita Bul.

With love and thanks,

Mu Gak

November 5, 1975

Dear Mu Gak and Byon Jo,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I arrived here at the end of last month. You are correct, I am very tired. My diabetes is very bad. Steve introduced me to a doctor in Providence. I went over there and he checked my body. He gave me new medicine. Maybe it will help me. So you don’t worry, o.k.? Maybe I will become strong.

After reading your letter, I think you are famous in Korea. Teaching Yoga is very good, teaching Dharma is very good. I already understood that you would be good teachers in Korea. Many young people in Korea like Zen, but the old Zen Masters' teachings are very difficult, so they can't understand it. Many people in Korea understand Yoga, but there are no good teachers. Maybe Byon Jo is the best Yoga teacher in Korea. Maybe young Koreans will like our Zen teaching, so in the future it will be necessary to make a Zen Center in Seoul.

How is Jung Bo-Sal? Why is she confused? I don't understand. Before I thought she was 100% sure she wanted to come to America. Why nowadays 80%? So please help her.

When are you leaving for Su Dok Sa? I have already written to the Su Dok Sa abbot, so maybe you will have no problems when you arrive.

Before I was very worried about Byon Jo's karma. But I think nowadays Byon Jo's karma likes Korea's karma.

I went to Esalen a few weeks ago. They liked us very much. They are a complete freedom area, but very attached to freedom. So I hit them thirty times. There are many Byon Jo-style people there. Many people there know Byon Jo and say hello. I told them that liking freedom and attaining freedom are different. Liking freedom is thinking, attaining freedom is before thinking. They only understand outside hippy, do not understand inside hippy. I taught them perfect hippy, which is inside-outside complete hippy. This is Big I, true love.

I am also sending you my letter to Esalen. They like us, so they want a seven-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the end of January. They also liked Jonny, Jacob, and Kwan Jang Nim. Maybe when you return you can visit Esalen. They will be happy. They want to see you.

You are soon going to Su Dok Sa. I hope you train hard for three months and keep a clear mind, attain great enlightenment, and save all world beings.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P. S. I say hello to Hea Myon Su Nim and Gak Man Su Nim.

Wha Gae Sa  
October 28

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

How are you? How was Japan and Big Sur? I think you must be *very* tired and I hope you can rest in Providence.

Today I am sending my film to Providence.

Nowadays Mu Gak and Byon Jo are giving talks to many Buddhist groups in Seoul. I also spoke once with Mu Gak at a girls' high school. We are all famous. Many Korean Buddhists are attached to scriptures. They say Buddhism is very difficult. Mu Gak is telling them it is very easy. "Only without thinking, just like this is Buddha." They think this is very interesting.

Byon Jo is giving a Yoga class here at Wha Gae Sa once a week for University students. They all say that there are no real Yoga teachers in Korea, only ones who have read books on Yoga, so they like Byon Jo very much. The girls think he is very handsome.

I am studying Korean with Prof. Kang at University. He has a modern teaching method which is very quick. I go there for six hours a week. Also Mr. Kim Jong Min from Don Gook University is tutoring me every afternoon.

한 곡말을 만일 열심히 공부합니다  
한 곡말을 참 재미 있습니다 아직 능숙하지 못합니다

Fall is here and the weather is clear and cool. Every morning we sweep up a big pile of leaves.

Please give my best to Bobby and all family.

또 만 함사다  
무 불

November 5, 1975

Dear Mu Bul Su Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I returned to the Providence Zen Center the end of last month. I am very tired, so I went to the doctor to check my body. The doctor said only you rest, but I can not rest. This is my life. Nowadays all day, all night, I sleep. Tomorrow I will go to Boston, the next day New York, and soon Chicago and New Haven.

Your letter said nowadays you are famous in Korea. I am very happy. But sometimes famous is becoming small I; this cannot help your true self. The Korean people only understand this sutra-style Buddhism, and there are many sutras, so they think it is very difficult. Zen is even more high-class, so they think it is even *more* difficult. So they like this American-style teaching of Zen. When I was in Korea before, I had a very important office job, so I had no time to teach Zen. So please work hard and teach Koreans American-style Zen.

The Providence Zen Center liked your letter to Lynn very much. We are typing it into the kong-an book.

You are learning Korean very well, but you must fix your name. You said . **모 불**

You must write **무 불**

Los Angeles, Tal Mah Sa, Sambosa, Big Sur, Chicago, Bul Ta Sa all say hello to you. They think it will be difficult for you to stay in Korea, but I say very good. But there are three difficult things: 1. speech, 2. bathroom (shit form), 3. take bath. But soon no problem. They say, "How no problem?" I say, "They have very clever minds, so soon change karma." Is it correct? I ask you. Nowadays no problem?

I hope you always keep a mind that is clear like space and soon get enlightenment and save all world beings.

Sincerely,

S.S. and Bobby

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Welcome back to America and to all of us. I hope your trip was a good one and that Mu Gak Su Nim and Mu Bul Su Nim are continuing to save all people in Korea. How are you feeling? We have all been concerned about your health because of the rigors of your trip. I think that Steve Cohen is a very good doctor and that you should listen to his advice about your health. All of us in New Haven have adopted him as our doctor! You should get much rest during the next few weeks because you have much important teaching to do in America and we have much hard training to accomplish.

I wish that Dave Mott, Steve, and I could be with you tonight (Thursday) for your welcome home celebration, but during the school semester we have many obligations. We sent our love by way of Katy and Matt.

Thank you for your letter from Korea. Although I don't completely understand karma in a clear way I'm doing Kwansum Bosal when I'm between classes, cooking, driving to work, etc. Many aspects of karma (such as past lives) are somewhat difficult for Americans to comprehend. Our cultural background is so different from your own. I assume that all of these questions will disappear when attainment of like this mind appears.

I have enclosed answers to kong-ans on a separate sheet. You asked me about Bodhidharma's not having a beard several months ago when we discussed attack kong-ans. I had not considered it since then, but as I was reading the *Mumonkan* the other evening this answer came to me when I read that kong-an.

I have two questions: (1) After one attains "just like this" mind, what happens to that attainment if serious injury to the mind results from an accident (like an auto accident) or even more likely in contemporary scientific culture if "life" is prolonged by machine or drugs after the functioning mind becomes dormant. I ask this because much Buddhist teaching stresses keeping clear mind right up until death.

(2) My other question is a personal one. Since I last wrote to you my step-father has died, leaving my mother alone in Arizona (2,500 miles from here). I've invited my mother to come visit Marilyn and I during Christmas vacation because she will be lonesome and we haven't seen her in several years. My mother is a wonderful person and a *very* serious Christian—Baptist. She is a great Bodhisattva in many respects and has helped people throughout her life even when it involved great self-sacrifice. However, she is not a highly-educated person and has not been exposed as far as I know to any non-Western systems of teaching. I'm afraid that my Buddhist practice would upset her very much and she would not understand it at all. If I were very strong maybe I could teach her, but I don't know if my understanding is powerful enough. My practice has grown to the point where it permeates my total life, and I would not like to conceal this most important aspect of my being from her. Also getting up and sitting with the group every morning is very important

to me as is a period of reading/sitting before bed in the evening. Do you have suggestions as to how I should approach this situation during my mother's visit (probably for about 10 days)?

See you in two weeks for Yong Maeng Jong Jin,

Peace and Love,

Bob

Cigarette man kong-an

Cigarette Man: (drops ashes on the Buddha)

Teacher: Stop! You are getting the Dharma room quite dirty.

C.M.: (hit)

T.: Oh, ho! So you understand one. Now show me your understanding of two.

C.M.: (hit)

T.: You are clinging to this answer. If you continue to hit me you are only attached to emptiness and will fall into the hell without doors, but if you don't hit me you are attached to my words and are no better than a corpse. Now quickly! What can you do?

C.M.: (hit)

T.: You have eyes but you are blind. You understand that the mind before thinking has no words and no speech; this is *very* good. But, you have become attached to this mind and have fallen down into emptiness. *Put it down!* Then, you will attain true Zen understanding and your mind will become like a clear mirror. This clear mind reflects all things only as they are, and everything that it sees, hears, smells, tastes, and touches is the absolute truth. Red appears and the mirror reflects red; cigarette ashes appear and are only cigarette ashes; a Buddha statue comes and the mind becomes only a Buddha statue. True Zen attainment is only *just like this*. Now, I ask you, "Is this clear mind the same or different from your blows with the stick?"

C.M.: (hit)

T.: Is this the truth?

C.M.: (hit)

T.: A second offense is not permitted. You must do more hard training and find a good answer to my questions. Then you will become a free man without any hindrance, and you will understand the great Bodhisattva way and will be able to save all people.

C.M.: (hit)

T.: I don't give acupuncture to a dead cow. In order to capture a lion one must enter the lion's den.

Question—The mouse eats cat food; but the cat's bowl is broken. What does it mean?

Answer—How can I answer you when you are already in my stomach?

Bodhidharma's beard:

Why are you dragging up the carcass of Bodhidharma? Skeletons don't have beards!

November 10, 1975

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your family? It is very kind of you to be concerned about my health. Steve Cohen has introduced me to a very good diabetes specialist in Providence, and he has given me some new medicine. My body is stronger, so don't worry.

Mu Gak, Mu Bul, and Byon Jo have been doing a lot of teaching in Korea. Korean people like their American-style Zen teaching very much.

You say you don't completely understand karma. That is very good. When you completely understand karma you understand life and death. If you completely understand life and death, then you will get freedom from life and death and you will become a great no-hindrance man. So, you must completely understand karma. What is karma? Karma comes from where? Who made karma? Karma is name, name is empty, so karma is made by thinking, and if you cut thinking there is no karma. An eminent teacher said, "Without thinking, just like this is Buddha nature." Don't make many difficult aspects of karma, only go straight ahead with Kwansum Bosal. That is very important!

I will now answer your two questions. (1) If you attain just like this, there is no death and no life, only infinite time and space. Then how can you worry about an automobile accident or your sick body in the hospital? The Heart sutra says perceive that all five skandhas are empty and be saved from all suffering and distress. So, why do you worry? That perception means just like this mind. Put it all down! Don't check yourself.

Answer to your second question: I think your mother is very good. Christian and Buddhist bodhisattva action are not different. Don't be attached to name. If a person thinks, "I am a great bodhisattva and I help many people," than that person has lost the way. I don't think your mother is like that. Although she has little formal education, still her mind already has a high education. In the true way, Eastern and Western religion are not different. The Bible says, in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." You must teach your mother about the five kinds of I; there is no need to talk of Buddhism. May people use this word I, but we must attain this big I. Teach her that we must cut through the mind that makes subject and object. Subject and object are only made by thinking. If you cut thinking there is no subject or object, and we will find the true way. This style of teaching is necessary. I hope your good teaching will help your mother find enlightenment.

Your kong-an answers to dropping ashes on the Buddha are not bad; answers 1, 2, and 3 are O.K., but answer 4 is no good. This man doesn't like a lot of words. Simple words are necessary. Answers 5, 6, and 7 are O.K.

Your answer to the mouse kong-an is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches.

Your answer to Bodhidharma's beard kong-an is like the dog running after the bone, so I hit you! What can you do? I hope the next Yong Maeng Jong Jin you will give me a good answer.

Sincerely,

S.S.

November 5, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Here is a little poem for your three men:

In China, they wear white.  
In America, we wear black.  
Because our eyes are full of tears,  
We do not see the clear sky  
When the floating cloud has gone.

That's not terribly poetic and not very terse but I think it reflects the three men. What do you say?

I hope your trip back to the East was pleasant and that all is going well at your East Coast centers. Please tell Mr. Kim for me that everyone was very much impressed with his demonstration. I have seen melons cut on stomachs before but always from up close—never from a moving position. I was very impressed too.

Later this month, I will give a Dharma talk at the Tibetan Nyingma Center in Berkeley. I think I will use your "Just Seeing is Buddha Nature" talk as a basis. The Tibetans have a very good, orderly and scientific approach but their students are sometimes too attached to methods so maybe this is good teaching for such an occasion.

Sincerely,

An Hanh (Michael)

November 12, 1975

Dear An Hanh,

Thank you for your letter. Your three-men poem is not good, not bad, but your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. In your poem I cannot find the meaning of the sword sound, picking up the handkerchief, and waving hands. This kong-an is very clear. It is just like this and has only one direction.

Don't make China, don't make America, don't make eyes, don't make sky, don't make clouds! These are not necessary.

I hope you only keep don't know. Then you will soon get a perfect answer!

Master Kim recently gave demonstrations in Boston and Providence to raise money for a school. Many people came, and his popularity grows. I think Shim Gum Do is the best kind of action Zen.

It is good you are giving a talk at the Tibetan Center. I agree with you that sometimes Tibetan students become attached to many methods and explanations. Many people keep perverted views. It is very important to keep a correct view. There are several kinds of medicine to heal the mind. First use demon (karma and consciousness) medicine. Then all attachments disappear, but you are still attached to the demon medicine. So next we use empty medicine, and the demon medicine disappears. Now there is an attachment to emptiness. Next we use just like this medicine and return to our original mind.

So beginner's mind is finisher's mind. They are not two. But in Tibetan Buddhism some teachers use only demon medicine, but not empty medicine and just like this medicine. So some students are practicing the long way.

You already understand. I hope you will teach these students the Diamond sutra. If they understand this sutra their sickness will be easily fixed.

Sincerely,

S.S.

## 355A

---

25 October 1975

Dear Seung Sahn-Nim,

On behalf of the Cultural Events Committee, I would like to invite you to give a Dharma talk (and to answer questions) to the students on this urban campus, a branch campus of the University of Michigan. The University would pay the cost of round-trip air fare between Boston and Detroit as well as give the Cambridge (or Providence) Zen Center an honorarium of \$100.00. My wife and I could put you up at our apartment so there would be no expense as far as lodgings and meals are concerned.

Since Detroit is most of the way to Chicago, you could probably combine a visit to this campus with a trip to Chicago. To do so would save your Zen center a little money in transportation costs as well as make me very happy, for I would enjoy talking to you again. There does seem to be a great interest in Zen here, as well as in Ann Arbor, and I know you would enjoy coming here because, naturally, you enjoy everything.

You could come any time during the academic year (which lasts until the end of April); it would therefore be relatively easy to coordinate your visit here with a sesshin in Chicago.

Please convey my best to your students, especially to Stephen Mitchell. Tell him that I have just finished my thesis for Harvard (at long last) and that I too am watching my step.

Sincerely,

Michael

November 12, 1975

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter. I am sorry my response is so late, but I have been traveling in Korea, Japan, and California and did not return until a few days ago.

It is good that you would like to hold a Dharma talk. The twenty-third of this month I will go to Chicago for three days. Perhaps this is too short notice to arrange a talk. If it is possible, you may contact my student, the abbot of my Chicago temple, to see what he has planned for me. You can reach him at the following address:

Abbot Venerable G. Hak Son  
Bul Tah Sah Temple  
4054 N. Western  
Chicago, Illinois 60618  
312-478-0696

If he says there is time in my Chicago schedule, I will be happy to come to your school for a talk.

If this is not possible, I will be traveling to the West Coast on January 10 or 15. Perhaps we could arrange something at that time.

Stephen Mitchell has become a monk. He is now studying Zen in Korea. His Buddha name is Mu Gak Su Nim. He will come back to this country July, 1976.

Sincerely,

S.S.

November 12, 1975

Venerable Sir,

I am a member of the Rochester Zen Center and have practiced here for four years. About two years ago I visited with your group for a couple of sittings and felt a strong bond with you and your students. You may remember me as I wore a brown robe and you gave me a set of Buddhist beads.

I am writing you now in hopes that you will be able to help me in what I hope to do. It has been my most ardent hope to be ordained and practice Zen in a monastery. There has been a strong attraction to Korea and Korean Zen and now it seems possible to go to Korea to join a monastery there. The teacher here, Roshi Kapleau, has given his permission and blessings to go to Korea and to seek help from you in knowing where in Korea to go. I have just started taking Korean language lessons from a Korean woman here in preparation.

Would it be possible to come to Providence to see you about this? Perhaps it would be good to come to a sesshin at your Center to give you a chance to become familiar with me. One of your students said there would be a sesshin the first week in December. Is it possible to come to this? Then later, in a few months, after saving some money, I can come to Providence for a longer period before going to Korea if you feel this is wise.

I know you are very busy and any help you can give will be very greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much,

Rebekah

November 18, 1975

Dear Rebekah,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? I remember when you came to Providence.

I was very happy when I read your letter. Your idea of going to Korea and becoming ordained and staying in a monastery is good, but you have already stayed at the Rochester Zen Center for four years—you understand Japanese Zen and the Japanese life style of an ordained Buddhist. So I wonder, why do you want to change? I think the form of Zen study is not important. What is important is how to keep “just now mind.”

Three of my students have gone to Korea. Many Korean people have asked them what they think about all of the things they have seen. They say, “We have learned that Korean

Buddhism is very wide; some people only practice Zen, some only read sutras, some do mantras, and some pray to the Buddha. We have seen many beautiful temples located high in the mountains. We have met many great Zen Masters who have been very kind and gracious. All of this is important, but we came here only to keep clear mind and attain enlightenment. This is most important.

The most important thing for a Zen student to learn is how to make his/her opinion, situation, and condition disappear. Then your mind will be clear like space.

If your mind is clear, staying in Rochester is good; coming to Providence is good. If your mind is not clear, your coming to Providence or going to Korea and becoming ordained is not necessary.

So you must first believe in yourself. Don't ask Buddha, don't ask your teacher, don't ask me.

If you want to come to the December Yong Maeng Jong Jin (sesshin), you are welcome to come and sit with us. After this we can talk again.

I hope you are always keeping a clear mind and will soon attain enlightenment and save all beings from suffering.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. I am enclosing two letters from my students in Korea.

Note. When you write or speak in the future, it is proper style to address Seung Sahn as Soen-sa-nim. This title has the same meaning as Roshi. Louise Stanton, Director.

Dear Zen Master Seung Sahn,

Hello. My name is David. I have listened to you speak a few times. I believe if these questions were answered it would aid me in evolving spiritually.

1. When people, usually friends, ask me for an opinion or make a discrimination about things, how can I answer them without giving an opinion or making them feel negatively towards me?

As I write this first question I have thought of some answers. The second question (#2) has grown in importance the last few weeks.

2. Sometimes I have thoughts I don't want to have. They seem to come precisely at moments I am sitting and meditating on some positive change for myself, such as bringing infinite love into my heart.

Sometimes they just come during the normal day. How can I get behind these thoughts I don't wish to have?

I would let them go like clouds except that I feel they would carry meaning and form if I left them unchecked.

Peace, Love, and Blessings,

David

November 12, 1975

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter. Regarding your first question, it is most important that your opinions disappear. If you keep a strong opinion, you cannot teach others. Opinions always are in opposition to something. Opposition thinking is not the truth. Making your opinions disappear is before thinking, before thinking is the truth, the absolute. If you attain the absolute, then you will intuitively know how to teach. So, first you must understand yourself. If someone with a strong opinion asks you a question, you can teach him as I am teaching you. You asked me a question so now I have a question for you: "What is good? What is bad?"

Regarding your second question: don't check your mind. Continually examining your mind is a Zen sickness. Only proceed straight ahead with don't-know mind.

You ask how you can get behind these bad thoughts. This is very bad thinking. An eminent teacher said, "Without thinking, just like this is the truth." Put it all down. If you try to get behind thoughts they will go further away. So I ask you a second question. Someone asked Jo-Ju, "Why did Bodhidharma come to China?" He answered, "The pine tree in the front yard." If you don't understand this answer you must ask the tree. Here is a poem for you:

The cat only looks at the mouse hole.  
A crying boy only calls for his mother.  
Originally there is nothing.  
Why does the wind shake the tree?  
The sun sets on the Eastern mountain.

I hope you always keep a clear mind, soon attain enlightenment, and become a great man.

See you soon,

S.S.

November 2, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Here is an article about us by Dr. Lee. Somebody translated it for us. We thought it was very funny.

We had coffee with him and spent 1 1/2 hours together. We talked for 55 minutes, Byon Jo for 25 minutes, Mu Bul Su-nim for 5 minutes, and I for 5 minutes. Mu Bul Su-nim tried to hit him, but it was like a mosquito biting an iron bull (I didn't even think it was worth trying).

The scene:

Dr. Lee was saying that the Bo-sal-nims who chant Kwansum Bosal don't understand the basic principle of Buddhism.

Mu Bul: Do *you* understand the basic principle of Buddhism?

Dr. Lee: Yes. It is emptiness. (Then he talked about how he has thrown away his likes and dislikes, etc., etc.)

Mu Bul: What is this emptiness?

Dr. Lee: Nothing.

Mu Bul: It is said in the sutras that the truth is before words. But all you have given me is words. What is the truth before words?

Then he gave another long explanation.

Mu Bul: But you are still using words. What is the basic principle before words?

Dr. Lee: If you asked me that way, I would answer like this. (Then he picked up a glass of water and slammed it down on the table, wetting everything around. He was quite angry by now.)

Mu Bul: Is this the truth?

Dr. Lee: Yes, it is.

Mu Bul: The dog runs after the bone.

Dr. Lee: I am not Rinzai style.

Mu Bul: I also am not Rinzai style. (By now Mu Bul was feeling embarrassed and had lost the fish.)

Dr. Lee: I don't play these games. (There were a few moments of silence.) Don't think about it in a concentrated way.

Mu Gak: (handing Dr. Lee a bunch of grapes) Please have a grape.

Byon Jo: There's a misunderstanding here ... (Then goes on in an effort to smooth things out.)

Anyway, this is how the conversation went. It seemed to me that it is not possible to teach a man like Dr. Lee. Is this correct? How would you teach him?

Will you visit New Haven soon? Please give my love to all people in our Providence family.

Your student,

Mu Gak

November 13, 1975

Dear Mu Gak, Mu Bul, and Byon Jo,

Thank you very much for Mu Gak's letter. How are you doing at Su Dok Sa?

As I read your letter, I understand that Mu Bul already saved Dr. Lee. But Dr. Lee cannot find a way to hide his body.

Dr. Lee has been studying Buddhism for twenty years. Now he says he understands Nirvana and the Buddha Realm. He is only thinking; he does not truly understand. In the newspaper article he said you had a very strong Rinzai smell. He said you had very strong Zen opinions. All of his words come from the sutras and the words of eminent teachers. He said that he does not believe in Zen. You have only been practicing for a short time, so he does not believe in you. But in this article he was very, very defensive, too defensive. So I think he is like the story of Su Dong Po and Mu Bul is like Sung Ho Zen Master. Katz! How many pounds?

In Mu Bul's dialogue with Dr. Lee, Dr. Lee said, "I am not Rinzai style." Then Mu Bul said, "I am also not Rinzai style." This is not complete. One more word is necessary. Next you must say, "I ask you, Rinzai's teaching and Buddha's teaching, are they the same or different?"

This is very necessary. Dr. Lee already said, "I am not Rinzai style," so it is very necessary to finish right there. Mu Gak, you didn't use Bodhisattva action. If Mu Bul couldn't finish, why didn't you take the baton and finish the race? Dr. Lee thought it was only a game. This is not a game. You must teach him how to keep just like this mind. This is very necessary.

So when you have Zen dialogues, your bodies are different, but your minds are the same. So if one person stops, the other person must continue. You already understand the story about two Zen masters; before dinner Katz, after dinner Katz. There is another story about two Zen masters. One Zen master came up to a podium to give a Dharma talk. He raised a knife in the air and stabbed it into the podium and walked away. The next Zen master came up to the podium, pulled the knife out, and walked away. This was a very good Dharma speech. One Zen master taught half, the other Zen master taught half. Together it was correct teaching.

So, Mu Gak, together action was very necessary at this time. If you kill somebody, completely kill them. You did not completely kill Dr. Lee, so he said you were playing games, etc.

This was not Mu Bul's and Dr. Lee's dialogue. It was not Mu Bul's, Mu Gak's, and Byon Jo's and Dr. Lee's dialogue. It was not American Buddhism and Dr. Lee's dialogue. It was the entire Zen family and Dr. Lee's dialogue. So one Zen dialogue is very important. Always heavy speech and heavy action are very necessary.

Here is a poem for you.

A man took of all of his clothes and went  
running down the street.  
This mouth said crazy,  
That mouth said crazy,  
You're crazy, I'm not crazy.  
The tree penetrates through the sun.  
The stone boy eats the moon.  
Who fixed the sun and moon?  
In a nest baby birds are cheeping for their  
mother's mouth.

I hope you put it all down. Only keep clear mind, get enlightenment, and save all suffering beings.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I came to Song Gwang Sa a few days ago to pay my respects to Ku Sahn Su Nim and to meet the foreign monks. Mu Bul and Byon Jo were busy, so I came alone. I planned to return to Seoul today, but Ku Sahn Su Nim asked me to stay until tomorrow. So here I am, sitting on a rock, as the sun shines and leaves fall all around me.

There are six foreign monks living here now—two Americans, two Frenchmen, a New Zealander, and a nun from Scotland. There have been about seven others during the past two years who have come and gone, and some of these have given up their monk robes. The monks I met are all very sincere and are doing very hard training. Most of them have begun a 1000-day meditation period, 13 1/2 hours of sitting every day. But none of them understand Buddhism. It is difficult for them to get good teaching, because of the language problem. So they have never heard of Bodhisattva action. I wanted to teach them, but in this situation it was not possible. So I mostly kept quiet and listened.

Soon after I arrived, the abbot (who speaks English) took me on a tour. When he showed me Zen Master Hyo Bong's sari-pagoda, he pointed to the stone lion on top and said, "This is the lion of transmigration." I said, "What is transmigration?" He explained about the six realms of existence. I said, "Which of these realms did Hyo Bong Su Nim go to?" He said, "That is a very difficult question." I said, "Oh, it's very easy. *You ask me.*" When he asked me, I hit him. He was *very* surprised! Then he smiled and said, "If you want to talk Zen, you must see the Zen Master when he returns."

I went to see him yesterday. (The conversation was sometimes difficult because we didn't have a good translator.) After tea, Ju Ji Su Nim told him about my hit. Ku Sahn Su Nim raised his eyebrows. Then, after a false start and translation problems, Ku Sahn Su Nim mentioned that he'd met a Columbia professor who was teaching that God is dead. So I begin:

Mu Gak: When did he die?

Master: He was never born.

Mu Gak: Is that true?

Master: Yes.

Mu Gak: The dog runs after the bone.

Here Ku Sahn Su Nim laughed, looking very surprised, and delighted. Then he leaned forward and said, with a gleam in his eye:

Master: And before God was born, where was the dog?

Mu Gak: He has already gone.

Master: (Laughing, then) Before God was born, where was your mind?

Mu Gak: I am sitting here right now.

Master: This is your karma.

Mu Gak: Karma? What is karma?

Master: Wong, wong.

(Here I can't remember what I said. I should have asked, "Are you a dog?")

Master: (takes his stick and pretends to hit me)

Mu Gak: Ouch!

Master: (Laughs, then) Where does karma come from?

Mu Gak: Don't you know?

Master: Tell me.

Mu Gak: Today there are clouds in the sky.

Master: (shaking his head) No.

Mu Gak: (pretending to hit him) Go drink tea.

Master: (shaking his head) No.

Mu Gak: You eat your food, I eat mine.

Master: (shaking his head) No.

Mu Gak: (only silence)

Anyway, I think we enjoyed each other very much.

My encounter with the abbot has spread around the monastery. A monk who heard of it came to my room today. He is 24 and has been doing hard training for five years. He is a very genial man. There was a large cat in the room (first on my lap, then on his) who has lived at Song Gwang Sa for ten years and is a good friend of this monk.

Monk: Are there cats like this in America?

Mu Gak: We have four at the New Haven Zen Center. They are all Zen students. They all sit Zen like this cat.

Monk: No, this cat doesn't sit Zen. He has many bad thoughts. He chases mice, runs after lady cats, and always wants food.

Mu Gak: This is Zen mind.

Monk: No no, it's very bad thinking. This cat cannot take the five precepts.

Mu Gak: Does the cat have Buddha-nature?

Monk: Buddha said all things have Buddha-nature. But Jo-ju Su-nim said, "Mu!"

Mu Gak: Which one is right?

Monk: (a long answer about Jo-ju's Mu, how it doesn't really mean negation)

Mu Gak: Your answer is like taking a stick and trying to hit the moon.

Monk: (silence; then:) Is there a Buddha or not?

Mu Gak: (hits him)

Monk: What does this hit mean?

Mu Gak: (hits him again)

Monk: Katz!

Mu Gak: (shaking his head) No.

Monk: No? (silence) Do you understand this hit?

Mu Gak: You must do more hard training and understand for yourself.

Monk: Have you sat Zen for many years?

Mu Gak: Oh, I sit now and then.

This monk thinks the hit is something deep and difficult, which only great Zen Masters can understand.

Yesterday I met Poep Jung Su-Nim, a writer, who has built a beautiful hermitage above Song Gwang Sa. He said to send you his good wishes. Also to Poep-An Su-Nim.

I also met Hyon Am Su-nim, who said he is a good friend of yours. He hasn't lain down to sleep for twenty years. I was very surprised when he said he was 60 years old. He looks about 35.

---

Back at Hwa Gae Sa

I left Song Gwang Sa yesterday, with very good feelings on all sides. Ku Sahn Su-nim gave me, as a departure present, a book by Bo-ju Su-nim and a collection of talks by his teacher, Hyo Bong Su-nim. They are in Chinese and Korean, so I can't read them. So they are very good books.

I have asked Mr. Huh Sung-young, a high school teacher who likes us very much, to translate your two books in Korean. He has already finished two chapters of your kong-an collection and may have the whole book done before I return to America. Then I will edit and rewrite it. I want to do your other book first, but it's out of print, and we can't find even one copy in Seoul.

Kyol Che at Jung Hae Sa begins after the ceremony for Mang Gong Su-nim on November 23. So I won't be finished with my 100-day retreat until May 30th. Will you pick me up then?

Please give my warm greetings to all people at the Providence Zen Center.

With love,

Mu Gak

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you?

Thank you for your letter and the pictures.

I think you are very tired now and I hope you can rest.

We are still at Wha Gae Sa. We will leave for Su Dok Sa on the 21st of this month. Ju Ji Su-nim will go with us for the ceremony there for Mang Gong Su-nim. We start winter training on the 23rd.

Thank you for your advice on fame. I am not famous though. Mu Gak and Byon Jo are, but I am too young to be famous in Korea. In Korea, if you are young, people don't care what you have to say. Sometimes this gets me sad or angry, but then I remember that this is only my small mind so I just try the mantra. Mantra is good medicine.

Nowadays everything is no problem. Shit form is no problem, food is no problem, speech is only a little problem. I have a very good Korean teacher and now I can speak a little. I cannot write or read well though. Maybe later I will study Korean at a university here which has a course for foreigners.

Thank you for your letter from Jonny at Big Sur. It sounds like you had a good time.

I hope you will take good care of your body.

Hello to Bobby and everybody.

Thank you for your good teaching.

See you later,

Mu Bul

P.S. Thank you for fixing my name in Korean.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you?

Thank you very much for your very good letter. Also, thank you for making my pictures. Everyone here enjoyed them very much.

We all like Jung Hae Sa and have no problems now. A nun here helps us very much (sometimes too much).

I am sending a roll of film. It is very expensive to get it processed here. It is not necessary to send the pictures back except the ones of the Jung Hae Sa monks and Man U Su-nim.

Please take good care of your body.

See you later,

Mu Bul

Hello to Bobby.

Hello Soen Sa Nim,

We have been at Su Dok Sa for three days.

The retreat-winter training starts tonight. It has been wonderful to be here a few days early and to get settled before the sitting starts. I love it here! Thank you for Su Dok Sa. Yesterday I took off my “gentleman style” clothes and changed into monk’s clothing—even with rubber white shoes. I will stay this way for the three months. I have a nice warm grey quilted coat. Our room is small but warm and comfortable. Since you know Su Dok Sa, there is very little to say except that all three of us are happy, healthy, and eager to start tonight. We will get up at 3:00 A.M., bow from 3:10-3:25, and get to the zendo in time for the first sitting at 3:30. Sitting will be for one hour, walking five minutes. Shit style—no problem; food style—no problem; talk style—no problem (we will be silent for the three months). Seoul city was great for me, sometimes difficult for Mu Gak and Mu Bul Sa Nim—they were like two lions in a cage at Hwa Gae Sa. Mr. Kim (Los Angeles) was very kind to us all. Mr. Kim (North Korea—your old friend) and the Bosal Nim from North Korea (from your home town who got me a suit) each gave us a car so we drove up. I spent a wonderful evening with

North Korea Kim and his family. He loves Buddhism and you very much. I was teaching Yoga two times a week at Hwa Gae Sa; some of the monks here have body problems so I have been showing them Yoga too. I must get back to work now—we have been working all day to finish winter kim chee. I was working on a big pile of radishes—cutting out the bad parts and stems. Tonight at 6:00 winter training starts. Thank you for all the time and energy that you have given me for the past two years. The value, power, and beauty of your teaching proves itself every day. Please tell this to the Cambridge family—don't-know mind really grows like a plant if you water it. I will not write to Cambridge Zen Center while on retreat, but my heart is with you all.

PLEASE take care of your health. You can not give so many interviews. *Slow down* for all people! Thank you for all the photographs (“good feeling”). Yesterday a monk asked me why I did not know how to speak Korean very much. I asked him if Buddha knew Korean. We both laughed. Mu Gak, Mu Bul, and Byon Jo Go Sa Nim are a close strong family so don't worry.

Love,

Byon Jo

December 11, 1975

Dear Byon Jo, Mu Gak, and Mu Bul,

Thank you Byon Jo, Mu Gak and Mu Bul for your letters. How is Jung Hae Sa? You have already arrived and are doing hard training. That is very wonderful.

Byon Jo—You say that now you are having no problems in Korea. That's very good. You are getting up at 3 A.M. and bowing ... hard training! You are already saving all people.

You don't need to worry about the Cambridge Zen Center; it is very strong. There are now twelve people living there.

Only keep a clear mind and finish your homework. I hope your don't-know mind grows and grows, breaks the whole universe, and kills all Buddhas. Then you will get the bone of space and become a great man, able to do everything. Then I hope you will save all suffering beings.

Mu Gak—I have received three letters from you. The first letter talked about Jung Kak Su Nim. I don't know who he is and haven't received a letter from him. If I do, I will follow your advice.

In the second letter you talked with Ku Sahn Sa Nim. That was a wonderful letter, but in the Dharma combat there are some mistakes. I will explain:

Master: God was never born.

Mu Gak: Is that true?

Master: Yes.

Mu Gak: The dog runs after the bone.

Master: And before God was born, where was the dog?

(That was the second time the Master followed your speech.)

Mu Gak: He has already gone. (This is a big mistake. You should have said a second offense is not permitted.)

Master: Before God was born, where was your mind?

Mu Gak: I am sitting right here right now.

Master: This is your karma.

Mu Gak: Karma? What is karma?

The rest of the dialogue was you following the Master and the Master following you. It is the same. The combat was not clear. If you had completely killed him the first time, then the dialogue would not have been long. Only four or five exchanges are necessary; then you understand who the keen-eyed is.

So if you kill somebody, completely kill them. This is very necessary. That is why we practice the cigarette kong-an. But this dialogue is pretty good—not bad.

I hope next time you send me a wonderful Dharma combat, and your Dharma light shines over the entire universe and saves all people.

Mu Bul—Your letter to Lynn was wonderful. All the Providence Zen Center people liked it, so we put it in the December newsletter. Also your recent letter to me was wonderful. You said you sometimes get angry, you sometimes get sad. But you soon remember that this is your small mind and try the mantra. That is good. Buddha once said, “I am a good doctor. I have many kinds of medicine, and I have explained all people’s sicknesses and which medicines to use to cure them. But it is your mistake if you don’t use these medicines, not mine.”

Mu Bul, you know how to use this medicine and how to fix your mind. So you are already Buddha. Just like this. Not young, not old; just Mu Bul. Just Mu Bul is the great Bodhisattva Way.

We had a very great ceremony on Buddha’s Enlightenment Day. About eighty people came from Cambridge, New Haven, New York, and Providence. Jerry was the announcer, and Louise gave the opening speech. Jonny gave a Dharma talk, and so did I. New York Dharma Teacher Mr. Kang gave the congratulations speech.

After the Buddha’s Enlightenment ceremony we had a Five Precepts Ceremony. Twelve people took the Precepts. Bobby gave the Dharma speech. The ceremonies began at 8 P.M.

and ended at 11:30 P.M. This was a long time, but many people were happy. Afterwards we had a great party—many eat.

Here is a poem for you:

Someone holding the Zen stick:  
What do you see?  
Hitting the zen stick:  
What do you hear?  
If you see something, you will become blind  
If you hear something, you will become deaf. Why?  
KATZ!  
Today is Buddha's Enlightenment Day of 1975.

That is the usual action, the usual speech—not special.  
What is Enlightenment?  
Do you see teeth hair?  
Do you find the tongue's bone?  
In the sky there are many stars; in the world there  
are many words.  
Now drink a cup of tea—better than seeing, better  
than hearing.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for the gift of the 108 beads and the Juzo beads. They are beautiful. Also thank you for the interviews. Hope we can get the Center going here. Of course, it will still be a long long way for me to drive from work or home, but will certainly support the Center and be there as much as possible—more so than I have supported other centers before, as I know the training will be better.

Please send me any new pages to Kong-an book, and any other new info you have. Also—I have the daily chants and the tape you sent before—but there is one part—that you chant most of, but students finish, that I do *not* have copies of.

Can you tell me what the Korean significance of the 108 beads is—other than for 108 bows??

The zen stick I gave you is from the Angeles Mountains. The wood is Manzanita—a very gnarled, twisted tree that reflects the struggle to know the true way. If it loses its shine or looks dry, use either linseed oil or lemon oil. It—the stick—was in a forest fire—so reflects earth, air, water, and fire—the four elements.

No zen talk this letter, but will appreciate it if you can advise me on ceremonies.

Hope you had a good trip back to Providence. Tell Jacob it was nice to meet him—also Mu Gak and Mu Bul when you write them.

Jack

November 13, 1975

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter. How are you? Thank you for offering to help with the new Zen Center. Many people want to start it in Santa Monica. I will help them and you help them. This is very necessary and good Bodhisattva action.

I will send you some new kong-ans. The chant you were asking about that I chant alone and at the end my students join in is not necessary for you to learn now. When I come to Los Angeles, I will teach you; it is very simple.

You asked me why there are 108 beads. If you check #159 in your kong-an book, it will explain it to you.

I like the Zen stick you gave me very much. In the future it will make many Buddhas, many eminent teachers, and many Zen Masters. So you have already made very good karma. You are a wonderful man. Thank you very much.

In your letter you said you had no Zen talk. No Zen talk is Zen talk. Everyday mind is Zen mind. So an everyday letter is a true Zen letter.

Jacob was also happy to meet you. Mu Gak and Mu Bul have sent me letters. I have already made a kong-an from their letters that I will send to you. They are already very famous in Korea... maybe.

See you soon,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

We have a house! a four bedroom house in Santa Monica. This is not the same house you looked at. This house is even better, very high-class. Carl and Susan, Eileen, See Hoy, Ed, and myself are all interested in living there. We will move in the first of December. Hope that you are very well and can see you in January. On my own I worked very hard to make a center, but it didn't work; but when the time is right no special effort is required. I hope that you could use the gift that Eileen and I gave you.

The center will be very good for me since I practice much better with other people (I am not too good at self-discipline). More than anything else I want to see my true nature and help all beings. At this time the center needs working people to help finance it. In a few years I would like to become a full-time monk. I think this is my true vocation. I will try hard training Zen right now in my busy daily life. We have a good start for a center, one full monk Satam, two Dharma monks (10 precepts) Jack and I, and Upasakas Carl, Susan, Eileen and See Hoy,

My don't-know mind is very big; I don't know how big though. I don't know life, don't know death, I want truth but don't know what that is either. I don't know kong-an answers either. I will try though. To the man who flicks ashes: I bow to Buddha with all my heart and clean him with all my heart. If I can do this maybe I can pierce the man's emptiness. The mouse kong-an means a mouse is eating from a broken bowl. You ask me what does it mean, the bowl is broken. I say fix the bowl and you will have it. When the mouth opens the bowl breaks; when it is shut the cat pounces.

Hang cat and mouse with the same rope  
Tied in the knot of no-knot.  
Who understands this truth?  
The ink is blue; the paper white.

With a deep bow,

Love, Stephen

To Soen-sa-nim,

We are indeed lucky to have been born human,  
And more so to have heard the teachings of Zen,  
But most fortunate are we to have a keen-eyed Zen Master,  
So helpful in teaching the way to enlightenment.

In gassho,

Steve and Eileen

November 18, 1975

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter. How are you, and Carl, Susan, Eileen, See Hoy, Satam, Jack, and Ed?

I am glad you are making a Zen Center in Santa Monica. You say this new house is higher-class than the one I saw. I am happy about this.

You said you will move into this house the first of December. There is a good Buddha at Tal Mah Sa. You ask Ke Jung Su Nim, and he will give it to you. When I come to Los Angeles I will bring a jukpe and moktak.

The present you gave me is on the altar in my room. Thank you so much. The card you wrote has very beautiful words, so beautiful that I have put them in the kong-an book.

Your ideas about practicing together with other people are good. This can make your practice stronger. You say in the future you would like to become a full-time monk, that is your true vocation. But being a monk is an outside job. What is a true job? Keeping a mind like space and helping all people is the Great Bodhisattva job. Monk, not monk, this does not matter.

The new Zen Center already has a good family. Linc likes you. He wants to learn more about Oriental medicine, which he can do in Los Angeles. I talked to him about the Santa Monica Center, and he would like to live there. Maybe he will come to Los Angeles with me.

Read your kong-an answers. You only understand the ink is blue, the paper is white. You do not understand your homework. Why do you scratch your right foot when the left foot itches?

Don't check your don't-know mind, don't check your true self, don't check anything. Only go ahead—DON'T KNOW!

I hope you are always keeping don't-know mind, and that you will soon attain enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. Please send us the new address so that we can send you the newsletter, kong-an book, and chanting books.

November 13, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

I was unable to make it to Dokusan on Monday, because I leave for work so early; however, there are two answers I wanted to give you.

To the person flicking ashes on the Buddha:

“Cut that out, Stop acting like a child.”

and... the mouse is eating from the cat's bowl, but the cat bowl is broken...

leap like a cat jumping on a mouse.

I understand that we have now a Center here in Santa Monica, and that you may visit on a regular basis. I hope you don't, because this would no longer give me a reason to leave California and come to Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Ed

November 19, 1975

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and your Zen class?

Your answers are not good, not bad. With the cigarette kong-an I must check your mind some more. I don't understand your meaning. Next interview I will check you again.

With the mouse kong-an, now you have found the direction, but you can't find the true things. You must understand a quarter is twenty-five cents, twenty-five cents is ice cream, the ice cream is already gone. So good feeling, then only wonderful. You must understand quarter. You must understand mouse. They are the same way.

If you don't understand, only keep don't-know mind. Don't check everything, don't check yourself, only go ahead. Then you will find a complete just-like-this answer.

Stephen already sent me a letter about starting the Santa Monica Zen Center. That is very good. Maybe I will come to Los Angeles on January 15 with Linc. He wants to learn

Oriental medicine and acupuncture. I have already talked to Linc about the Santa Monica Zen Center, and he wants to live there. You will be a very good Zen Center family.

I hope that the Santa Monica Zen Center will be good, and that everybody will keep a clear mind, get enlightenment, and save all people.

See you soon.

Sincerely,

S.S

November 1975

Dear Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim,

Am most grateful for your kind introductory teaching of the Dharma. Also superlatively thankful to have such an impeccable master as yourself. Keeping the mantra and with your aid, that of your able assistants, the little divine mother, and personal effort, will realize don't-know mind.

Look forward to seeing you, Jacob, Kwan Jang Nim, Jonny, Myla, and Willow. The image of your circle brings joy.

Sincerely,

Jim

November 21, 1975

Dear Jim,

I am grateful for your letter. In past lifetimes, we had the same karma. So this time again, we met, and again try Buddhist teachings. This same karma does not stop in this life. In the future we will also have the same karma, will meet again, and again practice Buddhist teachings together. You and me and Jonny and Jacob and Joan and Kwan Jang Nim.

So, you must practice your mantra with great strength. This is very important. Mantra mind is Buddha's mind. Buddha's mind is your true self. So an eminent teacher said: "One mind is everything and everything is one mind." And one mind is infinite time, infinite space. But what is mind? Before, someone asked Ma Jo Zen Master, "What is mind?" He said, "Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind." Next time, same question, he said, "No mind, no Buddha." No mind, no Buddha, what does it mean?

If you only practice mantra there is only one mind. One mind means empty mind. Empty mind means before thinking. Before thinking means no speech, no words. Before thinking is True Mind, True Buddha. So, no mind, no Buddha. Only practice your mantra. Put it all down. Then you will find your true self.

I hope soon you will get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Thank you very much for your letter. Jack has already written you and told you about the problem with the house. So there is not Santa Monica Zen Center right now. We are still looking for a place and sooner or later the new Center is bound to hatch.

If we haven't found a place by January, I will get a small house and live in it myself and everyone will come so we will have a temporary Zen Center. Please come anyway, because I will make sure the place has two rooms and is big enough to practice in. We don't really need a big house right away.

Song Hyong Sa is back in town and doing better, but he has not contacted anyone. The American monk's name is Ven. Bul In Bul Sa. He is a very nice man. If Linc wants to come out to live in L.A. he can stay with me, no problem. I hope Eileen writes to you soon; she is very shy.

Thank you for your picture. I do not have any answers to the kong an yet, just keep going ahead. Please keep yourself well. We all hope to see you soon.

Yours,

Stephen

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter and your telephone call. I am sorry that I am late in answering. I had to send about five hundred New Year's cards, so I have been very busy.

There is no problem about the Santa Monica Zen Center. I will arrive in Los Angeles on January 15 with Linc. You must find a good place before I arrive, and then we can decide. When I arrive it may be that the Korean people can give us a lot of help.

I am sending another picture for you to give to your girlfriend. I will be giving a lecture at Esalen beginning January 24, and will stay there a week. We will teach Zen and hold a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. If you wanted to come it might be possible to arrange it. It's a very nice place.

I hope you always keep clear mind, soon get enlightenment, become a great man, and save all people.

Sincerely,  
S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope I am not being rude but I must ask you some questions.

Why should I not chat idly at meals? Is this not part of being a human being? What reason have I for eliminating desires? I have no doubt that the true selfless mind exists, but why is it better than the selfishness that gives me friends and fun?

I would not put my hat on my feet. Please do not give me a shoe for my mind.

Dan

Dear Dan,

Thank you for your card and letter.

I think you have many desires. Then, go ahead. Nobody is stopping you. Originally you have no hindrance and you have true freedom. Eating time, talking is fine. Desire is also fine. You must not make a distinction between the mind of desire and true mind. Desire mind is true mind; true mind is desire mind. Any action is fine, but don't lose your true self.

An eminent teacher once said, My mind goes around everywhere: eating, talking, desiring. This going around is truth. Desire is truth. Anger is truth. Everything is truth. If you find the nature of anger, eating, and so on, there are no worries and no hindrance. Instead there is true happiness.

You must put it all down. Thinking is no good. I hit you thirty times. You must finish your homework. I hope you will soon get enlightenment and become a great musician.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Esalen Institute  
Big Sur

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Your “care package” arrived at the very moment when my unruly mind was about to consume my will to peace. This meditation practice not so easy! Do nothing? Not so easy! ... I opened your gracious gifts with joy streaming from every cell in my being. Such wondrous and loving things to share with our “freedom-attached” family. Each day of the retreat, I slip a little gift from you to one of our struggling souls—a carrot to encourage them when all seems lost or absurd. A little carrot ... loving kindness is all right if there is no end to the means.

Before your good letter arrived, Jim, Terry, Ann and I already doing 108 prostrations each morning 5:30 AM. I made a cassette tape of morning and evening chants, and we listen in silence. I discovered that the prostrations are easy when there is “no mind” ... re, no ego to strain the body.

Jim, Noki, John (the cook), and I are in the Master’s bedroom during the retreat. On the mantle piece is an altar with many of your kind gifts in addition to photos of you. We all remember with great joy your visit here. Such fine energy you brought us ... in addition to the “stone lion on fire” Kwan Jang Nim, and Jonny and Jacob. Needless to say, I look forward to your return in January when we can reunite and I can continue to learn from you.

By the way, Jim and I do dharma play several times and before sleeping. He has much insight about his situation and appears to be quite clear—in contrast to his previous confusion. No more panting or clinging. Biggest problems related to attachment and lust. Jim wants more training from you. I think it would be good, but he is very undisciplined, does very little practice, though is essentially cooperative and responsive when gently encouraged to meditate. So much thinking creates a real block for him in meditation practice. I keep working patiently with the dharma play and mantra and do not push him hard. Perhaps I am too indulgent.

Two days ago, in meditation, flies outrageous. Crawling all over my face, in my eyes, around my lips. I think flies like food and shit; are food and shit different or same? For the fly, food and shit the same. 360 and 0 same except for attachment?

Stan and I quite separate. He reminded me of a dream he had when we first married: He is looking for me in a forest. I am lost. He comes upon a caravan of Buddhist monks. On wagons are cages with monks and nuns meditating within. He sees me in such a cage; realizes that this is what is happening.

Zen robe very beautiful for me. I wear it to meditation when my head is “not thinking”. Mostly I wear it. Reminds me of the sameness in the universe.

The ginseng fine. Arrives just at my moon time when I am in much pain. Day before, Prem Das gave me one such little packet to help put a little yang in my system. Then your good gift arrives. How do you know such things?

Moktak I use with dharma play; Buddha statue on our little altar; incense always burning; calligraphy to be framed; kong-an book causes much laughter. All is perfect and fits. Sandalwood prayer beads in yesterday's meditation smelled so fragrant in my warm hands I put them down—they bring my mind into nose-consciousness so much!

Dear teacher, I am so unruly, truly so! Want to attain mind sword, see it as only way to cut through suffering and bliss. But there is so much imp in me. Will I ever attain clear mind? I know what it is but mirror easily clouded over with thoughts. Need more practice. Jack, he is good dharma teacher—Theravada strict. No tying together of nun's shoes! We are in a fine dance (combat?)! Need cleaner mind sword.

Retreat set up here January 24-31. Come early, stay late. We fly you and 2 dharma teachers here and give your temples a gift. I let Jonny know all details. Since I have another program the day the retreat ends, I will be a poor retreatant—as other details will be in my head. Perhaps you are giving a retreat later this fall or winter—and I could come as a student. Let me know.

By the way, what are you doing next September? I have a plan in the pot which I want to share with you. Jean Weaver of Cold Mountain, Vancouver Islands, has asked me to put together a month-long Buddhist program. Of course, I would like you, two dharma teachers and Kwan Jang Nim to participate. Perhaps a seven day intensive followed by sword play and more teaching. Would you and our other friends be available? This is *very* tentative but should you have the time, I can put more energy into realizing the plan.

This letter very long. I apologize. Behind words is a desire to see you again, become your student and learn to cut desire. I now am not very healthy. Body *very* thin and feeling weak. Much sorrow inside but feels not like my own. Although many things happening in my life that could cause confusion, my mind and will seem clear. But body not good. Sorrow not mine. I do not quite understand what is happening. The astrological transits are difficult for me at this time—so I feel that I have this foreknowledge as protection against confusion when my body does such things. But the grief? What is it? Too much thinking? Meditations clear and peaceful. Then convert to white light pure energy. I could pull trees from the earth. Then more peace and golden light. Then energy; then terrible grief that comes from a greater source. What is it? I do not understand. I accept and try to take care of body so mind stays clear. But sleep little. Too much energy—so I do walking meditation at night until body says: “sleep!” Walking meditation like a labor room in hospital where we walk and wait to give birth to our true selves. Then also, another thing, I hear chanting *all* the time now—but strongest while I am in bedroom. Chanting gnaws away at my thinking as waves chew sea cliffs. Korean chanting, Tibetan chanting, and Hindu satsang at times. Mostly Korean style chanting. What is this? Hidden Mountain has also heard this sound.

Dear teacher, I have a deep respect for you, esteem you great knowledge, and take joy in your endless compassion. You are a diamond in my heart, reflecting light within me—and toward others. The gratitude I experience in your gentle kindness toward me is profound. I hope some day to attain greater clarity through your teachings and love.

I am humbly your friend.

Joan

My warmest wishes to Jonny, Myla, Willow, Jacob, and Kwan Jang Nim.

We love you.

Cambridge Zen Center

November 21, 1975

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter. How are you, and Jim, Stan, Hidden Mountain, Jack, Cecilia, and the whole family? Your letter is not short. Not short means many thinking. Many thinking means meditation difficult. Meditation difficult means very attached to something. I think you are very attached to your life. But you don't understand your life. Sometimes you are happy, sometimes sad, sometimes suffering, sometimes empty, sometimes you cannot control your body and your mind, sometimes too much energy, cannot sleep. This is your life. And always you want big love, freedom, no hindrance. But sometimes many hindrances. All this is your life. But, your mind is a great Bodhisattva mind. You must take care of your body and your mind. Then you will keep great Bodhisattva's mind and great Universal Mother's mind.

How to take care of your body and your mind? First you must sleep seven hours a day. Already you are doing 108 bows and chanting. This is good. Now you must sit 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the evening. Any kind is good... Korean style, Japanese style, Tibetan style ... doesn't matter. Only keep clear mind is necessary. Only What am I?

I am very worried about your using Ketamine. Why? If you use this a lot, your True Self cannot control your mind, and cannot control your body. Your 8th consciousness (storehouse consciousness, memory, the level where deep karmic tendencies are stored) will become totally drug-oriented and dependent, so that everything in your life will only have meaning in relation to this drug. If you are feeling good, you will want to take more. If you are feeling bad, you will want more. So this is very dangerous.

You say your body is very sick. No good feeling. But your mind is clear. But in the future, if you continue with the drug, then you will not be able to control your mind and soon your mind will be only drug-mind, not clear. So now I think you are very attached to this. If it is possible to stop it completely then do so. Only cut. If it is too difficult to do it this way, then cut down slowly, say only one time per month, and then eliminate it all together.

I like you very much, so I say this. In the future, you will be a great Universal Mother. Your body is not your body, your mind is not your mind, but all people's body, all people's mind. So you must take care of them for all people.

I am very happy that you liked our teaching and our Zen family: Kwan Jang Nim, Jacob, and Jonny.

It is wonderful that you do dharma play with Jim. You must continue this with him. This is necessary. Why? Mantra and dharma play penetrate deeply into his 8th consciousness and repair strong bad karma. So if you stop now, it will only be a temporary repair.

You ask me, are food and shit the same or different? If you say the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say they are different, I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

Here are three answers for you. Which one is best?

Food is shit. Shit is food.  
Only Katz.  
Food is food. Shit is shit.

Stan and you... you say you are quite separate. This is your karma. When you had the same karma you were together. When different karma appeared, then you separated. But you must understand this karma. You must reach the point where you control karma instead of karma controlling you. This is very important. Then whether you and Stan are separate or together doesn't matter.

You say the ginseng came at a good time and has helped you. I have more. Now I am travelling but when I return to Providence, maybe December 1st, then I will send you some more.

Jack is a very good Dharma teacher. If you want clear mind, then already you have clear mind. So don't know mind is cut thinking mind. Cut thinking mind is empty mind. Empty mind is before thinking. Before thinking is just like this. If you keep don't know mind, already without thinking, just like this is Buddha Nature, is Truth. Nothing at all. Only the sky is blue, the tree is green. Put it all down.

We are happy to come back in January and do a Yong Maeng Jong Jin. Jonny will come and also another Dharma teacher, Richard, who is a friend of Jack's.

About Vancouver in September; we'll talk about it when we see each other.

An eminent teacher said "Ten thousand dharmas return to One. Where does the One return?" You must understand the One return place. If you understand the One return place, then you understand Buddha, God, Dharma, Nature, Substance, Absolute, Emptiness and you and me, everything. All live there together. This is big love, and the True way.

So, I give you some homework. Somebody asked Dong San Zen Master, "What is Buddha?" He said, "Three pounds of flax." What does it mean? If you don't understand, you must ask the tree.

See you soon,

S.S.

P.S. Please thank Hidden Mountain and Cecilia for their cards. I am sending them calligraphies, and also for you and Stan and Prem Dass and for your good friends. Also I am sending some photos.

December 1, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health. We are fine.

We almost had a Santa Monica Zen Center. We were all ready to move in with Steve and Satam. At the last minute we were told we were unable to have the house, as we were unable to come up with the deposit (\$1,300). Too much money all at once—So the next proposal we got was to move next door to Roshi Kozan—with See-hoy. After too much thinking, we decided to stay where we are.

Every morning we rise as 5:00 A.M. and do 108 bows, sit one half hour and then play music. Is this good?? Bad?? Different or the same!??

Joan from Big Sur called and told us you will be coming for a Yong Maeng Jong Jin in January. Carl and I hope to attend.

Here is a question for your mind:

How can there be thinking in a  
mind that doesn't exist? Why  
do we suffer if there is no suffering??  
Keeping Big Question "What Am I?"  
Still Don't Know Mind Keeps Knowing.

Thank you for our wonderful trip to Big Sur. We hope to be seeing you soon.

Our warmest regards to Bobby, Jacob, Louise, Johnny, Lincoln and the "Great Sword Master."

Sincerely,

Susan and Carl

P.S. Enclosed are some pictures from the Wedding.

Dear Susan and Carl,

Thank you for your letter and pictures. The pictures are beautiful but the faces are so dark that everyone looks like they come from India.

Did you receive my New Year's card and picture?

I am sorry to be answering your letter so late. I had to send about five hundred New Year's cards so I have been very busy.

Stephen and Jack already told me about the Santa Monica Zen Center's search for a place. I will come to Los Angeles on January 15 with Linc. So, before I arrive, you and Stephen together must find a good place. Money is no problem since the Koreans can help us. Only take into consideration how many people there will be to pay the rent and support the Zen Center each month once we have it. This is very important. Also, try to find a place which is easy for young people to get to.

In answer to your questions: first, music mind, Zen mind; Zen mind, music mind. If you are thinking, I hit you thirty times. Put it all down.

Next, DesCartes said, "I think, therefore I am." You mentioned "a mind that doesn't exist." This is already thinking. I hit you sixty times.

Next, I ask you, what is suffering? Explain to me.

Next, Don't know mind is don't know mind. If you know, this is not don't know mind. Don't know mind is don't know. Don't check don't know mind. That is just now mind. Just now mind is true liberation. True liberation means no hindrance, true freedom, and peace.

A few days ago Joan from Big Sur sent me a letter and in it she said how much she likes you. If you have time at the end of January, come and do Yong Maeng Jong Jin with us as Esalen.

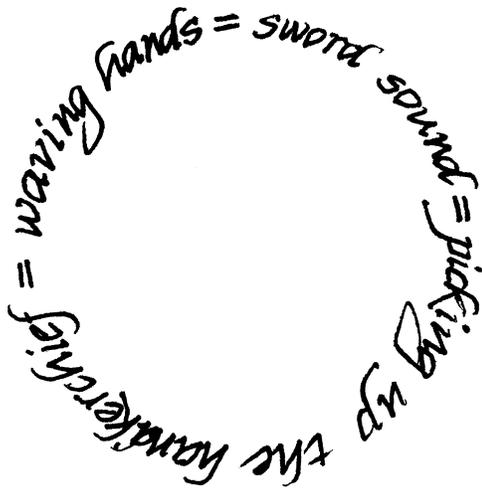
Hello to you from Bobby, Jacob, Louise, Jonny, Linc, and Kwan Jang Nim. Our whole family sends congratulations for your marriage.

Sincerely,

S.S.

December 3, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,



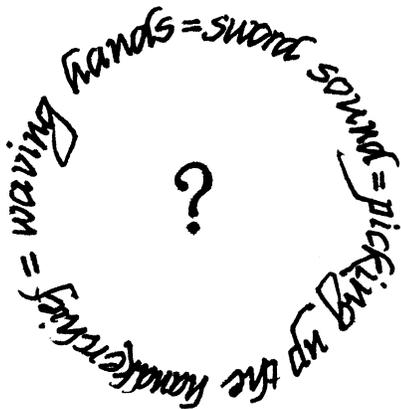
waving hands = sword sounds = picking up the hammering = waving hands = sword sounds = picking up the hammering

Sincerely,

An Hanh

Dear An Hanh,

Happy New Year!



waving hands = sword sounds = picking up the hammering = waving hands = sword sounds = picking up the hammering

What is inside? You only understand outside. You don't understand inside.

---

1. For example, although all grapefruits look the same on the outside, inside some are sweet and some are sour.

2. For example also, somebody said, "Where is my head? Where is my head?" He was looking for it everywhere. His friend hit him on the head. He said, "Ouch!"

You must tell me the inside meaning.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Thank you for your good, kind, and concerned letter—and all of the beautiful photos and calligraphy! Always you bring great joy to me whenever I think of you, look at your photos, or receive loving and wise words from you.

After my anthropology meeting this week, I will go to the desert for twelve days—away from all attractions—and rest, eat, exercise, but most of all to meditate and quiet the mind.

I do my practice—but irregularly. Sometimes I feel too weak to do prostrations; sometimes fall asleep when I meditate. And so on. The great constance is the overwhelming joy I experience emerging from my love and respect for you. You are a great and clear light that is in me no matter how troubled I might be.

Regarding Dharma play with Jim: Jacob advised me to put a suggestion in the Dharma play that Jim will do it by himself. Although Jim wanted me to work with him, I have encouraged him to do it without too much help from me. He does Dharma play himself perhaps once a day, sometimes more often. I work with him three or four times a week. He holds to the mantra pretty steadily and does prostrations at least once a day. I agree—this practice is very important for him, very good for him. He loves you, and he loves me. And his love will soon be one without desire for attaching.

Regarding Vancouver in September: I am doing this program (1) as a way of making it possible for me to experience more of your teachings; (2) as a way of bringing your teachings to others who would not ordinarily have access to them. Simple. The former desire could be realized by me coming to Providence—and studying with you. The latter reason has other dimensions. As it stands, Jack and Jakusho Kwong, Sensei will participate if the program happens. Also, I've talked with Tarthong Tulku, Rinpoche, Lama Govinda, Joseph Campbell, and Al Huang. I want your teachings at the core of the program.

Enough business and formal stuff! Do not worry about me—it is in my nature to die and be reborn many times. I watch—that is all.

“Are food and shit the same or different?”

Issa says, “Everything is going well in the world;  
Let another fly come on the rice.”

You ask, “Ten thousand Dharmas return to One. Where does the One return?”

Haiku says “The autumn tempest rages  
But high in the sky  
The clouds are motionless.”

You ask, "What does this mean that Buddha is three pounds of flax?"

I answer; I ask the tree / In silence, tree said, / Don't know.

Yes, dear teacher, I like you *very much*.

Our friends Cecilia, Hidden Mountain, Ann, Terry, Jim, Ellen, Prem Das, and many others send their love—

And to Jonny, Jacob, Myla, Willow, and the "Stone-on-Fire" Kwan Jang Nim, we send our highest regards and affection.

J.

P.S. Letter is not *that* long; I'm only writing BIG!

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

The calligraphy you sent will bless my abode. Thank you. Since the Institute, I have been re-establishing in Santa Cruz. It is a very fine town filled with many good people. Joan has asked me to tell them about the sesshin. I gladly share the news.

I hope you are well and that I will see you at the end of January. Joan is in good spirits. I have read the letter you sent her. You are most wise. I don't know about gates.

Love,

Cecilia

The universe Explodes with  
Laughter, Ecstasy,  
dance unending ...  
God bless you,

love, Prem Das

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Your words are always welcome. Please continue to send advice and reminders. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jim

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter. Did you receive my card and the Ginseng tea? I am very happy that you liked the calligraphy and photographs I sent.

You said in your letter that you already understand your bad karma, so fixing it is very easy. If a doctor doesn't know what sickness you have, then it is very difficult to help you. But, if the problem is diagnosed correctly, then you are well on the way to a cure. So, Buddha said, "I am like a doctor who understands people's mind-sickness. There are many kinds of sickness so there are many kinds of treatment." The four main types are sutras, nembutsu, mantra, and meditation (Zen). So, if you need medicine, fix your own mind. This is your job, not mine. This is good medicine, since you already understand your bad karma. In the Heart sutra it says, "Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva when practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita perceived that all five skandhas are empty and is saved from all suffering and distress." You must always keep this mind. Then you will be free from suffering. Only *perceive* that all five skandhas are empty.

If you think that your body exists, you will always have suffering. Only perceive it as empty; then there is no suffering. Very easy! Perceive-mind means don't-know mind. There is no subject, no object. *Just like this!* The sky is blue and the tree is green. Don't think about your body. Only blue! Only green! This name is *primary point*. All things come from this primary point and return to this primary point. So, any time you should take primary medicine and your karma will disappear.

I think it is good that you are going to the desert to rest and to do Yoga and meditation. But don't forget to take your *primary medicine*. Don't think about anything, don't think about you, don't think about me. Don't think about anybody. Only try! Then you will have everything when you cut off all thinking. Then you will become Universal Mother.

You must continue to help Jim. When his mind becomes completely strong, then not helping him is all right. But if he is not completely strong, you must continue to help him; this is very necessary. I understand Jim's karma. He is a great man. But he must only try mantra; then his bad karma will disappear, he will get clear mind, and, finally, he will get Enlightenment.

The idea you have for Vancouver is very good. I think that teaching only Zen is not the best idea also. Maybe Jonny could come with me. First talking about Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism and then about Zen. The first is like a professor teaching, then nembutsu or mantra practicing, and next, Hinayana and Mahayana meditation, and finally Zen meditation. This is my idea. In this kind of program, all religions are contained.

I also worry about your body. When the body is weak, the mind is also weak. If the mind is weak, the body is weak. So, having both a strong mind and a strong body is very necessary. The body needs good food, good sleep, and good clothes; the mind also needs good food, good sleep and good clothes. All the time you use your body and mind very much, but take bad food, only sleep a little, and your clothes do not help your body. So your mind and body are very weak. So, your mind food, your mind sleep, and your mind clothes are also bad, and

you have no energy. Therefore, you can not do the great Universal Mother's work. So, you must eat good food, get good sleep, and help your body with clothes. (When you are cold, wear warm clothes. Don't worry about style; only warm.) Next, you must take care of your mind food. Chanting and bowing are mind food. Mind sleep means mind rest. Mind rest means only keep this don't-know mind. What are mind clothes? Complete freedom, true Bodhisattva mind, no desire for myself.

Next, we must talk about your homework. I asked *you* to answer these *kong-ans*. A tape recorder answer is no good. I want *your* answer!

1. Shit and food—are they the same or different? I already sent you three answers. Which one is best? You must check my previous letter.

2. Ten thousand Dharmas return to one. Where does the one return?

3. Three pounds of flax! What does it mean? These three gates become the Universal Mother's gate. You must pass these three gates. I hope you always keep don't know mind, and soon get Enlightenment, pass through the three gates, and become great Universal Mother and save all people.

Here is a poem for you:

Last night falling, falling, much snow in Cambridge.  
Tree is white.  
Road is white.  
House is white.  
Everything is white.  
Why are the rabbit's horns not white?  
A car passes in front of the Zen Center.  
Early morning.  
There are two tire tracks through downtown.

See you soon,

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

December 21, 1975

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter and your beautiful card. Joan says you are getting very strong and practicing very hard. She also says that you practice Dharma play by yourself and that is very good. The Mahaparinirvana sutra says:

Everything is transient.  
That is the Law of Appearing and Disappearing.

If you make appearing and disappearing disappear,  
that stillness is bliss.

So you must only keep your mantra. This one mind does not appear, does not disappear. The mind that does not appear nor disappear is before thinking. Before thinking is your substance, your substance is absolute, and the absolute is the primary point. If you attain this primary point, then you will get stillness and bliss.

So you practice the Heart sutra mantra. This is the transcendent mantra, the great bright mantra, the utmost mantra, the supreme mantra. It is not false; it is the truth. You must believe this completely! So only try this; then you will get everything. Now you are young. Don't check your mind, and don't check your body. Only try this mantra. You must find your true way, your true self, your true life. You must find your true direction. This is very important! When you are thinking, you check your mind and your body. Then you become small I, with anger, desire, and ignorance. So you have problems. Throw away your small I, only try this mantra, and always keep clear mind. This is very necessary!

I hope you don't lose your mantra, that you will attain this primary point, become a great man, and save all people.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Jung Hae Sa

December 20, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

We received your letter to Byon Jo a while ago and were very exhilarated by all the good news. Also a long letter from Jonny about your experiences at Esalen. Also the New Year's card.

I just heard from Grove Press that our book came to 411 pages when it was set in print! At that length, it would have to sell at \$16 hardcover, \$8 paperback. This is no good, since many people would be unable to afford it—especially students. So I must cut it down to 225 pages. Then it can sell at \$7.95 hardcover, \$3.95 paperback. The cutting is too bad. But it is also good, in that the book will be tighter and stronger this way.

Man U Su Nim wants very much to live at our Zen Center in America, and she would like to go back with us this summer. She has helped us very much, in many ways. She is a good, strong nun—very dedicated to Zen (she is working on “What is this?”, given to her by Chung Gang Su Nim) and to Bodhisattva action. Her English is good, and she can translate fairly well. I think (and Byon Jo agrees) that she has much to offer our Zen family. Of course, there would be problems. If she comes, she could probably live in Providence, for a while anyway, to be close to you and under your control. Is it possible for a nun to live at the PZC? Do we want a nun at this point in the life of our family? Anyway, I wanted to write and ask you to decide if it's possible for her to come, and how we can help her. Please write me and tell me what you think.

We are all well and doing hard training. No problems, except the Great Problem. My good wishes to all people in Providence, Cambridge, New Haven, and New York. Please be good to your body.

With love,

Your student,

Mu Gak

P.S. I will be finished with my 100-day retreat on May 26.

P.P.S. Please ask Bobby to send a copy of *Three Pillars of Zen*, for Man U Su Nim's English Practice.

December 30, 1975

Dear Mu Gak,

Thank you for your letter. Happy New Year Byon Jo, Mu Gak, and Mu Bul.

I understand that our book would be too expensive with so many pages, so you like, I like. But you must talk with the publisher and tell him to get the book published as soon as possible. Many people are waiting for it. Please let me know when it will be finished. Find out how much they have done so far. Some people don't like the fact that only you are working with the preparations for the book and they are worried about the contract. So it is important that you explain to us what is happening. At times it might be necessary for someone here to talk with the publisher.

You said Man U Su Nim would like to come to America. Many Korean monks and nuns want to come to America. I would like them to come, but strong faith, great vows, and a strong practice are very necessary. You understand what happened to Chung Dal and Cha Hae. They have grown their hair and become gentlemen. No more monks. Why did this happen? Their faith, vows, and practice were not strong enough. Also they were not Zen or sutra Masters, so they could not support themselves. If you have no money in America it is very difficult to live here. They were finally forced to join the worldly life.

In our Zen centers everyone must pay money to support the Temple. People with special jobs (Zen Master, general repair man, etc.) can live in the center and not pay rent. These people are necessary. But we can not afford to support someone who is not necessary at this time. Even if the Buddha was not necessary, we would be obliged to show him the front door.

It is o.k. if Man U Su Nim wants to come to America, but why does she want to come? This is very important. Does she want to teach, does she want to study Buddhism, does she want to get a job? How can we support her? In the future, when our centers are strong and rich, we will be able to accommodate visitors. Now we don't have enough positions to fill in the centers.

Now I have explained the host-guest situation. But this is not your job. What is your job?  
PUT IT ALL DOWN!

Now I will ask you about your job ...

Long ago in China, Linchee Zen Master was walking in front of the Zendo. Just at this time two students appeared and simultaneously shouted KATZ! at each other. Another student walking with Linchee asked him, "Is there a host, is there a guest?" The Zen Master said, "Yes." The student asked, "Which one is the host, which one is the guest?" The Master said, "You ask them."

So Mu Gak, I ask you, which one is the host, which one is the guest? Tell me! Tell me! Quickly! This is your job.

Dear Mu Bul,

Happy New Year. I will give you a New Year's present.

Kwan Se Um Bosal has one thousand eyes and one thousand hands. So he is always helping your mind and body and saving all people. He is able to do everything. He is a great Bodhisattva.

Mu Bul, I ask you, which eyes are the correct eyes, which hands are the correct hands? If you attain this, you are Kwan Se Um Bosal.

Dear Byon Jo,

I will also give you a New Year's present.

Duk Sahn, before he had become a great Zen Master, visited Yong Dam Zen Master for the first time. He talked with him until late into the night. Yong Dam said, "Oh, it is very late. You must go to sleep." Duk Sahn said, "Yes, thank you very much. But it's very dark outside, could you give me a light?" Yong Dam began to hand him a lit candle, but just as he was giving it to him, he blew it out. Duk Sahn's mind opened, he was very happy, and he bowed to Yong Dam.

So I ask you, which did Duk Sahn get? Tell me! Tell me!

I hope you keep your bodies strong, always keep the great question, soon get great enlightenment, and soon finish the Great Work.

Here is a poem for you.

Good and bad are good teachers.  
Good and bad are very strong demons.  
Originally there are no feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness.  
If you keep it, you can not attain it.  
If you put it down, you also can not attain it.  
What can you do?  
If you want to attain it you must ride the bone of  
space into the diamond eyes.  
Be careful! Be careful!  
The puppy is crying outside the door.  
Do not kill it with kindness.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. If Man U Su Nim wants to come to America, it is her job to send me a letter. This is the correct way.

Jung Hae Sa

December 16, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I had hoped to do really hard training and keep silence during Kyol Che. But this is not possible. Anyway, I will have my 100 days.

A few days ago Zen Master Hae Am sent us a translation of three kong-ans that he gives his students. The first one is:

Buddha said, "If you give rise to even a single thought, it is a sin." Once a student told this to Zen Master Un-mun and said, "How about if there's not a single thought?" Un-mun said, "The sin is as big as Sumi mountain."

(I had heard this in Seoul from a student of his, who asked me why Un-mun said "Sumi Sahn." I said, "Your sin is as big as Sumi Sahn." The point was obvious—that the student was already thinking. But it seemed to me not a very clear kong-an. Why all this talk about sin? So I hit Buddha and Un-mun thirty times apiece.)

When we first arrived at Su Dok Sa, Hae Am Su Nim told us that we must only practice with Sumi Sahn and kept insisting that this was the best kong-an for beginners. So I asked him, "Are Sumi Sahn and 'What am I?' the same or different?" He said, "Not the same, not different." I said, "Then I will only do 'What am I?'"

The second kong-an is:

A student came to a Zen Master and bowed. The Zen Master said, "Where are you coming from?" The student said, "From Sword Mountain." The Zen Master said, "Did you bring your sword?" The student pointed to the ground with his finger. The Zen Master said, "If you brought a sword, why do you point to the ground?"

The third kong-an is:

A student asked a Zen Master, "What is the difference between Buddha's teaching and the teaching of Zen?" The Zen Master said, "When it

is cold, a chicken flies up a tree, while a duck goes into the water.”

I read these kong-ans and sent word down the mountain to Hae Am Su Nim that they were too easy and he must send us some difficult ones. Word came back the next day that he wanted to see me. So I went down with Man U Su Nim. Hae Am Su Nim said, “Why did Un-mun say ‘Sumi Sahn?’” I said, “If I were him, I would have hit this student thirty times.” He said, “No, this answer is not correct.” I said, “Then I will hit *you* thirty times.” He said, “You don’t understand the kong-an.” I said, “Who makes sin?” But he didn’t want to go this way and said, “No no. Why did Un-mun answer ‘Sumi Sahn?’” I was silent and then it dawned on me that he wanted a thinking answer. So I said, “The student was already thinking.” He said, “This is correct.” (There was a lot of static between, what with two attendant nuns and Man U Su Nim shouting in his ear.) I said, “My first answer is not different from this one. Only the style is different. You like this style. But if I gave this answer to Seung Sahn Su Nim, he would hit me.” He said, “No. There is only one correct answer. Your understanding is very weak. If you really understood, you would have given this answer the first time.”

On to the second kong-an. He said, “Why did the student point to the ground?” This seemed clearly a 180° answer and not a very good one. So I said, “His answer hit the target but not the bullseye.” He said, “This is not correct.” I said, “My answer would be, ‘You have already cut yourself.’” He said, “No. What does this pointing mean?” I pointed to the ground. He said, “You don’t understand this kong-an. So you must only doubt about why the student pointed.” I said, “Let’s try the third kong-an.” He said, “If you don’t understand the second one, you can’t understand the third.” I said, “Inside it is warm; outside it is cold.” He shook his head. So I kept silent while he spoke with Man U Su Nim. The gist of their conversation was that Hae Am Su Nim doesn’t believe Ko Bong Su Nim’s transmission and doesn’t like your teaching. He believes in gradual Enlightenment and thinks you must do hard training for at least twenty years before you can understand. Anyway, though the interview was unpleasant, it was good teaching. For one thing, that a Zen Master can be as full of shit as anyone else.

Please write and tell me if I missed the point of the second kong-an.

Afterwards, Man U Su Nim took me to the village to buy eggs. (She cooks us fried eggs almost every day, which relieves—slightly—the monotony of the food.) On the way back, we ran into the abbot, who was out in a nice furry brown hat. I said, “I just saw Hae Am Su Nim. He thought my speech was not correct, and I thought his speech was not correct. So we are both no good.” The abbot said, “What is correct speech?” I said, “You have a nice hat on.” He laughed and invited us in for coffee and fruit. When the coffee came, Man U Su Nim said, “This is interesting. Every time I make coffee for Byon Jo Go Sa Nim, Mu Gak Su Nim has a cup too. But this morning, for the first time, he said, ‘No thank you.’”

Mu Gak: “I knew the abbot would invite us in.”

Abbot: “Did you see this in your mind?”

Mu Gak: “What is mind?”

Abbot hands him his cup of coffee.

Mu Gak: “No thank you, I already have one.” I should have said, “Is that all?”

Abbot: “Your mind is very quick.”

Mu Gak: “Please don’t make mind.”

Abbot: “That’s a good answer.”

Mu Gak puts his hands over his ears.

Abbot: “Can you cover your ears when there is no thinking?”

Mu Gak covers his ears. The abbot laughs.

This was good fun. Later on, after more Zen talk and some talk about America, he said, “Your answers are very good. But you haven’t attained Enlightenment. So you must not talk this way. Your mind is strong, so I am very worried that you will get Zen sickness. Don’t think about kong-ans or Zen talk. Only ask ‘What am I?’” I said, “Thank you for your advice. But please don’t worry. I am only going straight ahead.” He said, “That’s okay.” I said, “I will come back after Enlightenment, and we can have some more coffee.” We both laughed.

Two of the monks at Jung Hae Sa have been asking me Zen questions. I always answer strongly, as you told me to. Yesterday one monk came to me with many opinions and ideas. I tried to teach him but he couldn’t hear. Finally he said, “You are a bad monk. You talk like a Zen Master even though you’ve been practicing for only a short time. Why did you tell Hae Am Su Nim that his three kong-ans were easy, if you could answer only one of them? This was a very bad action. So you must keep your mouth shut until you attain Enlightenment.” He was quite angry. I said, “You watch your own step, and I will watch mine.”

Now there is only sitting Zen and walking Zen and lying down Zen. “What am I?” sticks in my throat like a great sadness which I can neither swallow nor spit out.

With love from your student,

Mu Gak

December 23

I wasn’t going to mail this—too many words, too much “I”. But now it turns out that all the monks at Su Dok Sa think I am no good, because of my meeting with Hae Am Su Nim. Man U Su Nim even met a nun in Seoul who heard of it. Hae Am Su Nim told everyone that all my answers weren’t correct, and that I haven’t learned the true Dharma from you. Many thinking. I am sometimes upset by all this talk, and the monks seem like a bunch of old ladies. Everyone says I am not enlightened. But what the fuck is Enlightenment, anyway? Blue ink on white paper. If there is anything more than this, then I’m certainly on the wrong path.

Please write and send me a small pep talk.

Mu Gak

January 6, 1976

Dear Mu Gak,

Thank you for your wonderful letter. That is also your wonderful karma. Our Temple Rules say:

Your evil tongue will lead you to ruin.  
You must keep the stopper in the bottle.  
Only open it when necessary.

and

Buddha practiced unmoving under the Bodhi tree for six years.  
And for nine years Bodhidharma sat silently in Sorim.

So you must understand this true meaning. Next, the Temple Rules say:

Do not think, "I already have great understanding; I have no use for this speech."  
This is delusion.

If you have a question, put it to the Zen Master after he is finished speaking.

Finally, the Temple Rules say:

In the great work of life and death, time will not wait for you.  
If you die tomorrow, what kind of body will you get?  
Is not all of this of great importance?

Hurry up! Hurry!

Blue sky and green sea,  
Are the Buddha's original face.

The sound of the waterfall and the bird's song,  
Are the great sutras.

Where are you going?  
Watch your step.

Water flows down to the sea.  
Clouds float up to the heavens.

Only this. Put it all down. Only go ahead—don't-know mind.

I checked this first kong-an. Maybe the Zen Master did not have the correct translation, or he did not understand it—it is not correct. There is no Buddha in this kong-an. Somebody asked Zen Master Un-mun, “If one mind does not appear, is there a mistake or not?” Un-mun said, “Sumi Mountain.” Then the student said, “One mind did not appear. Why Sumi Mountain?” Un-mun said, “Put it down!” The student said, “Already nothing. What is there to put down?” Un-mun said, “Pick up your bag, sling it on your back, and go away!” This is the correct kong-an; not Buddha’s speech, not “How about if there’s not a single thought?” The meaning is the same, but not correct. This is very important.

You asked Hae Am Su Nim if Sumi Sahn and “What am I?” are the same or different. This asking is good, but Hae Am Su Nim’s answer is not clear. This time Sumi Sahn is Sumi Sahn; don’t-know mind is don’t-know mind. If you have the correct understanding of Sumi Sahn, then you understand don’t-know mind. So next, what is don’t-know mind? What is Sumi Sahn? Then next, when you have the correct answer, then Sumi Sahn is O.K. and don’t-know mind is O.K.

The second kong-an has no last sentence the way you wrote it. If Hae Am Su Nim says this, he does not understand the original kong-an. If Hae Am Su Nim asks *you* this last sentence, “If you brought a sword, why do you point to the ground?” and what does it mean, then this is O.K. teaching, but as part of the kong-an it is not O.K.

The third kong-an is also not correct. One student asked a Zen Master, “An eminent teacher said, ‘sutras are Buddha’s words. Zen is Buddha’s mind.’ How are Buddha’s sutras and Zen different?” The answer in the kong-an is correct; this is just-like-this mind, not *like* this—just-like-this.

Your thinking they are easy is very bad. So I wrote you the Temple Rules. You saying you already understand is delusion.

Your first dialogue with Hae Am Su Nim was not good, not bad—very clear. Also, Hae Am Su Nim’s teaching is a little not clear. This is thinking teaching, but an eminent teacher said, “Holy men also follow situations.” In America, this is “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” So if you are with Hae Am Su Nim, you must follow his style. Outside, follow; inside, you already have your way, the Great Way. The Great Way makes small I disappear.

We checked the second kong-an. You thought this was clearly a 180 ° answer. This is delusion, so Hae Am Su Nim was angry with you. This is not a 180 ° answer; this is a just-like-this answer. Second, he pointed to the ground. The ground has many meanings. I give you a hint: cemetery. Then sword, cemetery—what is behind the meaning? So now I ask you again, did you bring your sword? I point to the ground; what can you do? It is like the sword-sound, waving hands, picking-up-the-handkerchief kong-an. Don’t make easy mind; be careful. So, you answered, “His answer hit the target but not the bullseye,” but Hae Am Su Nim said, “This is not correct.” I say, your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches.

Be careful. Maybe your sword cuts off your head. Don’t lose your head. Hae Am Su Nim was correct; if you don’t understand the second, you won’t understand the third. So, your third answer, inside warm, outside cold, is like-this answer. A *just-like-this* answer is necessary. What is a sutra? What is Zen? Two points just like this, then come together. A

come-together answer is correct. An example: before, an eminent teacher said, “sutras are like a seal (a signet) hitting the mud; the language is clearly written, but Zen is like a seal hitting water or air; there you cannot see the impression.” So you must find a just-like-this answer. What is Zen? What is sutra? This answer is the answer you wrote: “When it is cold, a chicken flies up a tree, while a duck goes into the water.” (In Korean, the word for *into* and *under* is the same.) So I ask you, what does it mean? Don’t think it is easy.

So, your one action and one speech are very important. Hae Am Su Nim doesn’t believe in Ko Bong’s transmission and doesn’t like my teaching. Why? You must understand this. But don’t you worry. This is Hae Am Su Nim’s karma. About twenty-five years ago, when I was in the army, after the transmission, I was twenty-five years old and very strong. One day I was talking with Hae Am Su Nim. Other Zen Masters were listening. I asked him the cigarette kong-an. But Hae Am Su Nim’s answer to me was “Cigarette comes from where?” So, I hit him thirty times. “You are a blind dog, not a keen-eyed lion.” So Hae Am Su Nim was very angry. This was the only time he talked with me. All other Zen Masters had Dharma combat with me. They all liked my actions and were very happy, but Hae Am Su Nim would never have Dharma combat with me. How can he understand my teaching and my transmission? So he was afraid of my teacher, afraid of me, and I think he is still afraid of me. Also, Hae Am Su Nim always spoke badly about me and told everyone he does not believe in my transmission. This helps me. People who understand correctly do not believe Hae Am Su Nim’s speech, so you don’t worry. In the future, Hae Am Su Nim’s speech will help you very much.

I like Hae Am Su Nim very much. You say “a Zen Master can be as full of shit as anyone else.” I think your speech is very much like the Zen Master’s speech.

The Great Way is not difficult. You must make likes and dislikes disappear. Then everything already remains clear.

Afterward, your dialogue was not good, not bad, but I can see in your letter to me that Mu Gak wants good answers all the time. Is that good?

Taoism said that the man who tells you that you are bad is your true teacher; the man who tells you that you are good is a true thief.

Hae Am Su Nim is a very old man. He is like a child, so his mind is also like a child. A child’s mind wants love, so you must keep a great mind. You must visit Hae Am Su Nim, do a great bow, and say, “Before I did not understand everything. Please teach me. I will follow your teaching.” This is the correct way. You must kill yourself. Then your Big I will appear and Hae Am Su Nim will be very happy.

Next, very important: you must shut your mouth. Only take care of your body.

Your teacher,

S.S.

My dearest friend and teacher—

This morning, early time—3:00 AM—we arrived home from the desert. Its purity, quietness still resonating within as we drove through the coastal rains. Your large package filled with nourishing ginseng awaited—as well as the wonderful photos of you—you always so glowing! How do you maintain such radiant health—I can guess! You have been inside my mind-heart like a golden light at all times—as I walked across the sandy spaces of Borrego, or climbed the worn cliffs on the desert's edge, or bathed in hot springs. Whenever I feel my spirit eclipsing with thought I let your good face fill my being—much as on the night when we had the session—you and your wisdom and laughter filling me with joy. How I love you, love the world. And I forget—too often.

The sesshin, it fills—with unusual—and completely inexperienced meditators—a challenge—and much work for you I fear. Susan and Carl will be coming—great joy for us. And Joana Evans who has been practicing Zen for many years. But all the rest are “greenhorns.” We will love them, and all will be well. We begin Sunday the 25th and end Sunday the 1st. I hope you will come early so you can take the mineral waters, have good massages, and be loved by us. Also, things are happening vis-a-vis the Center. I let the energy carry its own self. But, perhaps, you will have a “permanent” place nearby—for us to practice in with you. Jim who is still my “sword-arm,” wants to do the same for you in Canada. We shall see. Too soon to say—only “Don't know.”

We come into this world naked, leave it naked, and only see the dragon's eye on fire if our vision is clear. Yes, dearest teacher, nothing is ours—not even our bodies—yet all is to be revered, cared for, as you care for me. Perhaps I am gone this next hour. But where could I go? Nowhere—

And so, with love pouring from me, I wish you the greatest joy this winter day. The whales here strike their way south to pup and mate. The sun is golden as it falls into the sea, the red-tailed hawk's offspring sits on my terrace regarding us humans with no expression. It is all here—so simple—

Fondest regards to our dear friends Jacob, Jonny, Mila, Willow, and the Stone-on-Fire Kwan Jang Nim—

And to you, my devotion

J.

My dearest teacher—

How wonderful, a letter from you. Always I experience great joy in hearing from you, seeing your face in the various photos, and learning , forever learning from you. You are so kind and caring. I am very moved by your concern.

Did I say I understand my bad karma? That is too presumptuous of me. I understand some aspects—I also know I must practice diligently to *really* understand karma. I know—my head (i.e. thinking)—that thinking creates karma. So I cut thinking when mental pain is being felt. It goes away, the pain.

I do not understand “Perceive-mind means don’t-know-mind.” I understand, “There is no subject, no object.” Are these the same? Mind is Buddha—therefore, no subject or object, no separation. Is this perceiving mind—i.e., this is Buddha, to know your own mind?

You tell me to take care of my body. You are right: it is the vehicle, the vessel of mind. And yet I forget body, and then the sickness comes. But now, body is strong; I am not forgetting. I am full of joy and feel very rooted in the earth. I eat much, sleep much, work much. It feels good!

About the kong-ans:

1. Shit and food—are they the same or different?

KATZ! (If I say same, attachment to form; if I say different, attachment to freedom)

2. Ten thousand Dharmas return to one. Where does the one return?

Don’t know!

3. Three pounds of flax! What does it mean?

One, two, three!

Jim, he is well, strong, and reminds me always to be mindful. Who is helping whom? Is there a difference? I think not. He does his practice—I take joy in his sincerity. Also, he teaches the Zen circle like a Dharma teacher to all who are interested.

I am so happy that you and Jonny will come to Vancouver. I will now start the program planning. Also, you are right, all of the great tree of Buddhism should be there, roots, trunk, branches, leaves, buds, flowers, and fruit. I will follow your good advice. Jack will teach Theravada; perhaps Tarthang Tulku, Vajrayana, and you and Jakusho Kwong, Zen. This will be good. I will advise you as the program comes together.

And soon you will be here. Susan and Carl will come. What a joy—to be together again. The whales make great spume trees as they pass our cliff. Perhaps they will be heading north as you come west.

Dear teacher, as this year passes into the next, may all beauty come to you.

I send my love to Jonny, Myla, Willow, Jacob, and the Stone-on-Fire Kwan Jang Nim.

And to you, my respect and devotion.

J

January 4, 1976

Dear Joan,

Thank you for your two letters. Your first letter was a wonderful letter. I liked it very much.

It says in a famous sutra that:

Mind appears, then Dharma appears,  
Dharma appears, then form appears,  
Form appears, then suffering appears.  
Mind disappears, then Dharma disappears,  
Dharma disappears, then form disappears,  
Form disappears, then suffering disappears.

So, everything is made by thinking. It is very important how you keep “just now mind!” Beautiful words, beautiful speech, beautiful clothes, beautiful body, beautiful face, beautiful thinking; this is all very beautiful. But all these beautiful things are form and form is emptiness. If you are attached to these things and they disappear, then there is only a great loss. Then, what can you do?

Life is like a cloud which appears,  
Death is like a cloud which disappears.  
The floating cloud itself originally does not exist.  
Life and death, coming and going are also like that.  
But, there is one thing that always remains clear.  
It is pure and clear, not dependent on life and death.

So I ask you, “What is the one pure and clear thing?” You must understand this. I understand your mind, your karma, your body, and your actions. What is most important? Teaching other people, helping other people, Bodhisattva action, good speech, happy times, coming and going; everything is all right! But, you must not lose your head!

Before, somebody went around and asked every person he saw: “Where is my head? Where is my head?” One friend, when asked that question, hit him on his head and he cried, “OUCH!” It is all like this story, so do not lose your head. This is most important.

Your second letter was a very clear letter. You have sent me several letters before, but this one was the best.

Before you said that you understood your bad karma: now you say you only understand a little bit. Don't worry about understanding karma. Don't check your karma, your mind, don't check your everything. Only go ahead with “Don't know!” If you check all of these things you will have problems. It is very important to only go ahead: “DON'T KNOW!”

Good and bad mind is small I.  
Understanding karma means karma I.  
Not thinking about everything is nothing I.

Good is all right, bad is all right, everything is o.k.:  
this is freedom I.

Only keep “Don’t know.” Then your mind will be clear like space. This is big I.

This big I means when red comes, then only red; when white comes, then only white. If all people are sad, then I am sad; if all people are happy, then I am happy also. There is no desire for myself, only for all people. This is the great Bodhisattva way. So, always you must not check yourself, because then you will have problems. Sometimes small I, sometimes karma I, sometimes nothing I, sometimes freedom I, all are no good. Only go ahead, “Don’t know.”

You said in your letter that you did not understand that perceived mind means don’t-know mind. Here is a story for you.

Long ago in China, there was a famous Zen Master named Ji Do. Before he became a Zen Master he had been a famous sutra Master. He only read the Mahaparinirvana sutra for ten years, but he did not understand the meaning of this sutra. So, one day he visited the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, and asked him, “Master, I have read the Nirvana sutra for ten years, but I still do not understand. Please teach me.”

Hui-neng replied, “What don’t you understand?”

To this question Ji Do said, “The sutra says that all formations are impermanent. This is the law of appearing and disappearing. When this appearing and disappearing disappear, then this stillness is bliss. ‘Then this stillness is bliss’ is the part I don’t understand.”

Hui-neng replied, “Why don’t you understand the meaning of this?”

Ji Do said, “Humans have two bodies, one is our form body and the other is our Dharma body. So, this form body has much suffering when appearance and disappearance all disappear, and it can not get this bliss that the sutra mentions. Also, this Dharma body already has no feeling, no perception, no impulses, no consciousness. It is completely empty, so how can it feel this bliss? Both the form and the Dharma bodies can not get this bliss, so I do not understand the sutra. Please teach me.”

Hui-neng said, “Oh! Who made this Dharma body and this form body?”

Ji Do answered, pointing to his body, “This is form body. Mind is Dharma body.”

Hui-neng said, “That is your thinking. If you cut all of your thinking, is there a form body or a Dharma body?”

Ji Do could not reply; there was only silence.

“Just this! Your appearing and disappearing thinking has already disappeared. This is true stillness and bliss.”

So when Ji Do heard these words he attained Enlightenment. Before he was attached to name and form, so he did not understand the true meaning.

Now I ask you, what about this perceived mind and this don't-know mind? Are they the same or different? If you say the same, I will hit you thirty times. If you say different, I will also hit you thirty times. What can you do? Don't be attached to words!

You say your body is strong, that you eat a lot, sleep much, and feel good. So, I am very happy. When I meet you again I will see this wonderful face.

Next, your kong-an answers.

1. Your KATZ is not good or bad, but your explanation is very bad. I hit you thirty times.
2. Do you understand this don't-know? If not, then you must get correct understanding of don't-know. Correct don't-know is your true nature.
3. Your answer is like scratching your right foot when your left foot itches. You must again ask the tree about the meaning of three pounds of flax.

You said that nowadays Jim is becoming strong. Also, that he likes to give talks about Zen. Maybe in the future he will be a great Dharma teacher. I hope Jim will become a great Zen Master and you a great Universal Mother.

Your Vancouver program sounds very good. In the past you have organized many programs and you understand how to do this very well. I only suggest to you an idea for you to check. Don't worry about this. Any way will be good. Your ideas are very good.

I will leave Providence on January 10, 1976, with Linc, and we will go to New York City. Then we will go to Toronto, then Detroit and finally Los Angeles on January 15. Jonny will come to Los Angeles on January 20 and meet us there. So when Jonny arrives, I will call you.

Jonny, Jacob, Myla, Willow and Kwan Jang Nim all say Hello to you. They like you very much.

Your Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Enclosed is a copy of the program for the New Year Ceremony we had last night. Maybe 75 people came to the Providence Zen Center. It was wonderful. I made a tape recording of the speeches and will bring it when I come, for you to listen. In the future it is very necessary for you to become a Dharma teacher. I am enclosing copies of some new kong-ans for you.

December 29, 1975

Dear Soen-sa-nim,

Time passes by so quickly—already it has been three weeks since Yong Maeng Jong Jin formally ended. Now I am living with my Korean friends. This is hard practice for me. They have a very different schedule from mine. I share a room with a 4 year old girl. It is difficult to sit Zen and do bows. Some days it is impossible. This has been difficult but life goes on. I am very grateful to them for all their help.

The Korean lessons are going along slowly. You must be aware of how difficult it is to learn a new language. It is a real challenge! Is there someone in Providence I can take Korean lessons from? I may be able to come to Providence earlier than March as the money is accumulating faster than expected. Already \$700 is saved. If it is possible to take Korean lessons from someone in Providence, then there seems no reason to wait until March to come.

It is hard to express how much gratitude I feel—to you, to the Providence Center, to all the Dharma brothers and sisters, for Zen, for living, for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for being able to go to Korea. There is such a quiet sense of rightness in my life now. Things seem to be falling into place so naturally after 4 years of Zen practice that felt like wearing shoes the wrong size. Do you know what I mean? Nothing wrong with the shoes or the feet—but ouch! How long can this good karma last?

Let me know if there are any new developments concerning the trip to Korea. My Korean friends have heard of Su Dok Sa but don't know where it is located. What part of Korea is it in?

Also thank you for all the concern and help for this body. It steadily grew stronger after leaving Providence. There seems to be no trace of hepatitis now. I hope you are also in good health. It was very moving to me how generous everyone was while I was sick at your Center.

Thank you,

Bekah

January 4, 1976

Dear Bekah,

Happy New Year. Thank you for your letter. I read your letter and understand the difficulty with practicing in your present situation. If you want to come here early it is possible. Also,

learning Korean is also possible at our Zen Center. The Shim Gum Do Master, Kwan Jang Nim, could teach you Korean. Any time you want to come is good. There are no problems.

You said that now you have found the correct shoes. I am very happy. This is very important. Long ago, an eminent teacher talked about the four difficult things in our life. They are:

1. being born in human form
2. hearing about Zen
3. meeting a keen-eyed Zen Master
4. attaining Enlightenment.

Su Dok Sa is in Chung Chong nam do Yea San gun duk san myun. Mu Gak Su Nim just sent me a letter and Larry also recently sent a letter and I am enclosing copies for you.

Our Zen Center family likes you very much and any time you want to come you are welcome. I am grateful to hear that your body is strong nowadays.

I hope you always keep a clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people.

Sincerely,

S.S.

Dear Soen-sa-nim and everyone at the Cambridge Zen Center,

Thank you for your last letter—it filled us all with joy and excitement. Based on letters sent earlier, I was concerned that we wouldn't be able to pay the rent—but to find out that 10 people live at the Center was a great surprise; also that so many people are trying to sit ( and walk, shit, eat, etc.) Zen. Also that Ritchie is still very much a part of the family; also that Dyan is housemaster. This made me happy because I remember the first time she came around to the Center with a broken mind and how much courage she had when she sat even though it was not easy. But I hit her 30 times anyway with my magic Zen stick that reaches all the way to Cambridge—why? Because I can see with my 270° eyes that her room is not clean and harmonious. Who are these new people; will someone write me a line or two about them? Esalen sounds good too. Jonny wrote to me about how kind they were to you all so I sent them a thank you note. On the way back to Boston perhaps I'll stop in on them for an ass massage—it already needs it. We are working hard. I love it here! You said many times when we were feasting in Seoul that “At Su Dok Sa there is nothing at all”—this is not true. There is less than nothing but right now this less than nothing is very good for me. The monks and Zen Masters do everything they can to help us with the situation but there is very little they can do—i.e. no granola or yogurt—no movies—no coffee house etc. I am lucky in that I always have loved rice and I like it even more now. At first it was very difficult not to have “breakfast,” “lunch,” “supper”—i.e. all meals the same. But now I see they are not the same—many kinds of kim chee.

From 12-2 every afternoon we have free time so I go up higher into the mountains, curl up near a rock and do “What am I?” Sometimes I go up to Mang Gong's house where that old monk in the photograph lives, say hello to him (i.e. we both laugh), and meditate in that small space with the steep drop. Then I run down the mountain again. My health is good, Mu Bul's too; Mu Gak still needs sleep and has a cold but his mind is beautiful and clear and an inspiration to us all. There is a wonderful nun, Man U Su Nim, who is a big help in every way. My favorites are 2 Grandmother Bosalims about 66 years old. They sit with the rest of us; take yoga every day (I teach the monks from 10 - 11) and always laugh and do kind things. They have taught me more than anyone. I love them.

I had an interview with Hae An Su Nim. He wanted me to work on the Sumi Mountain kong-an but I told him “What am I?” was already too much. I asked him information style questions about how to keep the eyes, etc. No problem. The Zen Masters here want to teach us - they are not just hotel managers, so I am open to them but don't want to hurt my practice, so I keep to information only. Hae An Su Nim was helpful. He talks “Only doubt”—no matter what you ask him. This was good.

In your letter you said you hope I get Enlightenment—I send this hope back to you—it weighs too much. I already carried my two suitcases up the mountain. Many Korean people tell me to get Enlightenment. Sometimes I feel like I am sitting Zen in the middle of Yankee Stadium (ask Jonny) with 70,000 people cheering me on. So I don't want to want

Enlightenment. I don't even know what "it" is. If it comes, great; if not, I will still sit Zen because it is a wonderful way to live. Now how do I give this not wanting to want Enlightenment to you? KATZ!!! There is no more room on this page so I will say I love you all. Please take care of your body. HAPPY NEW YEAR.

Byon Jo

January 5, 1976

Dear Byon Jo,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. Did you receive my New Year present? Your letter was a very wonderful letter. Cambridge and Providence, New Haven and New York Zen Center people all like your letter; I have already given copies to them. We had a New Year Ceremony on January 3 at the Providence Zen Center. The four Zen Centers' students gathered together. The ceremony began at 8 o'clock in the evening. A Dharma teacher from each Zen Center gave a speech. Also I gave Korean bowls to all Dharma teachers. Then after, we watched this very wonderful Korean Temple Dancing. This Korean woman is from New York; her name is Sun Ock Lee. Then after, we had a party.

Dyan is a very good Housemaster at the Cambridge Zen Center. Archie and everyone are helping Becky. Richard comes every morning and every evening to chanting, so no problem. Jonny sometimes comes, sometimes cannot come because of his baby. In the future Linc will go to Los Angeles, so nowadays there is no problem at the Cambridge Zen Center—the family is very strong. But, Becky controls the Zen Center, and she is very busy and has no time; school is busy. Sometimes the new students do not listen to Becky. They don't understand Temple-style living, so sometimes it is difficult. I tell Becky "Only quiet teaching is good," but she has had no time, so they didn't understand. Nowadays they are having a house meeting two times each week, to talk to each other and to make rules. Now that they have tried this, they have no problem, so don't you worry. But every time Becky talks to me, she asks, "When will Byon Jo come back?" So I ask you, when will you come back? All the Cambridge Zen Center is waiting for you. Sometimes I go to the Cambridge Zen Center; they think I am the father. They think you are the mother who takes care of them. Now they have no mother, and they want to know, when will our mother come?

You said you had an interview with Hae Am Su Nim—very good style, correct Korean-style interview.

Everyone says to you, "Get Enlightenment," so don't worry. If you are keeping don't-know mind, their saying "You must get Enlightenment" is a good song. You say you already carried two suitcases up the mountain. If Enlightenment is not necessary, then give it to a dog. Your KATZ is a wonderful KATZ, and afterwards you said, there is no more space and I love you all—this is most wonderful. That is correct; only keep this mind. I will be waiting for you to send your New Year present back to me.

Sincerely,

S.S.

P.S. I am leaving the Providence Zen Center on January 10 to go first to New York, then Toronto, next Detroit, and I will arrive in Los Angeles maybe on January 15. We will have a Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Esalen beginning on January 25 and ending February 1. Then afterwards I will stay in Los Angeles at Tal Mah Sah. I will come back maybe the end of February.

Jung Hae Sa

December 23, 1975

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you?

Last night we received your letter.

I bow to you three full bows and say:

Thank you very much.  
Before I did not know,  
But now I understand;  
Mu Gak is Mu Gak,  
Mu Bul is Mu Bul,  
Byon Jo is Byon Jo.

Nowadays it is very cold at Jung Hae Sa. There is snow everywhere.

Every day we sit Zen, eat, and sleep.

I like Korean monk style very much. Nowadays I live in the Kun Bang. Some of the monks are learning Yoga from Byon Jo. I also learn every day.

Mu Gak and Byon Jo are both well. I think they will write you soon.

I think of you and Bobby every day, and I hope you are well.

Please say hello to the P.Z.C. family for me.

See you later,

Mu Bul

January 7, 1976

Dear Mu Bul Su Nim,

How are you? Thank you for your very good letter.

An eminent teacher once said, “without thinking, just like this is Buddha.” You are correct: Mu Gak is Mu Gak, Mu Bul is Mu Bul, Byon Jo is Byon Jo.

I think Jung Hae Sa is very cold, but Providence is also very cold. It is only 4 degrees today, maybe colder than Jung Hae Sa.

We had a big ceremony on January 3 celebrating the New Year, 1976. All four Zen Centers gathered at the Providence Zen Center; maybe 75 people were there. We began at 8 P.M. I will send you the ceremony program. Each Zen Center had a Dharma teacher speak. The New York teacher, Jerry, gave a very eloquent radio announcer-style speech, in his usual fashion. But besides being eloquent, he also saved many people with very good Zen words. He said that people spend most of their time avoiding pain and seeking pleasure and are constantly shifting between happiness and suffering. He said this is no good. He said suffering is a very good teacher, and he hoped everyone had a lot of suffering in the New Year.

Robert Moore from New Haven gave a professor-style speech. He talked about the growing-pains which the New Haven Zen Center is now having and about how much Soen Sa Nim's teaching is helping them to become strong. He told a very beautiful story about a Zen archer who grew from an arrogant fame-seeker to a great Zen Master.

Richard Barsky from Cambridge talked about desperation as being a wonderful state of mind. He said that we must arrive at this state to be able to let go of our opinions and conceptions. If we are able to do this, then a clear mind will emerge.

Bobby gave a short talk about how attachment to time and space creates suffering. After she spoke, she asked four people in the room, “What is the true meaning of the New Year?” This was a planned drama and Peter, Suzie, Lee and Ken were the actors. Everyone thought it was very funny. Peter was a little boy and gave a little boy answer. Suzie was a housewife and gave a just-like-this housewife answer. Lee was a great 180 degree yogi and gave a very funny answer proclaiming the glorious union of all universal creatures. Ken was a very old and wise man who gave a good answer even though his senility caused him to forget the question.

After each had given their answers, Bobby said, “All of these answers are very good, but which one was the best? If you can tell me which one was the best, I will hit you thirty times; if you can't tell me which one was the best I will hit you thirty times. What can you do? KATZ! Today is January 3, 1976.”

Next I gave a Dharma talk. First I held up the Zen stick and hit it once on the table and said, “Happy New Year.” Every one had already given very good Dharma speeches, so I had no speech. So I asked my Zen stick, “Do you understand the New Year?” The Zen Stick said, “I don't know.” I said, “Why don't you know?” The Zen stick said, “Do you understand me?” I said, “You are Zen stick.” “I am not Zen stick. All people are fools. Who made last year, who made New Year? All names are empty.” So I asked the Zen stick, “Then what are you?” The Zen stick said, “Same as you.” “Then do you understand me?” “Don't you know?” I said, “So I ask you.” The Zen stick hit me. “Why did you hit me?” “My name IS Zen stick. Also last year's name was 1975, the year of the rabbit; this year's name is 1976, the year of the dragon.” So then I explained to everyone that the Zen stick is better than people. Therefore I already have given transmission to the Zen stick. If you don't understand kong-ans, your

true self, the true way, or life, you must ask the Zen stick. Then I hit the table three times and said thank you very much.

I next gave all the Dharma teachers their Dharma bowls. We finished the ceremony and took a picture. After this, a famous Korean dancer did Temple Dancing for us. There was a party afterwards, and everyone was happy.

You say nowadays you are living in the Kun Bang. When I lived at Su Dok Sa I also lived in the Kun Bang. I liked it very much.

The Providence Zen Center family all say hello to you. Somebody said you are homesick. Is this true? Where is your true home? I think somebody has made a mistake. You check your fingers. How many do you have? Mu Bul, already everything is complete.

I hope you will many eat, many sit, many work, many sleep. Then you will be O.K.

Bye, Bye,

S.S.

P.S. We will come to Korea about May 15th. Please finish your Korean language studies before this so you can show Korea to everyone.

January 12, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I have been working on the homework you gave me, not often, but when it passes through for a visit. A man drops ashes on the Buddha; what do I do? Usually I wonder, think hard, wonder a little more, and give up.

It has been a while since I last worked on my homework. I have been practicing Zen in everything, though. Thank you very much for your teaching. I am understanding Zen more and more. It is helping me to be clearer.

Yesterday I suddenly remembered my homework. My mind jumped on a scene that happened a few weeks ago. One of my jobs is to clean the Sanctuary one morning a week. I was almost finished when some men who were taking a tour of the community came into the Sanctuary. One man had a cigarette, and when I met his eyes I said with my eyes, "Put out your cigarette!" I didn't even have to say with polite words, "We don't smoke in the Sanctuary." He understood instantly and put it out.

How funny that my homework came to life! If someone came into the Dharma room and dropped ashes on the Buddha, my reflex action might likely be to point to his cigarette and say with my eyes: "Put out your cigarette!" The power of my action, when my homework came to life, was its reflexness. A man steps in front of my car, I step on the brake.

I would be very grateful for your answer.

With much love and respect,

Jane

January 24, 1976

Dear Jane,

Thank you for your letter. Your letter is not good, not bad, but this cigarette man is very attached to emptiness. He doesn't understand himself, so he thinks, "I am a great Zen master; I am the Dharma; I am Buddha." When he is in the Dharma room, he wants to teach other people. So he smokes a cigarette, blows smoke and drops ashes on the Buddha. So, how can you fix his mind? Reflex action is O.K. but cannot fix his mind. If you do this, he will hit you. What can you do? If you open your mouth, he will only hit you. How can you fix his mind?

I understand your mind, but this man doesn't understand your mind, so you must fix his mind. This is very necessary. Here is an example: If you went to the market with a small child and he doesn't understand taking things, he'll take some chocolate candy and put it into his pocket. If you say, "You are no good!" and give him strong teaching, then the child will become very angry. He thinks market things and our things are the same. So you must give him soft teaching; you must explain that if he takes this, he becomes a thief. Then the child will understand good and bad. That is the correct way.

This cigarette man doesn't understand like-this and just-like-this, reflex action. He is very attached to emptiness, to primary point, so no Buddha, no you, no I, nothing at all. So you must teach him like-this, just-like-this, reflex action. You must first fix his mind. How can you fix his mind?

I hope you only keep don't-know mind. Don't check the cigarette kong-an; this is very necessary. Then soon you will attain the Correct Way.

Sincerely,

S.S.

January 16, 1976

Dear Bobby,

Hi! We made it to the West Coast after a very interesting trip. We managed to ship our luggage to Detroit, so that made things simpler. Thank you for the ride and the visit.

Visiting Toronto was very interesting, so I would like to tell you about what happened there. The monk we visited picked us up at the airport and was happy to see Soen Sa Nim again after many years. He was nervous but very cordial. We stayed at his small apartment-temple in downtown Toronto; it consisted of two very small bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, and Dharma room that accommodates about fifteen people. Several times a week Canadian students come to meditate in the evening, and on Sundays a few Korean people visit.

The afternoon we arrived we visited a Korean family for lunch (the beginning of my hard training), and they really rolled out the red carpet. The grandmother (eighty years old) used to be Soen Sa Nim's student in Korea many years ago and was very happy to see him again and to meet me.

Soen Sa Nim gave them all a "Dharma talk" while we sat on the floor eating fruit—he kept them laughing for about two hours. The monk came with us, but he was very quiet and only sat.

When we returned to the temple the monk gave me several articles to read that he had written. His apartment was literally covered with books—thousands of them—and he is interested in translating Korean Zen literature into English. He was very formal in the temple, and he instructed me in how to drink tea, remove my socks, sit and walk during meditation, eat, etc.

That evening about ten students came for sitting, which was extremely formal (Soen Sa Nim told me to be sure not to sleep). Several students had interviews with Soen Sa Nim, and afterwards we had a Dharma talk.

Soen Sa Nim wanted to have the usual question-answer type, but the monk wanted a formal Dharma talk which he would then give a commentary on. He settled for a formal introduction which consisted of several stories about Mang Gong Zen Master, Soen Sa Nim's "Grand-teacher." When it came time for the questions no one would ask anything. After much urging one student asked a few questions. He is the head of the Rochester Zen Center branch in Toronto and has been Kapleau Roshi's student for five or six years. The interchange was good and at least there was something. Soen Sa Nim's teaching of "like-this" and "just-like-this" is very important. Many people do not understand the difference. After the talk we all went out to a vegetarian restaurant for dinner.

The next day, after an informal breakfast table Dharma talk in Korean to the monk, we went sight-seeing and visited the Toronto Zen Center. Their house is very beautiful, all fixed up Japanese style with drums, bells, gongs of various sorts, a little high-class for me but very beautiful and well cared-for. We saw many pictures and talked about our various Zen centers. It was a very nice visit, and they would like to get our newsletter, so I am including the address.

That afternoon, when we returned to the temple, the monk told me there were several things he wanted to point out to me. He informed me that when I had gotten up from the kitchen table I did not return my chair under the table. Also, when I was standing around, sometimes I would keep my hands in my pockets, which was extremely rude, indicating a poor understanding of Zen.

I only said, "Form is emptiness." At this he got very angry and said, "We can choose or not choose to do something, but if we choose to do it, then it must be done as perfectly as possible. This is life action as opposed to death action."

His energy was up, so I said, "Thank you very much for your teaching. It is very good to visit here and see a different style of Zen teaching. Soen Sa Nim always teaches us that many people are attached to name and form, and what is most important is how you keep your 'just-now' mind."

He calmed down and we talked for a while. The next morning he tape-recorded our chanting and asked me many questions about how we run our Zen centers.

After we left for Detroit, Soen Sa Nim told me that the monk had changed a lot and wanted to have a Providence Zen Center-style place in Toronto. Soen Sa Nim told him that we would help him and that he could visit sometimes, so now we may have another new Zen center.

We visited Detroit and had a fine time. The professor who invited Soen Sa Nim was someone who had sat during the first Yong Maeng Jong Jin at the Cambridge Zen Center, so I had met him before. About seventy-five students came for the talk. They asked many questions and everyone had a good time. After, we went to the professor's house and had dinner with about fifteen students and some other professors. The questions continued and everyone laughed a lot. We stayed overnight at their apartment and in the morning left for Los Angeles. When we left Detroit it was 15° and there was a lot of new snow; when we arrived in Los Angeles it was 85° and palm trees. Just like this!

Give my love to everyone in our family. We're getting a West Coast family now. We are going to visit all the Zen Masters in Los Angeles today. Will write again soon. Very busy now but I will try to write often.

Love,

Linc

February 1, 1976

Dear Housemaster Bobby,

Thank you for your letter and pictures and for sending the kasas. I will send the pictures to Mu Bul. We just finished our Yong Maeng Jong Jin and the Five Precepts Ceremony. I am a little tired, but I have energy so please don't worry, O.K.?

Before coming here we stayed in Los Angeles and visited all of the Zen Masters there. First we visited Kosan Roshi, a famous Japanese Zen Master who is almost seventy years old. Next we visited Dr. Rev. Ven Teich Ten-an at his Vietnamese temple. He has many buildings, an Oriental college, Buddhist library, and a big Vietnamese temple, but only a few American students. Maybe about thirty-five students study there. Dr. Pruden is a professor there, so we met him and took pictures; I will send them to you. After lunch we visited the famous Zen Master Maizumi Roshi (Los Angeles Zen Center). They have many buildings and a beautiful Zendo, many students and many monks. Next we visited the famous strong Zen Master Sasaki Roshi at his Zen Center at Mt. Baldy. On the way up the mountain our car had problems, so we had to walk part way. We were supposed to arrive at 3:30, but we were late. They were having the last day of a Sesshin, but Sasaki Roshi put off his interviews to visit with us. Mt. Baldy is very beautiful, but they only have a little flat land; most is just mountain land. Sasaki Roshi liked us very much, and we gave him some Ginseng. He is very old (68) so he likes this for his good health.

After this we went to Sambosa the next day (January 24) for the finish of a 100-day retreat. We had a ceremony and a Dharma talk. There were about twelve people from our family, eight people came from Esalen, and about seventy-five Korean people came.

The next day we went to Big Sur. At the beginning of the Yong Maeng Jong Jin there were about thirty-five people altogether. We used the same schedule as Providence except every afternoon we had a Dharma talk and questions for an hour or so and then an hour sitting. Each Dharma teacher gave two talks. At four o'clock everyone went to the hot springs for a bath, and then we had supper. We kept this schedule for six days and finished on Sunday morning. On Sunday only the Dharma teachers had interviews, and then we had the Precepts Ceremony. Only this. There were twenty-two people who took the precepts, and all their names begin with Jin. Jin means *true*, so we had True Mountain, True Moon, True Dharma, etc. So, I explained Jin. It was very interesting so here is a poem for you:

Here is Jin which is Truth.  
Jin Song means True Pine Tree;  
True Pine Tree has no roots.  
Jin Kwang means True Light;  
True Light has no shadow.  
Jin Um means True Sound;

That is the sound of the flute with no holes.  
What does it mean?  
If you find the dragon's tooth hair, then show it to me;  
Then I'll tell you that 1976 is the year of the Dragon.

Your Dharma,

S.S.

February 4, 1976

Dearest Megan,

There are several forms of Buddhism. In the Hinayana tradition one comes to realize the potential peace/bliss of meditative emptiness. Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. In the Mahayana school when all senses and impulses, including consciousness, have been extinguished, one progresses to no form, no emptiness. Finally one reaches Utmost Vehicle Zen Buddhism, wherein one has seen the truth and voluntarily lives in the world of name and form, without attachment to illusion. Selfless Bodhisattva action for all people.

Form is form; emptiness is emptiness. The truth is just like this. "Like this" is name and form. The primary point, your true self, is only a mirror for all sensory input, thought, impulse, and so forth. With a strong practice one is able to reflect the world mirror-like, "just like this." A before-thinking mind: somewhat like realizing you are a rainbow, traveling through the prism to its white light primary point, then keeping this light, again reflect the rainbow. *Just like this.*

All paths of life lead to the same centre; all is cyclic. Some routes are more circuitous than others. My true chosen path is relatively quick and very direct. This Patriarchal Utmost Vehicle Zen is the Truth, Dharma, no more and no less.

Have now received lay ordination and taken the five precepts:

- 1) To abstain from taking life,
- 2) To abstain from taking that which is not given freely,
- 3) To abstain from false speech,
- 4) To abstain from wrongful sensuous pleasure,
- 5) To abstain from all intoxicants as tending to induce mindlessness.

My Chinese name is Jin Gong, which means "True Emptiness," a highly complimentary choice by the Master. Seung Sahn Soen Sa Nim can be traced directly in line of transmission to Bodhidharma, and thence to the Buddha. I may now begin to practice Aikido, Karate, and Sim Gum Do (Zen Swordsmanship).

Hopefully also am beginning a monastery in a 400 acre valley yet to be secured, at the gateway to 300,000 acres of wilderness. We love children, company, and energy. Joan and I are vibrating on different planes just now, but Soen Sa Nim and two Dharma teachers are here so everything is perfect. Jonny's wife Myla and son Willow (6 months) are also here. Very fine family. Wonderful feeling.

On the envelope in which my layman's "diploma" came is written in calligraphy,

In the tradition of the Shao-lin Monastery  
the needle and the blade of grass touch  
each other.

There are no accidents. All your experiences are only lessons from the beneficent forces of the cosmos. Pain and pleasure, the needle and the strawberry, each is an impetus towards growth. Inside and outside become one. The world of opposites, duality, is just your teacher. Inside the “diploma” (Zen 101) is a poem written by Dok Sahn, a man of the mountains taught by Seung Sahn.

Good and evil are without self-nature,  
“Enlightened” and “unenlightened” are empty names.  
In front of our doors is the land of stillness and light.  
Spring comes; the grass grows by itself.

The practice begins with early bowing 108 times. There are ten levels of consciousness, which can be subdivided into 108; these can be further subdivided into 10,000 levels. Thus doing 108 grand prostrations cuts off all thinking and is a sophisticated and true form of repentance. Also some sitting is good.

Wishing you happiness.

Buddha is just like this.

Love,

Jimmy

(Jin Gong)

## 380A

---

Bene Dictum, Benedicite!

If any pilgrim monk come from distant parts, if with the wish as a guest to dwell in the Monastery, and will be content with the customs which he finds in the place, and do not perchance, by his lavishness, disturb the Monastery, but is simply content with what he finds, he shall be received, for as long a time as he desires.

If, indeed, he shall find fault with anything, or expose it, reasonably and with Charity, the Abbot shall discuss it prudently, lest perchance he had been sent for this very purpose. But, if he have been found gossipy or contumacious in the time of his sojourn as a guest, and if he be found exacting or prone to vice, not only ought he not be joined to the body of the Monastery, but also it shall be said to him, honestly, that he must depart, lest others be corrupted by his evil ways. If he does not go, let two strong monks, in the name of Charity, explain the matter to him.

Believe nothing, O Monks,

Merely because you have been told it,

Or because it is traditional—

Or because you yourselves have imagined it.

Do not believe what your teacher tells you

Merely out of respect for your teacher,

But, whatsoever, after due examination

And analysis, you find to be

Conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare

Of all beings—that doctrine

Believe and cling to,

And take it as your guide

—Gautama Buddha

## 308B

---

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Here are some letters for you. Here are the addresses of the people who sent you the two packages. The package from Korea had seaweed and Ginseng tea. The Barries sent us a very beautiful electric blender. I will send a letter of thank you to the Barries.

Please take good care of yourself and all the other people.

Sincerely,

Bobby

P.S. I am taking Kwan Jang Nim to a lawyer tomorrow.

February 9, 1976

Dear Housemaster Bobby,

Thank you for your letter and my letter. Enclosed find tape of the New Year's ceremony Dharma speech.

The Zen Center of Los Angeles will now be located at Tal Mah Sah. It will be named the Dharma Center of Los Angeles, 354 South Kingsley Drive, etc.

The Big Sur Zen Center address is Buck Creek, Big Sur, California, 93920.

In the future the Zen Center here in Los Angeles will be for American students only. Because of overcrowding, the Korean community intends to expand outside of L.A. After the end of a 100-day retreat on February 22, Tal Mah Sah will be available for the first American-style nucleus of about five students.

At the Big Sur Center we have finished Yong Maeng Jong Jin, but about fifteen students continue bowing and chanting practice daily. So I am taking a Buddha and plan a small opening ceremony; I leave on Monday. Present seating capacity at the temporary Center is about twenty people, so it is necessary that we secure larger premises with more adequate facilities and grounds.

Nowadays I am very busy and only living on white rice. I wish to return to the Providence Zen Center soon, but circumstances and the situation here prevent it at this moment.

Hello to everyone, and I hope that you are always keeping a clear mind, will soon get Enlightenment, and finish the Great Work.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

February 14, 1976  
Norwell, Massachusetts

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you?

I have decided not to return to the Zen Center as a live-in student.

When I was in Korea I tried very hard to be a good Korean monk. All the Koreans liked me and I was very happy. One day my thinking changed, though, and now I don't care about being a good Korean monk or whether Koreans like me or not.

Soen Sa Nim, what possible value is there in teaching Americans to do Korean rituals, hold Korean opinions, and wear Korean clothes?

I think you are a great teacher and I am still your student and still a monk, but I want to be on my own for a while.

Sincerely,

Roger

February 22, 1976

Dear Mu Bul,

Welcome back to the Providence Zen Center. How are you lately? Thank you for your letter.

In your letter you said that all Korean people and Korean monks like you. I already understand this. Many Korean people and Korean monks already wrote to me and said, "Only Mu Bul is original monk." They think in the future you will become a great man.

You said that one day your thinking changed; this name is ignorance. Before, when you went to Korea, I already said to you that in Korea there are many bad things, bad monks, and bad people. Don't check other people, other monks, other things. Also don't check yourself, your mind, your things. Only go ahead and practice. If you check your mind, and if you check other people, then you have a problem. Then you lose your true way and your true self.

Also I told you—good and bad are both your good teachers. All this is in the past. What is most important is how you keep your mind just now.

You ask me about Korean ceremonies, Korean opinions, and Korean clothes. If you keep primary point, there is no America and no Korea. All this is teaching style. If you are attached to form, you have a problem. It is very important that you not be attached to anything. Many people living together, practicing together, working together is necessary. So it is necessary to have rules and forms. So I ask you:

Form is emptiness;  
Emptiness is form.

Next,

No form, no emptiness.

Next,

Form is form;  
Emptiness is emptiness.

Are these three statements the same or different?

You already understand. Don't check your mind; don't be attached to form. This is very necessary. Only go ahead—don't know. How you keep just-now mind is very important.

You said in your letter that you are still my student, so I hope you can put it all down, only keep clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and finish the Great Work and save all people.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Everything here is wonderful! Each day is new and interesting. We are all healthy in body and mind; we are eager to go to Su Dok Sa. The date for starting the winter retreat is November 25 so we will stay in Seoul until about the 22nd; go up to Su Dok Sa for a big ceremony honoring Mang Gong. Mu Bul, Mu Gak and I are very close. We help each other all the time. Mu Gak's body is good and his teaching is very powerful. Every time we teach he is more clear, more to the point and more helpful to the many students who come to listen and ask questions. Mu Bul does some teaching too and everyone loves him. Usually Mu Gak and I teach together. People ask me "professor-style" questions but I don't answer like a professor anymore—I try to point to the truth instead. So they get a little confused when the professor doesn't answer like a professor—then Mu Gak comes in and makes it more clear for them. After morning practice, I do two hours of yoga and sit for two to three hours. I go to a nice place behind the temple buildings—it seems to be a Kwanseumbosal and many Bodhisattva helper statues (made by the Japanese). After lunch I sit again or meet with people—many Korean psychiatrists have come to talk to me, give me their written work, etc. Each day is different but we continue to see many people—especially college students. At night sometimes I go dancing or spend time with a few very nice lady friends. C.S. Kim (Los Angeles) has been very kind—he looks after us all the time—food, bath, etc. My sitting is very steady and strong. The *Question* gets stronger all the time. The mouse kong-an answer is a bigger and bigger *nothing* all the time. Perhaps there is *no* meaning to it—you are only tricking us? I cannot thank you enough for the wonderful training you gave me, for your infinite kindness, generosity and patience in pushing me through the hard times. Now my body is good, food is no problem and I love being in Korea. It is not possible to write about the last arrangement but it is definitely off. I will explain when I see you in person. Love to everyone. Take care of your body.

Byon Jo

Cambridge Zen Center

November 21, 1975

Dear Byon Jo,

Thank you for your letter. How are you and Mu Bul, Mu Gak and all Zen family? Now we try Yong Maeng Jong Jin in Cambridge. Maybe 40 people everyday interview. I am very tired. Thirty five people everyday sitting. All people hard training. Jonny, Richie, Becky very good Dharma teachers. And now Dyan is housemaster. Very good. Now 10 people are living here full time. Everything is OK. You don't worry. Only keep don't know mind. Soon get enlightenment. Soon come here. Teach us please.

We read your letter. All people very happy. Nowadays you are very popular in Korea. That's good. Teaching also is good. Dancing is also good. Yoga is good. Sitting is good. Mr. C.S. Kim also is good. But how is Jung Bo Sal? Your sitting, you say very strong. That is very good. You must finish mouse kong-an. This is very important.

What did you think of the big Mang Gong ceremony? How is it living at Su Dok Sa?

We are going back to Esalen in January, 24-31, to do a seven day Yong Maeng Jong Jin. They like us very much. This time we go with Jonny and Richie, and also Myla and Willow. Also Susan and Carl and Steve and Satam in Los Angeles will soon open the Santa Monica Zen Center. So we send Linc. All fix. Housemaster over there. Also many learn Oriental Medicine. One woman, Rebekah Murdock, from Rochester (four years sitting with Kapleau) wrote to me. She wants to go to Korea, become nun. So first she wants to come to the Providence Zen Center to learn Korean Zen Buddhism. Maybe in the future you must help her.

You say mouse kong-an only bigger emptiness. But you don't check mouse kong-an. Also don't check your mind. Also don't check your body. Only go ahead. Don't know. This is very important. Here is a poem for you:

Don't know say don't know  
Don't know keep don't know  
Don't know go away, also don't know  
Don't know is only don't know.

Sincerely,

S.S.

January 20, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim and Linc,

Just a note to acknowledge your letter, to thank you again for coming, and to let you know of some of the student reaction.

Of course, the students were fascinated and wanted to learn more. This seemed especially true of those students whom we had invited to dinner. The student who was supposed to write a report for the campus newspaper acquired such a “don’t-know” mind that she still has not been able to write a word. The students seem to have been far more deeply affected than the faculty—my colleagues who have tried to “categorize” you, which is very funny.

All those I have talked with called your visit “the event of the year.” It remains to be seen if interest deepens by next year. If so, perhaps we can do this again.

Thank you. Enjoy your summertime.

Michael

February 23, 1976

Dear Michael,

Thank you for your letter. It was good to hear that many people found our visit so interesting. I would be very happy to do it again in the future if you thought the interest was there. I am enclosing a few pictures for you.

Thank you and your wife again for taking such good care of us while we visited Detroit.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 20, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? Last week-end was sesshin. We missed you very much. Not many people from outside the house came to sit, but all house members sat well and kept silence. Many energy.

We are still looking for a new house. The nursing home we liked is not zoned for a Zen Center. But there is another house we are interested in. It is a big brick house, two blocks from Harvard Square, with correct zoning. Because of its location it would be a good investment. Soon a contractor will come and check it to make sure it is possible to make a large zendo. Then we will make a bid for it.

All Cambridge Zen Center people would like a Korean-style Zendo in the new house. We hope that many Korean people in Cambridge will come to the new temple and practice with us.

Now I have a question for you. Sometimes my mind will be clear, but then this thought comes and sends it spinning. I think, "I must get out of this place. If I stay here I will become crazy. I hate Zen, I hate the Zen Center. I hate bowing, I hate sitting, I hate chanting, I hate all people. I must get out." When this happens I feel very crazy. I want to scream and attack people with the Zen stick or drive my car into a wall.

For a long time this thought has come to me. One day I decided, "I will stay at the Zen Center for one more year, no matter what happens, even if I become crazy." I thought this would make it go away. For a few days after, I was able to practice with no hindrance, but then this "I hate Zen, I must leave" thought came back more powerfully than before.

I know that you cannot stop my thinking, but maybe if you could explain what is happening it would help. I am just miserable and cry all the time and my stomach is starting to hurt a lot from being upset.

Becky said that if I do Kwan Seum Bosal it might help. I have been doing this mantra, but I do not get calm. Should I lock myself in a room and bow a zillion times? Should I do nothing at all? I will continue to practice and wait for your reply.

Have a good time at Esalen with Jonny, Richard, and Suzie.

Sincerely yours,

Dyan

January 30, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I hope that your body is strong and that you are able to find a little time to rest. How are Jonny and Myla, and Willow and Richard and little Jonny and Suzie and Linc? How is Yong Maeng Jong Jin? Everyone in Cambridge is well and practicing hard. We miss you very much.

Last Sunday there was a big meeting of all four Zen Centers. We met in New Haven. First we ate lunch. Then we chanted the Heart sutra. And then we got down to business. I am enclosing a copy of the report of what we discussed at the meeting. You will see it was a very good meeting.

Here in Cambridge we are still looking for a new house. The big brick house near Harvard University that we liked was taken off the market. Someone else bid on it. Now we must start again to find a suitable house.

Last Wednesday we went to court. The City of Cambridge is filing suit against our landlord for being in violation of safety codes. When we got to court with our lawyer, they told us that our landlord had the hearing postponed. So now we don't have to go to court again til February 11. Maybe we will find a house by then and it won't matter whether we are evicted or not.

Bob and I both got new jobs—driving a school bus. Sometimes we get to go on the bus together. One person drives; one person yells at the kids. We like our job very much. When all the kids get off the bus, we are so happy. We sing songs and chant. Soon Glen and Steve will go there and try to get the same job. Then half of Cambridge Zen Center will be school bus drivers.

This is all the new news. Everyone at Cambridge Zen Center says hi to you and to the rest of the Zen Center family at Esalen.

Love,

Dyan

February 23, 1976

Dear Dyan,

How are you? I liked your letters very much, but I have been very busy lately so I could not answer you. Now I have a little time, so I am able to write to you.

I think you have very strong Zen student karma. But, in your letter you said that sometimes your mind is clear, and sometimes your mind has much bad thinking. You must not think that this mind is wrong; it is a correct mind. But many people are attached to their thinking, so they have problems. If you are not attached to your thinking, you won't have any

problems. Thinking comes, thinking goes; that's O.K. Don't worry. Don't check your mind; don't check everything. Only go ahead—don't know. If you check your mind, you will lose your clear mind, lose the true way, and lose your direction.

If you go to live outside the Zen Center that is all right; if you stay at the Zen Center that is also all right. What is most important is, where are you going? What are you? You must understand this; this is very important. Staying or not staying at the Zen Center, bowing or not bowing—this is not so important. How you keep your mind, just now, is most important.

You are already my student and a great Housemaster, and soon you will become a great Dharma teacher. I have always told you that you must make your opinion, your condition, and your situation disappear. Only keep a clear mind! Don't check yourself; don't check your mind; only go ahead. This is the great Bodhisattva Way, the way to save all beings.

I liked your second letter very much. Moving the Cambridge Zen Center to a new house is very necessary. When I return to the East Coast I will help you. Your new job as a bus driver sounds very interesting. Each of us has two jobs, an outside job where we get money and an inside job, which is our original job. This original job is only practicing and save all people. So now I ask you, are these two jobs, outside and inside, the same or different? You already understand. Don't worry about anything; put it all down.

I checked the information you sent about the meeting of the four Zen Centers. This was a wonderful meeting and makes me happy. This meeting is like a Dharma light. Many people have much ignorance, so their minds are dark. When the light is turned on, the darkness goes away. This meeting will make much light in the future and help many people. I hope this Dharma light will make world peace.

We just had the opening for the Tal Mah Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles and a small ceremony for a Zen Center in Big Sur, California, so our family is still growing. In the future it will be very important for you to understand your original job and help other people.

I think you are a very strong woman, so I hope you will always keep a clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and finish the Great Work.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

January 24, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How is it going? I think you planned well to be in sunny California, while here in the East it is very cold and full of snow. Geof, Lea, and Jeannie (David's wife) created a marvelous Snow Buddha, sitting larger than life in our front yard. Now, however, the Buddha has lost his head! Some mischievous little kids lopped it off. I've been helping the electrician rewire the house and have made plans to build an altar. Katie works very hard and long at her painting. John has moved out of the Zen Center to live with his old friends. He pays less rent now, so can afford to give some money to his wife.

We have just decided to display our daily schedule throughout the community, to attract new members—even though the Dharma room is still unfinished. People say we must build the Zen Center *now*, because come the summer, Katie and I may not be here. It depends if I get into medical school. People are too busy to do much work on the Center now, so want to wait until the summer.

The morning schedule has been changed to give people more time after practice to eat breakfast before leaving for school. We now sit 6:00-6:45 A.M. instead of until 7:00 with walking. On Wednesday evenings we like having a free night. John comes here to teach Aikido and Lea teaches dance: how to use the body correctly. On the other nights, one person is responsible for being here to conduct sitting for 10-40 minutes and chanting.

Mu Gak Su Nim sent me a note praising the picture I took of you holding the fan in the old New Haven Zen Center Dharma room. He wants you to send it back to me so that I can send it to the publisher, to have it appear on the back cover of *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. I would like this very much!

Here is a question for you:

Everybody here says they like Zen. Some people, however, cannot sit very much or work on the house because their karma keeps them too busy. Some people are so busy, they sometimes haven't even enough time to clean up. They believe, "This is my way—straight ahead; no hindrance." But if they don't understand together action, no desire for myself, can they still understand themselves? I think maybe it takes more than bowing, sitting, chanting to exhaust karma. One must clearly understand *why* we do Zen and *why* we live together in a Zen Center.

Jerry Shrair explained this very clearly. He is a good Dharma teacher. he is teaching Lea and me Dharma play. We have to practice going down to sixth consciousness before he'll take us to the eighth. Now I understand that karma is made by thinking. Jerry explained to me that once you become enlightened, you no longer make karma and so you are free in every direction. By keeping just-now mind, you can continually change your karma, so that no one

can see such a person's future life. The first thing I want to change about my karma is my susceptibility to the z-z-z monster—the sleep demon. I fall asleep while sitting, studying, and listening to lectures in school. It's no good.

You say that we must keep just-now mind to help all people, for Bodhisattva action. But, why Bodhisattva action? A man wrote our Zen Center from prison to inquire about Zen. I wrote him a letter and visited him there. Now he is out of prison and wants to visit the Zen Center but has no car. He cannot come at night because he studies Karate. None of our commuting members are willing to go out of their way in the morning to pick him up. Is it necessary for me to get up a half hour early to get him? Is that what is meant by Bodhisattva action?

I would like very much to help my father. He is a business man who wants to retire although he is only forty-six. He has no idea what he wants to do; now he only sleeps, watches television, and reads newspapers. My mother likes to go out with friends, but he only wants to stay home. He worries a lot and has an ulcer. I am sending him Esalen's catalogue. He knows it is a very high-class place and might like to go there.

My school work is going well. This is my last semester as an undergraduate. For my senior paper, I plan to write a big paper about Zen. My advisor is a Chinese woman who says I must read the *Platform sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, *Transmission of the Lamp*, and *Avatamsaka sutra*. I want to discuss in my paper how teaching styles change and are different for different people and different cultures: \*Our Chogye Order uses mantra and kong-ans. \*Long ago people didn't have much thinking, so you say "Mu" was a good kong-an, but no longer. \*What is the correct style for American Zen students: hard or soft, difficult or easy?

The other day I was in the library when this guy comes up to me and asks:

—Do you like to talk about God and religion?

—No.

—Why not?

—Because I can understand God better by watching the snow blow off that wall than by talking about him.

—But, what sort of concept do you have of God?

—Huh!

—Wh-what? I can see I can't ask you the usual questions.

—I'll explain. If you want God, you have God. Thinking makes God. But if you want to understand yourself and the universe, you must understand before thinking.

We talked for quite a while. He was a follower of Rev. Moon's Unification Church. He had a very open mind and liked Zen. We shared one thing in common: a love for kimchee and kochee chang!

Respectfully yours,

Matthew

February 23, 1976

Dear Matthew,

How are you and the New Haven Zen Center family? I received your letter a long time ago, but I have been very busy and could not write until now, so I am sorry.

First I went to a Korean Zen Center in Toronto; then I visited Detroit and had a Dharma talk with Linc at the University of Michigan. Then we came to Los Angeles and visited all of the Zen masters in the area. After this, we went to Big Sur for a seven-day Yong Maeng Jong Jin and a Five Precepts ceremony. After returning to Los Angeles for an anniversary ceremony, I returned to Big Sur for a ceremony beginning a small Zen Center there, and just yesterday we had the opening ceremony for the Tal Mah Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles. Very busy!

I will return to the Providence Zen Center by the end of this month. I will see the New Haven Zen Center family during the March Yong Maeng Jong Jin.

In your letter you explained how many things are happening at the New Haven Zen Center. All these things are important, but most important is how you keep your mind just now. After the Big Sur Yong Maeng Jong Jin, when our family was going to the airport, there was a very bad car accident, and many people were hurt. Some people had much suffering while others did not have so much. In the other car one person died, and another was hurt very badly. After the accident some people had a lot of suffering. Why did this happen? Why me? They had many questions like this and sometimes much thinking. But I said to them, "This accident has already appeared, so you must keep enough mind. Suffering is O.K.; only go ahead and keep just-now mind." In your letter you say that everyone is very busy at New Haven. You must keep enough mind also! Don't be attached to busy; only go ahead. Then your job may be busy, but your mind will not be busy.

I will send you the picture of me that you wanted for the book and also a picture of the Five Precepts ceremony at Esalen.

In your letter you asked many questions. An eminent teacher once said, "Ten thousand questions return to one question." If you understand this one question, then you understand all questions. What is this one question? I ask you. You already understand, so put it all down. How you keep your mind just now is most important. Don't check your mind; don't check other people's minds; don't check everything. Only go ahead.

You already understand Mu Gak Su Nim's actions. Before he went to Korea, I told him that in Korea there may be many bad things happening, so you must not check your mind, and you must not keep your opinions. You must only go ahead and practice. Good and bad are both your true teachers. I already said this to him, but he lost his way and lost his clear mind because he was attached to his opinions, so he could not finish his retreat, and he returned to

America. So, if you see good and bad, you must bow to them because they are your true teachers. This is the correct way; this is the Bodhisattva Way; this is saving all people. Don't make I and don't make you; only go ahead.

I think you like the correct way, and that is very good. But don't be attached to the correct way. I hope you only keep a clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and finish the Great Work.

Your in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I have been sick with the flu for about a week, but I am starting to feel better now. School is a lot of work. I must study Chinese for hours every night, so some days I can't find time to sit, but I try. Still I do bows every morning and chanting when I get the chance. My roommate likes sitting but thinks bowing and chanting are no good, so he won't try them. I tried to explain them to him and showed him the kong-an book, but he still won't change his mind. Maybe it isn't his karma to practice our style Zen.

As for my homework about the man who drops ashes on the Buddha: he is attached to emptiness and I must help him break this attachment to fix his mind. So I ask him,

*[answer deleted]*

I still don't understand the mouse kong-an, but here is a poem for you.

The mouse eats cat food.  
But the cat bowl is broken.  
Don't know, don't know.  
The sun is setting over the mountains.

Keep well,

Hapchang,

David (Hae Jin)

February 26, 1976

Dear David,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You and I both have had the flu—we have the same karma. I am also getting better now. Take care of your body. It is good that you are sitting and bowing. If you try this every day, your roommate may follow you in the future. Don't worry now; only practice.

We had the opening ceremony for our Los Angeles Zen Center last Sunday. Also, we now have a small Zen Center in Big Sur. The Los Angeles center is called the Tal Mah Sah Zen Center, and Linc is the Dharma teacher, and several others live there already. They keep the same schedule as Providence, so if you ever come to Los Angeles, please come and sit with them.

Your first three answers to the homework are good, but the fourth one is no good. The ones after this are O.K. also, so you must understand this fourth answer. This is very important. If you check the kong-an book carefully, you will find the answer.

I hope you always keep a clear mind, find the correct way, and soon finish the Great Work.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How do you like the coldness of the East after the warm climate and crazy, Marijuana-Zen people of the West coast?

I have a suggestion which I hope you will follow when you come to Los Angeles again. This is to have a short Dharma talk each evening after sitting as you do in the morning. Many people begin work early, and just one Dharma talk a day at 7:30 A.M., or even at 7:00, means that they will not have any Dharma talk.

For example, I start work at U.C.L.A. at 7:30 A.M. or earlier. Even if I lived at Tal Mah Sah, I could not stay for it. Last year, when you came, I worked at U.S.C., which is much closer, and didn't start until 8:30, so I could stay. If you have Dharma talks only at 7:30, then only students with late classes, or those who begin work at 9:00, could come.

Now, there are many Zen centers where people can come to sit in L.A., but there is nowhere that they can come for your very clear Dharma talks, like you have in the morning. I don't mean just reading from the kong-an book, but the explanations that you give.

I am supposed to begin teaching at the University of Rhode Island Extension on September 9, 1976. It is located at Promenade and Gaspee Streets in Providence. Is this near the Center? If I can, I would like to move into the Center around September 1.

Hoping to see you again, soon.

Sincerely,

Ed

March 3, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

This letter is to reinforce what I said in the last letter. Before I met you, I sat many hours each day (4-10 hours) for two years; spent a three-month training period at Mt. Baldy under Sasaki; and studied under Thien-An, Maezumi, and Hearn. I learned many things, but I did not understand at all what was being said; it sounded like pure garbage, and I ignored it.

Then, when I began to hear your Dharma talks, things started to make sense, to fall into place. All that practice and study did not do much for understanding, but your Dharma talks did. That is why, at least for me, they were so important. That is why I hope you give Dharma talks or kong-an readings in the evening, at least when you can.

Now, last time you were here, you explained the Zen stick kong-an. I had had this kong-an under Kozan Roshi, and it is different with him, and seems to be a different understanding. Below, I'll put the Japanese way, then yours, but I do not remember all of your way. Then, can you explain, please?

Japanese:

If you call this a stick, you fall in the trap of words, but if you do not call it a stick, you lie; so, what do you call it?

A. Stick

Q. If you call a stick a stick, you are attached to stick. Now, what is it?

A. Then, it is a piece of wood.

Q. You trespass!

A. Then it is a stick.

Q. Without falling into a trap, how do you deal with this?

A. What nonsense, trespass, trap. Break the stick!

Soen Sa Nim:

This is a Zen stick. If you call it a Zen stick, I'll give you 30 blows. If you do not call it a Zen stick, I'll give you 30 blows. What is it?

A. Zen stick.

Q. If you say Zen stick, this is just form.

A. Hit (function).

How does the rest of your way go?

Sincerely,

Ed

March 10, 1976

Dear Ed,

Thank you for your two letters.

I think your idea of having kong-an reading in the evening instead of morning is a good one. Next time I am in Los Angeles we will discuss this at the Zen Center and decide.

The University of Rhode Island Extension is not far from the Providence Zen Center. I will not be here in September and October, but if you want to move into the Zen Center at that time, there should be no problem.

You say you like my Dharma talks. Thank you very much. I am sending you my Zen Stick kong-an. There is already a copy of this in Los Angeles. It is number 14 in the kong-an book. Please read it carefully.

We have just begun the Tal Mah Sah Zen Center. I hope you will bring many of your students to the Zen Center to sit Zen and hear Dharma talks. This would help the Zen Center grow and help your students.

I should be in Los Angeles the week of May first.

I hope you will always keep a clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering.

See you soon,

S.S.

March 8, 1976

Dear Mu Gak,

Welcome back to America. How are you doing lately?

I heard that you now call yourself Stephen instead of Mu Gak. Where does this speech come from? Last year when you became a monk in the Providence Zen Center Dharma room, the seventy-eighth patriarch Zen Master Seung Sahn gave you the name Mu Gak. Zen Master Seung Sahn got transmission from Buddha. So the name Mu Gak was not given to you by Zen Master Seung Sahn; it was given to you by Buddha. Then, what is Buddha? Just-now mind. This is the true way, the great Bodhisattva way, and your true self. Therefore, the name Mu Gak was not given to you by Zen Master Seung Sahn or by Buddha but by your true self. If you do not use the name Mu Gak, then you lose the true way, the great Bodhisattva way, and your true self, and you don't understand your direction. So dogs, cows, and horses are better than you. If these animals learn their job, their way, for three years, they don't lose it. But you learned your way from me for three years, and you have already lost it. Mu Gak! Where are you going now?

I heard that you have grown your hair and become a gentleman. I think any action is O.K., but why you act is very important. You say "no more monk." I think that before you were a keen-eyed Zen student, but now you are a blind dog. You don't understand that the sky is blue and the trees are green. You don't understand beginning and finishing. When you became a monk we had a big ceremony. If you want to stop being a monk, you must come here as a monk, and we must have another ceremony. This is the correct way. You came to America and only went to your parents' house and said you are not a monk. This is only *your* speech. You are still a monk. If you want to stop being a monk, you must come here in your monk's clothes, and we must have a ceremony of returning your 250 Precepts to Buddha; then you will finish being a monk. Then coming and going is clear.

Before you went to Korea, I told you in Korea there are bad monks and bad people. So you must not check other people's minds and other people's actions. Also you must not check your mind or your feelings. If you check something, yourself or anything else, you have a problem. You must only put it down, only go straight ahead, only practice. This is necessary. But, I got many letters from Korea. I already understand all your actions. I already told you to be careful of women; you have bad women karma. When you began the Cambridge Zen Center and when you became a monk, you had big women problems. If you cannot control women and yourself, then you must stay away from women. So, our Temple Rules say:

Money and sex are like a spiteful snake. Put your concern with them far away.

If you can control yourself and women, then it's O.K. This is the Great Bodhisattva Way

This time, where did your big mistake come from? You thought this nun was helping you, but this nun did not help you. An eminent teacher said, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and another eminent teacher said, "If someone says bad things about you, he is your true teacher; if someone says good things about you, he is your true enemy." You and this nun did American-style action, not Korean-style. I gave you Hae Myong Su Nim, but this nun sent him back to Wha Gae Sa. Why? This nun only wanted to go to America so she called you a great man and gave you good food. Also during winter training you went to On Yang with this nun and stayed overnight in a hotel. This is not correct action. If I had been at Jong Hae Sa I would have thrown you out with the nun. The monks were being considerate of my feelings in not throwing you out.

So it is very important that you believe in yourself. This is the meaning of Great Faith, Great Courage, and Great Question. Good and bad, all demons, are your teachers. You must understand that all Buddhas, all Bodhisattvas, and all eminent teachers are all demons; then no problem. So, an eminent teacher said, "If you meet Buddha, you must kill Buddha." But you heard the speech of one Korean nun, one monk, and one Bosalnim, and your mind moved. This means that your great faith equals zero.

You sent me a letter about Yong Maeng Jong Jin. You said many people were sleeping so you shouted "Katz." This is very bad. You are not a Zen Master. Why do you check other people's minds? You went to another room by yourself and caught cold. If I had been there, I would have hit you 60 times. If you had done correct sitting, regardless of other people's action, then you would have been teaching them. Your katz is a blind katz; it cannot teach them. This katz only killed you so you fell down. It didn't help anybody.

When I came to America I had no money, no English, and no one to help me. I worked in a laundry for four months, and I made a small temple. At this time I only believed in myself. Every day I went to the laundry and cleaned the bathroom, the floor, and the machines for twelve hours a day. I only wanted to learn American style, so I had to make my opinion, situation, and condition disappear. You already understand my situation in Korea and Japan. In America I work very hard teaching, but no one gives me money. In Korea and Japan, if I want money, anyone will give it to me. Someone said Soen Sa Nim has made a lot of Zen centers; he wants to be famous. This is not true. I don't care about being famous. You made the New Haven Zen Center and Cambridge Zen Center; Ku Su Nim made New York; Kea Jung Su Nim made Los Angeles. I only made the Providence Zen Center. I don't care about Zen centers; I only want keen-eyed students. So I sent you to Korea, but, what are you doing now?

An eminent teacher said if you sleep during meditation you must live in the Kun Bang. This is a temple rule. But you used another room and talked and talked and did many bad things. Before you went to Jong Hae Sa you decided to do hard training and keep silence. Why was your mind broken?

Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree for six years. Bodhidharma sat in Sorim facing the wall for nine years. You must understand this. You want to become a great Zen master quickly; this is not possible. I am always worrying about you, so I sent you letters saying, "Put it all down; only go straight." You many check other people's action and many things. This is not your job. Your job is to put it all down and only go straight ahead. Only this is your true job.

I don't care whether you continue to be a monk or not, but you must understand your karma and your true way. How do you keep just-now mind? This is very important. If you want to make only American-style Buddhism, you must first get Enlightenment and Transmission. Then you will be free to teach any way you want. But before you get Enlightenment, you must listen to me and follow my directions. Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. No form, no emptiness. Form is form; emptiness is emptiness. Which one is correct? If you open your mouth I will hit you 30 times. If you close your mouth also I will hit you 30 times. You must understand the correct meaning of this.

KATZ!

Many young chicks have lost their mother.  
Cheep, cheep, cheep.

Sincerely,

S.S.

March 1, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Am fine here in Canada. Please try the following dietary suggestions; combined with your impeccable understanding of herbs and medicine, will make you stronger.

1. No fried foods.
2. One green salad daily with oil and vinegar.
3. Replace white rice with whole grains and/or brown rice.
4. Plenty of green and yellow vegetables, raw or steamed, daily.

Look forward to seeing you in May.

Picking it all up.  
Putting it all down.

Clear, unclear, clear, and so forth until gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha.

White snow, wet ducks,  
Bare trees, strong pups.

Please take care of your body.

Love,

Jim

March 9, 1976

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your card. You like the puma—that is good. You worry about my body; thank you very much. I will follow your suggestions, but sometimes Zen Master's job is very difficult. You must help me.

You say “gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha.” I ask you, in the Heart sutra it says, “Nirvana” and “Anuttara samyak sambodhi.” What is Nirvana? What is Anuttara samyak sambodhi? You must correctly attain Nirvana; you must correctly attain Anuttara samyak sambodhi. This is very necessary. If you say only “gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha,” I will hit you thirty times. I hope you will send me a good answer.

Only keep don't-know mind, go straight, and soon finish the Great Work.

Your Dharma,

S.S.

My dear Soen Sa Nim,

That which is  
already  
together  
has met.

Thank you and thank you for the Yum Joo.

I Love You,

Werner

“... When you experience  
yourself, it brings you  
into the world.

When you experience the  
world, it brings you back  
to yourself.

You see, it all works out  
beautifully.”

Celebrate,

Werner

March 9, 1976

Dear Werner,

How are you? Thank you for your card and for your booklet. That is very wonderful. This answer is so late, but I have returned to Providence very late, so I am sorry.

I am sending you the Diamond sutra Pagoda picture. The Diamond sutra means form is emptiness, emptiness is form. But, true form is emptiness, emptiness is form means no form,

no emptiness. True no form, no emptiness means form is form, emptiness is emptiness. So, now I ask you, of these three, which is correct?

You are my good friend. You said, "That which is already together has met." I hope you soon attain great Enlightenment and finish the Great Work.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 9, 1976

Dear Jin Kwang,

How are you lately? I worry about your mind and your body because I heard that you were going to Tal Mah Sah in Los Angeles last Sunday but you didn't go. Also you did not call me up, so I think you may be very sick. No news, so I worry about you.

I am sending your medicine. You must take 30 pills one hour after each meal, three times a day. Before, when I was at Esalen, I saw your body sometimes very sick. I am very worried about your body. This medicine is special; in it there are many kinds of natural oriental medicines, so you must not forget this, *every day*. First, very important, strong body; then strong mind; then working. But you don't take care of your body and mind—this is very dangerous, not the correct way.

Now your age is a very important time in your life, and your job situation is also very important, but most important is, how do you keep just-now-mind? Everything is changing, changing, changing; American young couple, their minds, their actions are also changing, changing, changing, but there is one thing that never changes. You must find it. The Mahaparanirvana sutra says, "All formations are impermanent. This is the law of appearing and disappearing. When both appearing and disappearing disappear, then this stillness is bliss." That name is Jin Kwang. Jin Kwang is True Light: no shadow, no life, no death, no opposites, no form, no emptiness. But this True Light means Universal Energy; Universal Energy is able to do everything. Then, what is True Light? You must go straight, only Jin Kwang, just-now mind. Don't check everything.

Taoism said, "If I attain the True Path in the morning, then if I die in the evening, that's O.K." This means you must always keep enough mind; enough mind means just-like-this mind. So, an eminent teacher said, "What is Zen? Every day mind is Zen Mind." Also nowadays my diabetes is not so good. If I die tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, I don't care. But it is very necessary to have great faith, great courage, and the great question. When those three kinds become one, it is just-like-this mind. First, great faith means believe in yourself; great courage means you must do just-like-this action. If you eat, only eat; if you walk, only walk; if you drive, only drive; if you love, only love; if you think, only think—only *just* action. What is the great question? Don't check myself; also, don't check other things. Only go straight—don't know. This is the great question. I think you are the Universal Mother. If you keep a just-like-this mind, you soon will get your True Light.

I hope you will always keep just-like-this mind, soon get Enlightenment, become Universal Mother, and save all people.

Here is a poem for you:

Ten thousand fishing lines straight down.

One wave becomes ten thousand waves.

Deep quiet night and cold water  
So, all fishes do not eat.

Empty ship returns  
Only full of moonlight.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. I am sending you the chanting tape; maybe it will help you.  
Also, I am sending you the Diamond sutra Pagoda picture.

December 30, 1975

Davidson, N.C.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Jonny Kabat-Zinn came to Davidson recently and I attended one of his yoga sessions as well as a lecture on the Zen mind. I sensed that he had not yet achieved Enlightenment, but I also sensed a compassion and sincerity which I appreciated more than any words he could have said. I am a philosophy major here, groomed in the Western Tradition, but possessing an intuition which bends me into monism and mystical views of reality. Would you offer some words or a “pointing finger” to a few questions?

1. Could we view words as being a ladder which we use to climb up the walls of ignorance to Zen Enlightenment and then throw away upon reaching the “top”? I am bothered by the fact that it seems true that *language* makes “self-consciousness” (i.e., the abstraction of ourselves which allows us to view our humanness as an object) possible and yet Zen points to the “don’t-know-mind” before all words. If this is so, is it not the same state as that in which a new-born infant is in, being unable to distinguish itself from its surroundings? What then can we say about our civilization, its scientific discoveries, art, drama, etc., which are made possible by language? Is any of it worth the effort? What is “created” in the process?
2. What is the difference between Transcendental Meditation and Zen meditation?
3. How do you as a Zen Master “love” those around you who do not yet know of Zen and cannot gain from “silence” or a “pointing finger” or a “smack in the face”? What if they don’t attribute any great “knowledge” or “wisdom” to you; how then can you affect them? Do your actions conflict at any point with Christian love? Was Christ a Zen Master?
4. Would you recommend to a pre-med student that he drop his studies in medicine, or a seminarian, his pursuit of philosophy and the Christian Tradition in order to enter a Zen monastery? If not, is it not much harder to attain “don’t-know-mind” while cramming fact after objective fact into one’s head in order to learn according to the Western Tradition?
5. Do you listen to music, read poems, attend films, etc.? Which ones?
6. What does friendship mean, and what does it require of us?

I have asked so many questions because it is so difficult to give up a paradigm to accept another when the premises of the original paradigm contradict the one which I wish to accept, being so used to the truth that can be had by “Aristotelian logic.” You see, I would have to give up the thing whose worth I am questioning *before* I have established the worth of the thing for which I am giving it up, thus I ask for the impossible I suppose, viz., an indication of the “truth of Zen” through Western logical language.

Wrongly or not, I desire greatly to hear from you! I think a blank sheet will discourage me and I am afraid you might do something like that, but you are the master so I suppose I must give you the benefit of the doubt if you do. Words are so inefficient and my mind continually is boggled when I try to climb the walls they erect!

P.S. How would you interpret this poem on the basis of your Zen mind, but as though you were writing a critical evaluation of it as poetry, as a truth bearer, etc., for a college English class? What would you say about the state of mind of the author?

#### Prescient Dawn

Were  
violet threads of yellow loom  
a praying  
before pinking swallows  
and trill awakening  
gathering in one hand  
one hand  
a single yellow finch  
and a mountain's first murmuring  
in stone?

And this one? Heavenly Voices

The Jerusalem cherry tree blooms  
between space and mind, contained  
neither in itself nor apart from it.

Its life is frozen hard as a seed  
in the dreams of early pilgrims  
awaiting the thunder of bat's wings

beyond the clefts of human song  
to break open the suddenly luscious,  
or perhaps the sacrament of the morning

glory unfolding its magnetic emptiness  
to sanctify an early rising or evening death  
who has conquered the encroachment of

Elysian fields upon the fruits of the spirit  
like greedy ascetics' tongues probing  
for the voice inside the lotus, and

revealed truth as a deaf-mute.

Thank you.

“the mountain flowers bloom like  
brocade, the stream runs full and blue.”

Steven

March 11, 1976

Dear Steven,

Thank you for your letter. I am very sorry that I am very late in answering; I returned to the East Coast very late and have been very busy. Now I have time so I can send an answer to you.

You have many questions. An eminent teacher said that one thousand questions are only one question. If you understand the one question, you will understand one thousand questions. What is the one question? I ask you, what are you? If you understand your true self, then you will have no problem with your many questions.

1. About your first question, words are very necessary, but if you are attached to words, then you don't understand the true way. Your question is like an attached-to-words question. So, don't be attached to words. I ask you: one plus two equals three; one plus two equals zero; which one is correct? If you understand this, then you understand the true way. If you are thinking, you won't understand. If you keep before-thinking, before-words, then you will understand.
2. If you are thinking, Transcendental Meditation and Zen meditation are different; if you cut off all thinking, Transcendental Meditation and Zen meditation are the same. Ten thousand Dharmas return to one; where does the one return?
3. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form; no form, no emptiness; form is form, emptiness is emptiness. You must understand these three. If you understand them, then which one is best?
4. Every day mind is Zen mind. If you keep just-now mind, already you have Enlightenment, so with any action, any kind of studies, there is no hindrance.
5. I like everything. Everything is the truth. An eminent teacher said, “What is Buddha? Dry shit on a stick.” Do you understand this meaning?
6. Put is all down. Only go straight, don't know. Then you will get everything.

If you keep don't-know mind, there are no opposites, so no Western, no Eastern, no American, no Korean, no Taoism, no Christianity, no Zen, no life, no death, no good, no bad, no name, no form, no God, no Buddha. That name is Primary Point, the Absolute. Everything is from the Primary Point and returns to the Primary Point. Then what is the Primary Point? Primary Point is don't-know mind. Don't-know mind is to cut off all thinking. To cut off all thinking is before thinking, no speech, no words. To open the mouth is wrong. If you open your mouth, I will hit you thirty times.

Don't check your mind; don't check your feelings; don't check everything. Only go straight—don't know. Then you will get the Primary Point; then you will get great Enlightenment. I hope you will always keep don't-know mind, become clear, soon get Enlightenment, and save all people from suffering.

Your poems are wonderful, but these poems control you. You must control these poems. Here is a poem for you:

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva  
Ten thousand hands, ten thousand eyes.  
Which one is the correct hand?  
Which one is the correct eye?  
Ten thousand mouths, ten thousand words,  
Where do they come from?

One, two, three, four  
Who made this?

Is zero a number?  
If you understand zero,  
Then you will understand all numbers,  
But don't make zero.  
If you make zero,  
You will go to hell.

KATZ!

The snow melts  
Drip, drip, drip.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

The following is a talk that Mu Bul Su Nim gave at the International Zen Center of New York on March 14, 1976 after he returned from Korea.

(Raising his fist and hitting the floor)  
Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.

(Raising his fist and hitting the floor)  
No form, no emptiness.

(Raising his fist and hitting the floor)  
Form is form; emptiness is emptiness.

Of these three statements, which one is correct? If you answer, I will hit you thirty times. If you cannot answer, I will hit you thirty times. Why?

KATZ!

Today, driving from Providence to New York, I spent two dollars and fifty cents on tolls.

Thank you for coming tonight. I have just come back from Korea and so I'm going to talk a little bit about my trip. First of all, why did I go to Korea? I became a monk in Providence over a year ago. At this time, I got a new name, and I got these clothes, and I got my head shaved. And I didn't really know what this was about. I really wanted to be a monk; I knew that, but I didn't really know why I got all these things. I was walking around Providence, Rhode Island with these clothes, and everyone was looking at me very strangely. They didn't understand what was going on, and sometimes they'd say bad things to me, or they'd just look really funny. I myself was very troubled by this, because I did not know what I was doing. I really wanted to go to Korea to live in a Korean monastery and be a Korean monk, because that's what I had become—that's what I thought. So, I was going to go to Korea and live in a monastery there, so that's what I did.

I've never traveled very much, and anyone here who's traveled to a foreign country knows what that's like, but I didn't know. Korean culture is entirely different from American culture, and that's something I was just not prepared for. Everything's different: the language is different, the food is different, the manners are different, the way people think is different. So, this was very difficult at first.

Another thing that made it more difficult was that I was an American, and I had these Korean clothes on, and I had a shaved head. We were in Seoul, and I was staying at a small monastery right outside of Seoul, and every day I would go into Seoul to take Korean lessons. On the way there, I had to ride the bus, and *everyone* on the bus would stare at me and laugh, or they would point at me and talk to their friends. This was really difficult because—it's like I had no basis for normality. It was a totally bizarre situation to be a Westerner in these ridiculous clothes, with this shaved head. You'd just go out and walk

down the street in Seoul and everyone, I mean everyone, would say, “Oh, American monk, an American monk,” and they’d laugh, and the women put their hands up to their mouths, and they’d giggle.

This really put me through some hard times. I was so totally unprepared for it; I had this naive idea that I was a Korean monk, so I was going to go to Korea and fit in. It wasn’t like that. This was a very difficult thing for me, so I had to really become strong and really decide, “What the hell are you doing here, and what are you going to do?”

At this time, I was studying Korean, so I just decided, look, no one else here knows what you’re doing because first of all, you can’t talk to them because you don’t speak the language, and second of all, there’s nobody else like you in this country. There were a couple of other American monks, so that’s not entirely true, but—I just felt like I was alone.

All of a sudden, I decided I was just going to learn Korean, and I didn’t give a shit what anybody said to me, or how many people laughed at me, or anything, so I just went ahead and did that. I really felt like I killed a dragon or something. I was feeling very strong. So I was there in Seoul and learning Korean and feeling very strong.

Eventually, we went to this monastery in the mountains. I don’t know if any of you have heard about Korean landscape, but the Korean mountains are incredibly beautiful. They’re very steep and jagged peaks, and they’re almost all rock. They’re not high mountains, but they’re incredibly beautiful. The monastery we were at was at the top of a mountain. You could look out and see a landscape just full of these jagged peaks. Off in the distance was the ocean, and on a clear day, you could see the ocean. Mists would come over the mountains. It was a very beautiful place.

At this monastery we did what in Korean is called Kyol Che. Kyol Che is ninety days of seated meditation. This is conducted in the following manner. On this mountain there were three monasteries, one of which was a nunnery, one of which was a large monastery, and the other of which was a small monastery on the top of the mountain, where we were. At the beginning of this Kyol Che, everyone comes to the top of the mountain, to this small sitting hall for a big meeting about how they are going to conduct this ninety days of meditation. At this time, they decide everything about the next ninety days: who’s going to cook, who’s going to clean, who’s going to hit the chugpe, who’s going to hit the moktak ... they decide *everything*. And they have this huge piece of paper which is a list of jobs in sort of a hierarchical order. Your name is there, and they post this in the sitting hall. So, all the jobs are listed, and the people who are meditating do not do much work; they just clean the Dharma room, and sometimes they sweep the grounds. But the people who are cooking, that’s all they do is cook. The people who go out and buy food, that’s all they do is go out and buy food. Everyone decides they’re going to do ninety days of meditation, and they’re going to do it in this way, and they have a big ceremony at the beginning, and they have a big one at the end, and in between, it’s just meditation.

It’s not a very rigorous schedule physically; it’s only about nine hours a day of sitting. We’d wake up at three and go to sleep at nine. In the middle of this, they have seven days of what they call Yong Maeng Jong Jin, which is seven days without any sleep. It’s really continuous sitting, only breaking for meals, and you have about ten minutes after meals to go to the bathroom and brush your teeth or whatever. So this is a very intense seven days, but this

comes after you've been sitting for about a month, so you're sort of into it. It's really an intense period.

I'd like to say a little bit about Korean Buddhism. I don't think many people in this country know much about it. I personally had the notion that it was like Japanese Buddhism, which it is not. There are many reasons for this. One thing that I can say that will make it a little clearer is that in Korea, when you become a monk, you get this big robe, and everyone calls you "Su Nim," which means "monk," and that is true of *every* monk in Korea. There's no ranking system. When you become a monk, you're a monk. You get your two hundred fifty precepts, and that's it. There are Zen Masters in Korea, and they are high monks, who are called "Kun Su Nims," and there are old monks, who are called "No Su Nims," and there are rich monks and poor monks, but they're all just monks. Your reputation, your situation, is dependent upon your own action. There is no system of rank which you can climb. This seems like a simple fact, but when you think about it, it means that the Zen masters and monks, they're just people. They have no hope of gaining anything except through their own effort.

The Zen masters in Korea are real personalities. It's not like they're doing their job, which is a Zen master's job. They're really bizarre sometimes. There's this one guy who's famous for his bad speech, and he goes around making really obscene comments to nuns. He gives Dharma talks, and people are so embarrassed that they leave the room, or they laugh, because his speech is very bad.

There's another Zen master who is famous for only working. All he's done since he became a monk is just work, physical labor for fifteen hours a day. That sounds kind of extreme, but I met the guy; in fact, he lived on the mountain we were on, and that's all he does all day is work.

There is another Zen master there. He's ninety-two, and he's this little man. Oh, he's the crotchiest man I've even seen in my life. He has the most incredibly horrible voice, and he just won't let anyone help him at all. He's ninety-two, but he will not let you help him walk; he has this little stick that he walks around with.

You meet all these Zen masters, and every one is really a personality which is entirely developed, which is mature. And this, to me, was a very beautiful thing to see because, always before, I felt like, if you become a Zen master, that means that you get your horsehair whisk which you hold up here, and you sit in a certain way, and you say Zen words, and everybody goes, "Oh, you're wonderful!" But that's not the way it is in Korea. You really have to show your stuff.

And so, this brings up the question of how you become a Zen master. And this is quite an important question to anyone who's tried to sit Zen. The way you become a Zen master in Korea is that you must defeat all the great Zen masters in the land; you must go around and hit them. And hitting means that you must come out on top in Dharma combat. So the seal of transmission, or of Inka, is not simply a gesture that means "I like you, and you're a far-out guy, so I give you this, and now you can teach." It means that you have actually gone around and knocked down everyone. So you can teach, because you are free. You can stand up to anyone, and you've proven this, so this guy gives you approval, and then gives you transmission, and then you can teach. This is very direct. You hear about someone giving

transmission and you think it's some sort of special seal, a stamp on your arm or something. But it's very simple: you have *shown* that you are free from hindrance, that any problem that someone puts to you, you can turn around and hit him. And this is really quite something. I don't know if any of you have had experience in interviews with Zen masters, but they're pretty clever guys.

So now the question comes: why did I do this ninety days of meditation, and why, in fact, do people practice Buddhism? And what does it mean to have no hindrance? Before, when I raised my fist, I said, form is emptiness, and emptiness is form. Now, what does this mean? This is the first gate of Zen practice. Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. This is a watch, and this is a glass of water. But, these are just names. We say, "This is a watch," but this watch does not say, "I am a watch." It says, "Tick, tick, tick." And, in the same way, this glass does not say to you, "I am a glass of water." So these are names, and these are forms. But all these names and forms are made by our own thinking. We create them.

There is a good story which illustrates this. This is about a great Zen master in the history of Korean Buddhism. His name was Won Hyo. He was involved in a war, and he was a swordsman. During this war, all of his friends were killed. All of his close friends, from when he'd been in a military academy, were killed by the invading enemy. His whole life had been one of a warrior, and he and his comrades were fighting the enemy, and *all* of his friends were killed, and he escaped alive. He was extremely troubled by this. Why? Why am I alive? What does my life mean? Everything has been cut out from under me.

He heard about Buddhism and became a monk and studied sutras for several years. But he could not find the truth in the sutras, so he decided to go to China to find a teacher who could answer his questions. He decided to walk to China—there was no other way to get there, and it's a long way from Southern Korea to China. He was with a friend of his. In between Korea and China, there's a large desert in Manchuria. He was walking through the desert. He'd been walking for two days without any water, and he was extremely thirsty. Night came, and he and his friend lay down to sleep.

In the middle of the night, he was so thirsty that his thirst woke him up. He couldn't sleep, and he was gasping for water. He was crawling along the ground. It was pitch black, and he was reaching out in the vain hope of finding water. There was just no possibility of it, but he was looking anyway. He was reaching out and moving his hand back and forth in front of him as he was crawling, and all of a sudden, his hand hit something. It was like a bowl, and his hand went up over the rim, and in it there was water, so he was very happy. He went up, and he picked up this bowl, and he drank. It was the best water he had ever had in his life. I mean, it was really good. He was very happy, so he hapchanged and he bowed to Buddha and said, "Thank you very much." So then he just lay down right where he was and went to sleep. And he had a very good sleep.

In the morning he woke up, and he looked over, and there was this skull sitting next to him, and this skull was just rotten flesh, and inside was this tiny bit of tepid water with dead insects in it. He took one look at this and vomited. And, upon vomiting, he attained Enlightenment.

So, what does this mean? As I said before, form is emptiness, emptiness is form. When he drank this water, it was like a golden bowl, filled with the sweetest water in the world,

because he couldn't see it. All he wanted was water. His only thought was, "I want water, I want water," so he picked this up and drank, and it was the best water in the world. The next morning, when he saw it was this filthy skull, he was disgusted, so he vomited. So, what *is* this? He realized that everything in the world is simply created by our own thinking. If we think it's good, it's good. If we think it's disgusting, it's disgusting. Understanding this, there is no need to study Buddhism. So, he didn't go to China; he came back to Korea. He told his friend, "You go ahead; I don't need Buddhism. I have no problems; there is no question." So this is the first gate of Buddhism.

Next, I said, "No form, no emptiness." Already we understand that everything is created by our thinking. So no form, no emptiness means only practicing. Practicing this understanding. Practicing this understanding means cutting off all thinking. And this is through meditation. This is called nirvana, or the first Enlightenment. The other one, form is emptiness, emptiness is form, is understanding in the sense of intellectual understanding. No form, no emptiness is samadi, is nirvana.

The Mahaparinirvana sutra says, "All formations are impermanent. This is the law of appearing and disappearing. When appearing and disappearing disappear, this stillness is bliss." So the first, form is emptiness, emptiness is form, means all formations are impermanent; everything is changing. Now we have a body; before we were born, we had no body; when we die, we will again have no body. So, this body is not a body. We say "body," but this is just a name. What is this thing? Where is its space? When does it exist? This body does not exist, and when all thinking is cut off, there is no existence, there is nothing, but this nothing cannot be described by words, because it is freedom from words. So, this is called true emptiness or nirvana. This is no form, no emptiness.

Next, I said, "Form is form; emptiness is emptiness." This is throwing away emptiness. Through practice, we have attained this stillness, this bliss, total freedom, nothing. Nothing. No life, no death, no happiness, no sadness, no good, no bad. No words, no speech, so no problem. Keeping this is being attached to this feeling. It's like—before when we were chanting Kwan Seum Bosal. If you're just chanting Kwan Seum Bosal, there is *only* Kwan Seum Bosal, and this mind has no thinking. This mind has no difficulties. *Only* Kwan Seum Bosal. So, this is nirvana.

But, if you want to recreate this situation, and live in this situation, then this is clinging to emptiness, and Buddhism is no attachment to *anything*, no involvement with anything, no clinging to anything. So, also, you must throw away emptiness. In throwing this away, you see once more that this is a watch and that this is a glass of water. And seeing this, you are able to function as a human being.

Functioning as a human being means that you are not concerned about yourself, because you are no longer attached to the illusion of suffering. But you see that many people are, and that these people need your help. So, your true function as a human being is to help other people, to help them see that there is no problem. This is called the Bodhisattva Way. This is called the Great Way.

An eminent teacher once said that, without thinking, just like this is Buddha. So already, we are all Buddha. Since we are human beings, we are Buddha. There is no escaping that fact. You are Buddha. You are a human being. But, every day, in every moment, we do not act

like Buddhas, because we are attached to name and form, because we are attached to our own desires, because we are clinging to some illusion. So, every day, we act out of ignorance; every day we act out of desire, and this just perpetuates itself.

When you see that your life is not correct, when you see that you are not acting as a human being, in a correct fashion, then the next step is to try to correct your action. One way to do this is through meditation. Meditation means controlled action, correct action.

I don't know how to eat. Whenever I eat, I have a tremendous desire for food, so I eat too much, or I eat the wrong thing, or I eat too quickly, or I spend too long eating. I mean, I can't do it right. So, I must stay in this one room for ninety days with all these other people and eat in a very simple manner, in this very controlled manner, and then I eat correctly. Then there's no problem. Digestion is good; everything is good.

Also sitting Zen, meditation, just sitting still like this—by myself I cannot do it. I start picking my nose, and cleaning my ears, and moving around. But when you are sitting in a room with twenty other people who are doing exactly the same thing, you sit correctly, because if you start moving, you know someone will look over at you. Anyone who's done it knows that there's tremendous pressure from all these other people to be correct. And this is through every single moment of every day, through all your waking hours, and when you go to sleep. At Jong Hae Sah, the temple I was at, meditation ended *just* at nine o'clock, and *just* at nine o'clock they pull out the bedding, and the lights would go out, and you'd go to sleep. If you wanted to stay up and read, tough luck. Everyone does it all at once, so you just have to throw away any of your own opinions and act *with* everyone else. In doing this, your own bad karma, your own opinions are thrown away, and it's very easy. This is the purpose of practicing together. This is the purpose of having this ninety days of meditation.

There's one more part to this story which I haven't told, and that is that when I was in Korea I was with two other Americans, and these Americans did not like Korea. They did not like the monastery and they did not like Korean Buddhism. So we had some hard times at this monastery. It was not smooth sailing as I may have made it seem. It was sort of screwed up most of the time, because we had a very bad translator. This translator *only* wanted to go to America, so she would mistranslate everything to these two other Americans. Fortunately, I knew a little Korean. But she would tell them that these monks are no good, and that Korean Buddhism is no good, and that *only* America is wonderful, so let's, you know, go to America. So they really wanted to leave.

They lived in another part of the monastery. They didn't want to live with the rest of the monks, although they sat every day with them. I was living in the Dharma room with the rest of the monks, and I was speaking Korean, and I had these Korean clothes. It was like I had become a correct Korean monk, through my own sort of perverted love of the Korean culture, which they had thrown away as being sort of ridiculous.

In any case, there I was. All the time, the Koreans were telling me I'm doing the correct thing by staying here and learning Korean and sitting in this Korean monastery, and the Americans were telling me I'm crazy; I should be back in America; what am I doing wearing these Korean clothes and speaking Korean? What do I think I am? Do I think I'm a Korean? What am I doing here?

I was sure I had decided that I was going to stay in Korea, and that I was very strong, and that I was going to be ambassador for all Americans in Korea. But, on the last day of this ninety-day meditation, these guys were going to leave. I mean, they were going to finish and then they were going to go, and I was going to decide how to get them out of there in the cleanest fashion. They were very angry at this time. And then, all of a sudden, I was going with them. All of a sudden, I didn't care about Korea anymore, and I just wanted to get out of there really fast, and go have a hamburger or something. Not a hamburger; I wanted to have buttered toast or something.

Anyway, I was on the airplane and that was O.K., but the next thing that happened was that I started listening to them. I started talking to them a lot. And they were saying that Korean Buddhism is no good, and that our teacher is no good, and that this and this is no good, and we are just going to be American style. So I started talking to them—and I'll sort of do what anyone tells me to do; I'm not a very strong individual, I don't think. So, I started agreeing with them: "Hey, you know, you're right. Korean Buddhism *is* no good. This whole trip in America of wearing these clothes and chanting these chants—this is just a bullshit trip. We're going to go back to America, and we're going to be American Buddhists. We're not going to have anything to do with this cultural bullshit." So, this is what we were talking about. And I felt like, "Yeah, sure, this is what we're going to do."

So, I got back to America and I just couldn't maintain that anger; I couldn't maintain that feeling. But before I dropped it, I wrote my teacher a letter, and I said, "I've been to Korea, and I've overcome all this ethnic stuff, and I'm not going to do it anymore. I'm going to be a free man and walk around the United States studying Buddhism American style." By the time I got his answer, the wind was out of my sails, and I was ready to head for the nearest Zen center—fast.

What he said in his letter was that this opinion is ignorance. What does this mean? It doesn't mean that if I'd stayed in Korea, I would have been a good boy, and now that I'm back in America, I blew it. What it means is that holding an opinion—having American Buddhism and Korean Buddhism, America and Korea—having these names and clinging to them is fine. It's just like being angry at somebody. You say, "That person is no good, and I don't like him, and I just want to sock him in the mouth." And that's O.K.; you get really a lot of energy, and you're ready to do it. But then, it doesn't last long. And the reason it doesn't last for long is that it's founded upon something which is nonexistent.

I already said, "Form is emptiness; emptiness is form." Korean Buddhism and American Buddhism are simply names. So, clinging to them, you're going to fall on your face. And that's what happened to me: I fell on my face. I came back to the Zen Center where I had been living, and I fell back into my old ways of living, and I had to admit that I'd blown it.

I think this is a very important point. A lot of people in America have had this problem with the fact that people who are teaching Buddhism in this culture are from other cultures, and they bring with them things which are strictly from that culture. But if we as Buddhists, and if we as people, are attached to these things, then we cannot learn Buddhism. If we try to figure out what they are doing, and try to figure out whether their motives are good or bad, we cannot learn. We simply have to take the practice and do it. Just take it as it is and do it. If it's good, it's good; if it's no good, throw it away, and try something else.

But for me, this was a very clear example of clinging to names and, as a result, getting a certain amount of suffering.

So, to sum up, I would ask myself, “I went to Korea and I did a lot of stuff. I was there for five months, and I came back, and here I am. What exactly did I get?”

KATZ!

(Holding up his hands and counting his fingers)

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

March 9, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

I hope this letter finds you in good health.

Please accept my sincere gratitude for the kindness you and your students so freely gave to me. I wish that I could be with you always. Knowing you has helped my practice a great deal. You speak of the mind “clear like space.” This is a treasure greater than any other. I will work to cultivate this mind that I may help others as you have helped me.

If I can ever help you in any way, please let me know; it would honor me.

Please give my warmest regards to Jonny, Richard, Myla, Suzie, and, of course, Willow. I have thought often of Jonny and his family and hoped that everyone’s physical sufferings are eased by this time.

I am looking forward to seeing you again in the spring.

With deep respect,

Cherie

March 18, 1976

Dear Cherie,

How are you? Thank you for your letter. You said you will try to keep a mind which is clear like space and help other people. That is the true way and the Bodhisattva Way. It is wonderful.

I think your practice is very good: your sitting, your action, and how you keep your mind. I only worry about your attachment to quiet. If you are not attached to quiet, then there is no problem. Everyone has different karma, but if you control your karma, then your practice will have no problem. But if you cannot control your karma, you will have a problem. Then, how can you control your karma? You must not check your mind, not check anything, only go straight—don’t know. Then your karma may come and go itself, but it cannot stay in your mind; it will soon disappear. If you cannot keep don’t-know mind, your karma will stay with you, and you will have anger, desire, and ignorance. So, you must only go straight ahead—don’t know. That is Great Faith, Great Courage, and Great Question. When these three come together, they make your original job.

I hope you always keep a mind which is clear like space, soon get Enlightenment, and finish your original job.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 14, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim (and friends),

How are you? I am doing well and living in Vancouver, momentarily sharing a large house with my brother and four others; raising puppies and looking for work.

When I was in the country, I broke my wrist mala and lost some of the beads. Would it be possible to have one sent here?

We have no telephone at present. Keeping practice although schedule is a little haphazard and unsettled; bowing daily, chanting and sitting irregularly. A “little bit no good”—will only try harder.

Hope your body is strong. Were you able to try the organic-style diet? Wish you and the family/Sangha great good fortune. Look forward to seeing you all. Moon waxing on a northern tree.

Love,

Jim

P.S. Puppies' registered names will be Jingong's Thunder Rising and Jingong's Amber lake;

“Thunder” and “Amber”  
Alone is good.  
Kwanseum Bosal  
Gate gate paragate  
Parasamgate  
Bodhi svaha.

Sincerely,

Jim

P.P.S. Thank you, Soen Sa Nim, for being a kind Master and superlative teacher.

JMP

March 18, 1976

Dear Jim,

---

How are you? Thank you for your letter. I am glad to hear that you are living in Vancouver. You say you broke your yom ju (mala) and lost some beads. This is no good. I will send you another yom ju. You must send me the broken yom ju. I will fix it.

You said your practice is a little no good. This means that your belief in yourself is not so good. First you must keep Great Faith, strong belief in yourself. Strong belief in yourself means practicing on time every day. Next Great Courage: Great Courage means only keeping one point. Next Great Question: Great Question means cut-off-all-thinking mind. Cut-off-all-thinking mind is before thinking. Before-thinking mind is just like this. Just like this means only go straight. Don't check your mind; don't check everything.

Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha.

This is the Great Bodhisattva Way, so your action is not for yourself, only for other people. I hope you will always keep these three things, soon get Enlightenment, and finish the Great Work.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Mr. Lee, 270°-style magic man, is now staying at the Providence Zen Center and sitting Zen with us. I am sending you some pictures and his instructions. Los Angeles Mr. Alton Park has the same magic teacher as Mr. Lee. Some day I hope you will meet Mr. Lee. In the pictures he is pulling a car that is attached to a needle stuck through his forearm, pulling a forty-two passenger bus with a rope in his teeth, and hammering a nail with his fist.

Dear Soen Sa Nim!

I am back in Big Sur, after a short (5 day) retreat on a mountain top in Ojai. Mu health is truly fine, after a good rest, and actually I am getting fat! A relief. I feel more grounded, more solid.

The house (Zen Center) looks wonderful. I and friends cleared enormous amounts of stuff away. It is peaceful now (and quiet as I am here alone). Very much work comes my way now! Quite amazing! All is joyful. I do my practice and feel better for it. But wonder at so many pills! 90 a day! So many.

I send my love to you,

Joan

The poster is fantastic! So beautiful. Thank you!

March 23

Dear Jin Kwang,

Thank you for your card. You already gave to me two frogs. Thank you very much. You are getting strong—this is very good.

Just now I came back from Cambridge. At the Cambridge Zen Center there are many of Trungpa's students. They already understand the Big Sur Zen Center and you. They like you and the Big Sur Zen Center very much, and they want to go to Big Sur and sit Zen with you

You are already the Universal Mother; clean house—that is wonderful. This picture is of washing clothes. You already said clean house. So I ask you, did you clean your mind? Tell me! Tell me!

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

March 24, 1976

Dear Jin Kwang,

How are you? Thank you for calling me up. It was wonderful to hear your voice. This time I forgot to ask you if you are taking your medicine. I think this medicine will help you very much. If you think it is too much, then twenty or fifteen are good each time, but you must take these pills three times each day. This is very important.

I am sending you the Big Sur Zen Center pictures. All of the pictures are very wonderful; it is a wonderful Zen Center. Of all the pictures, your picture is the best. I think it is the picture of the true Universal Mother. I like it very much.

I am also sending you a picture of Avolokitesvara Bodhisattva. This picture is a photograph of a national treasure statue done fourteen hundred years ago during the Sila dynasty in Korea. The famous artist named Dam Jin made this. Look at this face; it is the true Universal Mother's face. You must follow this face. Maybe this picture teaches you better than I do. So I ask you, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva has ten thousand eyes; which one is the correct eye? You ask the Buddha. This Buddha has already answered you. If you find it, please answer me soon.

Before I sent you a letter. In the letter I sent you a poem. The first line is

Ten thousand fishing lines go straight down.

This means go straight, don't know. Don't know means see through your nature, become Buddha.

One wave becomes ten thousand waves.

But sometimes, much thinking appears. When one thought appears, many thoughts continually appear: desire, anger, ignorance, but don't worry. Don't check your mind, don't check your feelings, only go straight. Then your original nature, complete stillness, does not move. Then bright everywhere: that name is Jin Kwang.

Deep quiet night and cold water  
So, all fishes do not eat.

The meaning of this is that everything is complete.

Empty ship returns

This means your mind is already empty; returned means already killed small I, returned to Big I.

Only full of moonlight.

This means always full of Big Love. Big Love means the Bodhisattva way. My empty mind is full of Big Love. This is the poem's meaning.

I like your job, I like your action very much, so how do you keep just- now mind? You must be strong, keeping empty mind full of Big Love. That is the Universal Mother's mind and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's mind.

Last Yong Maeng Jong Jin I gave you homework. Someone comes to the Big Sur Zen Center, smokes a cigarette, blows smoke and drops ashes on your Buddha; what can you do? You must soon finish your homework.

I hope you will always keep a clear mind, soon get Enlightenment, and become the Universal Mother.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.

P.S. Are you bowing every day? Are you chanting every day?

P.P.S. I am sending two pictures to Jo. Please say hello to her and give her these pictures.

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Thank you so much for the wonderful photos, ginseng, books, and the picture. I look at the picture—and I see that this Buddha and this person are the same. The correct eye is the perceiving one. This eye is the correct one.

I like very much your explanation of the poem. This is fantastic—and I understand now the poem. Before, it was a poem; now, it is also a poem—and one I comprehend. My ship is not empty. I also understand this.

I am still and always working on my homework. This *kong-an* is difficult. I think of someone dropping ashes on the beautiful Buddha, and I weep. This is attachment. I fly in rage. This is attachment. So many feelings—all attachment. Therefore, there can be no feelings. A great Bodhisattva would teach the ash-dropper. But how? I do not know. So, still, I must do more homework.

I do not do all that you tell me to do. Each day I meditate, offer incense. But I do not bow; nor do I chant. I know I *need* my practice—but I do not do it faithfully. This is only the truth.

Your mind is full of moonlight—  
How beautiful!

Jin Kwang

March 29, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? The New Haven Zen Center is very happy to have our friend Mu Gak Su Nim back with us. Every day his eyes get brighter and his face more clear. Now he is getting strong again—he has even offered a challenge to Dharma combat once or twice in the last few days ... just as he used to before he went away to Korea. All should be ready by Thursday for the beginning of the 100-day retreat. This will be very good for our spirit to be able to help in this effort.

We are looking forward to Buddha's Birthday celebration at the Providence Zen Center. Enclosed you will find my paper on Zen. I still feel the way I did the first time I hit the floor during an interview—"somehow this teaching is not my teaching." Perhaps this is better—it is only teaching.

Until Saturday, I don't know what is going to happen! See you soon.

Love,

Steve

New Haven

March 29, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

How are you? I was sorry to hear that you feel tired and must die someday, but that's O.K. I understand. You say it is necessary that your students soon get Enlightenment. This makes me feel that there is no time to lose in finishing the Great Work.

Everyone really enjoyed your visit. The evening before, I began reciting the Sin Mio Chung Kou Tae Ta Rani silently over and over again. It had quite naturally appeared in consciousness after spending time that afternoon with a young woman. At that time it became clear that she did not desire any deeper involvement with me, so I began the mantra to put her and all attachments out of mind. It was therefore quite interesting when, the next day, you came and spoke about this mantra. I could hardly stop laughing to hear the way you told the story about the Buddha giving this mantra to Ananda and the woman with whom he had been.

Before you mentioned your health, I had been thinking of doing a 21-day retreat and then traveling this summer. If I only do a 21-day retreat, however, I probably wouldn't get enlightened. So now I think maybe a 100-day retreat is necessary. If I die or go crazy, I won't care, but some people think I'm already crazy to want to go off to a mountain all by myself. They say I should only enjoy a vacation between the time I graduate from college and begin medical school. I'm only concerned that once I begin medical school, there may not be another chance to do a 100-day retreat. This summer I have the time, having completed one phase of my life and not yet begun the next. I also feel very strong now, which may not last long. If I begin a medical career without having attained Enlightenment, I may end this life as a gentleman householder. But this would just be everyday mind, so I'm sure it's O.K.

I believe you understand my karma and can advise me about the retreat. If I do it, could you supply me with a practice schedule, diet, and moktak? I would like to find a place outdoors, either in a hut I know about in upstate New York or else a cave which a friend of mine knows about in the Adirondack Mountains.

I look forward to getting together again on Buddha's birthday. Enclosed is my paper, "What is Zen?"—merely dry cognition, not particularly worthy of a teacher of the Dharma.

Everyone in our New Haven family appreciated meeting Mr. Lee. He is a very big fellow. Perhaps he could be persuaded to give a demonstration in honor of Buddha's birthday? Surely, everyone would enjoy that.

Spring lives!

Matthew

March 24, 1976

Dear Soen Sa Nim,

Enclosed is the blank cassette for a copy of the daily chanting—and hopefully, it will include your bell chant.

Again I thank you for the sesshin experience this past weekend in Cambridge.

Working on the kong-an. Will write to you about it later in the week.

With my deepest respect and gratitude,

Patricia

P.S. Would it be possible to have a photograph of you?

For the Venerable Seung Sahn

Post-Sesshin

Early Spring in the mountains.

Snow peaks.

Blue sky.

Bird-song.

Sun.

Winter ice melts and flows

Unerringly toward the river.

Patricia

Jackson, New Hampshire

March 26, 1976

March 30, 1976

Dear Patricia,

Thank you for your letter and beautiful poem. I am sending a tape; on side A is (1) the Morning Bell, (2) Chanting, and (3) the Evening Bell. On side B is a recording of our big New Year's ceremony with speeches by Dharma teachers from our four centers. Although the recording is of poor technical quality, please listen to it carefully; it will help you.

I am also sending you my picture.

You have been Trungpa Rinpoche's student for many years so you already understand Buddhism and all Dharmas. But, an eminent teacher said the Buddha taught all Dharmas in order to save all minds. When you keep a nothing mind, what use is there for these Dharmas? So, understanding nothing mind is better than understanding all the Dharma minds. Zen is not dependent on word and speech; it only points directly to your mind.

I am giving you homework. A famous kong-an is, "What is Buddha? Three pounds of flax." What does this mean? An eminent teacher said, "Without thinking, just like this is Buddha." If you understand this, then you will understand the meaning of three pounds of flax.

I think your practice is very good. So, only go straight ahead; don't check your feelings, don't check your mind.

I hope you always keep a clear mind everywhere, soon finish your great work, and save all people.

Here is a poem for you:

Quiet night,  
Only sitting in silence at the mountain cabin.

Everything is stillness.  
Moonlight fills all space.

But why does the wind from the west  
Shake the forest?

A bird shrieks;  
The sound slowly fades  
As it flies through the cold sky.

Yours in the Dharma,

S.S.