

Primary Point



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Summer Kyol Che 2015

June 1 ~ August 28, 2015

Mu Sang Sa is located on an energy point of Gye Ryong Mountain which is renowned in Korea for its strong mystical energy .

Zen Master Dae Bong Sunim will be the Guiding Teacher for the Kyol Che. Also many teachers of Kwan Um School of Zen will join the retreat.

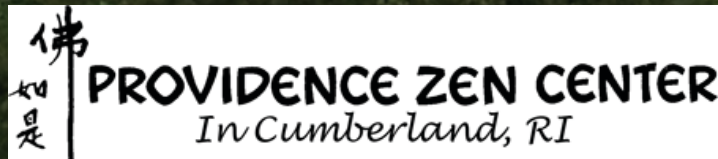
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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 2,800 copies.

The views expressed in *Primary Point* are not necessarily those of this journal or the Kwan Um School of Zen.

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Cover: Dharma bell/lotus lantern offering display at Jogye Sa Temple Museum, Seoul, South Korea. Photo by Jerry Botha.

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The Way of Enlightenment

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Preface

Great nature, with its singing birds, flowing streams, and temple bells deep in the mountains, leads us from our worldly passions into nirvana, transcending life and death. Dark mountains and clear water, fresh spring leaves and deep oceans—all these, by themselves, are the path, the truth, and Zen. Every dust particle we touch and feel are just wonders, and all things we come across are nothing but our original face. But the reason we do not recognize this while constantly sensing it is because we do not understand our true self.

A human cannot be a human only just because they are a human. Knowing the path, perceiving the truth, living in Zen will distinguish you from the animals. Attaining the path, the truth, and Zen will be possible only after you understand your true self. If you find your original face, the before-thinking face—that is, if you cut off all thinking in your mind—then there is no Buddha and common mortals, no good and evil, no life and death, and no right and wrong. When all thinking is cut off, there cannot be any distinction by language or words; what you have is the absolute world that transcends the duality of name and form—you are the universe and the universe is you.

Therefore, if we recover our before-thinking faces, then the sound of birds and the sound of streams will become our lives all at once, and the high mountains and the deep water as it is will become our truth. Our life will become that of things as they are, like a large round mirror reflecting black into black and white into white.

We must give up the idea of “I,” which tends to inquire into right and wrong or good and evil between me and you. The world in which you and I become one, in which I live with nature, is the path, the truth, and Zen.

In the hope of introducing, from old days, the bright lives of the righteous with the great freedom over life and death to this dark world of suffering, I picked up a hundred cases out of the traditional seventeen hundred Zen kong-ans, and I wrote a Zen storybook that, I hope, will become a guide in our troubled lives.

If this book can lead its readers to an understanding of the path, the truth, and Zen, then I am doing my part, however little, to repay the Buddha’s grace.

Finally, grateful acknowledgment is made to monk Kyeh-Hyun Lee and laymen Yoo Chan and Chul We for their help in editing the manuscript, and to layman Yun Taik for his assuming the publishing costs.

S.S.

December 1965

Case 1: No Question-and-Answer for Primary Meaning

Zen is commonly understood as something like a bamboo stick grafted onto a chestnut tree, communicating through eccentric words and actions far away from common sense. But Zen is not that kind of thing.

As indicated by the old masters’ teachings:

*Not relying on words,
A transmission outside the sutras.*

or

*Investigation of words cannot attain it;
Thought cannot reach it.*

It would be a great mistake to try to describe the essence of Zen with words and letters or specific actions. It does not allow any possible description, as it always has been such.

This is because Zen does not rely upon words, letters, consciousness or ideas. However, it does not mean that words, letters, consciousness and ideas should be discarded—it means simply that Zen is not restrained by them.

Like the old proverb, “The art can be taught, but not the genius,” it is possible to teach Zen in a common-sense way. It can only be learned through its perception and its spontaneous practice. It cannot be learned through words or letters.

If it is describable, the description is only something secondary, and cannot be the ultimate primary meaning. Because it is indescribable, the old masters said:

*Word’s road is cut off,
Mind’s arena is destroyed.*

and

True form is beyond words.

When two persons reach the same stage of mind through identical consciousness and ideas, then words and letters will not be necessary for a 100 percent effective communication. At such a stage, there is indeed no need for an explanation or question-and-answer.

One should drink water to taste its coldness or hotness. Likewise, it is foolish to attempt a description or instruction of such a state of mind through words and letters. On the other hand, simply keeping Zen to oneself after attaining it, and not trying to share it with neighbors, goes against the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. A Zen person should not only try to attain Zen, but also try to help others attain it.

Therefore, teaching Zen through all possible chan-

nels usually takes the form of questions and answers. But its intent is very much different from that of questions and answers in the ordinary learning process. This is because Zen attempts to point directly to primary meaning. In order to show the true picture of life and death, various ingenious methods are employed, sometimes using strange words, shouting a belly sound, [That is, “KATZ!” –Ed.] or sometimes brandishing a stick.

This type of question and answer can be quite energetic and stylized, full of wit, nerve and surprises. But regarding only this as Zen is a mistake. At the same time, all these questions and answers by themselves should be considered as the skillful application of Zen, because our every action, whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down, is nothing but Zen. Therefore, it is important that we take up the following cases and devote ourselves to studying them.

“Zen is Practice, so don’t preach Zen!” This remark characterizes one aspect of Zen.

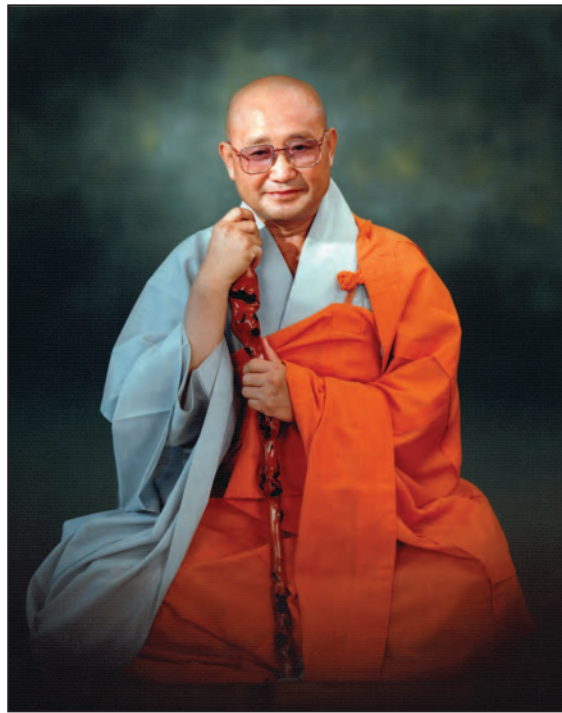


Photo: Kwan Um School of Zen Archives

Editor’s Note: The Way of Enlightenment was published in Korean in 1965, thanks to the generous donation of a Korean bosalnim. This kind of offering is part of Asian Buddhist culture and is one way that a lay family will support the dharma. The text went through a preliminary translation without attribution in the 1980s, and while we do not currently know the identity of the translator, we are grateful for the work. The book is a collection of traditional kong-ans with commentary by Zen Master Seung Sahn. In the preface and first chapter, though, Dae Soen Sa Nim speaks directly to the reader. Those of us familiar with his teaching will clearly recognize his voice here, although his style in 1965 was a little different than in his later years. Much of this issue of Primary Point is devoted to the “Whole World

Is a Single Flower” conference, one of the fruits of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s worldwide teaching. Primary Point is pleased to offer this example of his earlier teaching as a preface. Our thanks to Barry Briggs JDPSN for his efforts in producing a digital version of the original manuscript. I have made some modifications to this version, to accommodate standard English usage. ♦

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**The Tenth Triennial Whole World Is a Single Flower Conference & Zen Master Seung Sahn’s Tenth Memorial Ceremony
Mu Sang Sa, Korea 2014**

The Whole World Is a Single Flower

Opening Ceremony

All Forms of Existence Are One Flower

Zen Master Dae Bong

I want to welcome you all to Korea and to our tenth Whole World Is a Single Flower conference. All of us know that at the end of World War II, Man Gong Sunim from Su Dok Sa Temple took a petal of the national flower, dipped it in ink, and wrote the calligraphy, “Sae Gye Il Hwa.” So his comment at the end of the war was that this whole world is a single flower, even those fighting each other, even the animals, and the birds, and all forms of existence are one flower.

that we carry from life to life. If you have anger toward someone and you’re holding that, and want to harm them in some way, this is what you will carry into the next life. If our vow is to understand our true nature and help all beings, then this is what we will carry into the next life. If we have that vow, then we will continue to meet together again, life after life, doing this great work. If we have this vow, there’s no unemployment.

This vow has two aspects. One is the vow to continue our practice, looking deeply within, realizing what is our true nature. The other aspect is how we use it in this world to help others. When many of us were young and had no direction, Seung Sahn Sunim appeared and showed us how to find the correct human direction of this life. Now, many young people in this world are suffering and also cannot find true direction. So, at this Whole World Is a Single Flower, let’s consider together what is the situation that young people are experiencing, and how can we use our practice and our lives to connect with and help them.

When Zen Master Seung Sahn was young, he only tried to work with society, exploring how to help or even fight with society to improve life for everyone. But soon he realized he had to learn to work with his own mind: “What am I?” Then, his success in doing that spread to all of us. How can we do the same for all beings? Now we begin this time together in Korea, and I hope that we will enjoy it and also share with each other how we can continue this Great Work. *Kamsa hamnida*. Thank you.

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Photo: James Stanford

Zen Master Seung Sahn spent his life traveling to all parts of the world, showing us that we are part of that flower. Now is the tenth year since Kun Sunim [“Great Monk,” another title for Zen Master Seung Sahn] has passed away, and we’re gathered here to enjoy that flower again together. We want to consider how we can continue sharing this flower with all beings. Our theme this year is “Great Vow, Life After Life.” Our vow is the one thing

Suffering and Taking Away Suffering

Zen Master Dae Kwang

Good morning everybody! I'd like to welcome you to Korea and the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference. Every three years, since 1987, the Kwan Um School of Zen has hosted an international conference. This year our conference memorializes the tenth anniversary of the passing of Zen Master Seung Sahn. The theme of this year's conference is "Great Vow, Life After Life." When Zen Master Seung Sahn first came to the United States, one thing he impressed upon us is the importance of the great vow to save all beings from suffering. One of his great contributions to the Zen teaching style from the time of the Sixth Patriarch is his emphasis on great vow in Zen practice. He said if you look at the history of the Zen teaching style, you notice that sometimes the great vow is almost lost. In fact, one of the most famous Zen books in the United States doesn't even mention bodhisattva action. Because of this, Zen Master Seung Sahn named our international organization the Kwan Um School of Zen. This name was to emphasize what Zen is really about.

Actually, Buddhism is very simple. The Buddha only

taught about one thing: suffering and taking away suffering.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said there are two central questions for every human being. Number one: What are you doing right now? Number two: Why do that? These two questions point to how we live our life, moment to moment, and our great vow. The meaning behind "life after life" is "What are you doing right now?" This is not an abstract, philosophical concept. It's not anything you have to believe. It's something you have to wake up to, moment to moment. That's our human beings' job. That's Buddha's job; that's my job; that's your job. Dae Bong Sunim already said you don't have to worry about being unemployed. We're born into an ocean of suffering. So our vow is without bounds. I want to thank you all again for coming. Zen Master Seung Sahn always ended his talks and letters with, "I hope you only go straight don't know, soon get enlightenment, and save all beings from suffering." Nobody could say it better. Thank you very much.

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You Have to Talk to Our Guests

Zen Master Soeng Hyang

Good morning. This morning we had a wonderful thing happen with the international Kwan Um School of Zen. Even though many of us came here from far away and haven't gotten much sleep, and even though some of us had trouble with finding enough bed padding, the vast majority of us came to practice this morning! So actually our conference began at 6 o'clock this morning. It started with our most essential teachings. We did our prostrations, we sat and we blended our voices with what I consider the strongest chanting I have ever heard.

Many people like to talk about Zen, but most people don't like to actually do it. Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, "99.9 percent will kill you." That 0.1 percent is extremely dangerous. This means we must wake up to each and every moment. So we all have to be careful about learning to be aware of each thing. As Zen Master Dae Kwang said, "Be careful. Watch your step. How may I help you? What are you doing just now?" That is our practice.

When I first met Zen Master Seung Sahn, he was always very busy trying to make the temple clean, clear and inviting. My memory is that he spent hours on the telephone speaking in Korean. So many students wanted to

talk with him! He also spent a lot of time trying to learn English, and planning his next dharma talk. After I had lived at the Zen center for only about two weeks, he had already given me strong teaching. I had been appointed the housemaster, and to me that meant shopping, arranging meals, cleaning the public spaces and so on. I would also make tea and cookies for our guests to eat after the dharma talks. Quite a lot of authentic responsibilities! I thought I was quite the contributor! One night after I had put out the cookies and tea for the guests and gone back to the kitchen to clean up, Dae Soen Sa Nim came out to the kitchen and said, "You have to talk to our guests." Well, I didn't like to talk to guests. I liked to just do the dishes, to stay in the kitchen. So I was reasonable. I said to him, "You have to understand me. I'm shy; I don't like to talk to guests."

Then he took his finger and he pushed it right here [*points to her solar plexus*]: "You don't like to talk to guests, you. What are you?!" Whew! I went out and talked to the guests. Very beautiful lesson. Very difficult lesson.

So how do you find your correct job? There are two more important questions.

One is, "What am I?" Not small I—big I. What am I?

Also, saying “What am I doing just now? What is this?”

My next big lesson with Zen Master Seung Sahn was this. When I first moved into the Zen center I quit working and was just hanging around the temple. I was a registered nurse, but had decided that I didn’t like nursing anymore. In the 1970s, the doctors could be autocratic, and I had been placed in some difficult and painful situations while working in hospitals. As nurses, nobody listened to us. So I decided, “Oh, Soen Sa Nim is the best doctor. I’ll stay home and hang out with Soen Sa Nim and not be a nurse.”

One day Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “You’re a nurse, aren’t you?”

“I don’t like hospitals so much.”

“We need money. You be a nurse.”

So that was good. I went back to nursing, and I helped to pay the rent! I learned to integrate the Zen practice of

paying attention to each moment into my nursing vocation, everything became my teacher. Good, bad or ugly, I learned to enter it all more unconditionally.

Zen is not about whether we live monastically or whether we live a lay life. Every single one of us has to ask, “What am I?” “For what and for whom?” And of course, “How may I help you?” Asking these questions completely helped me be a better nurse than I ever could have been without practice. We cannot spread the dharma. That’s a big mistake. If we have the idea, “Oh, we’re having this conference; we’re going to help spread the dharma,” then we’re mistaken. Each one of us has to find out what we are; what we are in *this* moment. As we learn to do this, we will be able to teach others. Then the conference and the dharma are not separate. Let us all enjoy and listen to each other and have fun.

Thank you very much.

We Have a Fine Refuge

Seol Jeong Sunim

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I’d like to offer a heartfelt welcome to all of you who must have come from a great distance. Some of you had to take time out of a difficult schedule. I’d like to thank all of you for coming and for your contribution. We are



Photo: Lubor Kosut

disciples of Buddha. We are all family. Family are not just people who meet because they happen to be in the same place. They meet each other because they understand each other, they respect each other, and they love each other. Buddhists meet each other also to practice the buddhadharma. We call this conference “The Whole World Is a

Single Flower,” which means the correct eye to be able to discern the correct dharma.

We all have the question, “Why do we live? What achievements do we have to attain in this life?” The goal of all Buddhists—the goal of all beings—is to reach nirvana, to reach ultimate liberation. That is the world of joy, ecstasy and ultimate perfection. Nirvana and this world are not two, so we and the world are not two. When mind is at ease in the Buddhist sense, that means it’s the state of mind completely free from agony, fear and suffering. And in such complete, perfect stillness, we have a fine refuge. That is the refuge of perfect freedom.

It’s a place of no hindrance. It’s a place of eternal bliss. It’s a place where true self can be unfurled forever. It is a place of utter purity and light. And you will find the whole universe a clear and pure place. It’s where there is no object and subject. There is no set order. Everywhere you go, you find truth. And everywhere is authentic. It is the place of truth beyond words.

Maybe Zen masters have taught you the important question, “What am I?” The true meaning of “The Whole World Is a Single Flower” is finding yourself. It is only because people have lost their true self that the world has become a place of conflict, jealousy, struggle and suffering. Finding this true self is the ultimate goal of this conference—The Whole World Is a Single Flow-

er—and to this goal, Zen Master Seung Sahn dedicated his whole life. No matter how rich you are, no matter how famous you are, money and fame are here only for a moment. It's here and then it's gone. It doesn't guarantee you true freedom. It doesn't guarantee you true happiness. It doesn't even give you joy.

Where does suffering come from? It comes from within. Where does it come from within? It is from greed and attachment. Sentient beings are too used to attachment and greed, so much so that they don't even know how uncomfortable it is, how agonizing it is, how sad it is, how painful it is.

What Buddha taught and what Seung Sahn Sunim taught you all his life is to be free from attachment and greed. If you are totally immersed in greed, you don't know how to live. We already have true happiness. We already have true freedom. We already have true virtue. We all have complete merit and wisdom already inside of us. We just forget that we do. Buddha's teaching, in other words, is compassion and wisdom. Wisdom is knowing that you have been on the wrong, incorrect path and finding the place in your mind from which you can see everything in the world with the mind of no thought. It is knowing with certainty what kind of life we should lead.

That's wisdom, and the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference is for us to gain that wisdom. We aim to be free from suffering and live the life beyond life and death. So put down anger, greed, ignorance, attachment, right here, right now. That's Zen.



Photo: Jerry Botha

Some people may ask, "How can we live after we put down anger, greed and ignorance? We cannot live like that."

Wise people put it down. Unwise people cannot put it down. If you just put down anger, greed and ignorance, then boundless merit, boundless wisdom will just come to you naturally. Buddha taught that already limitless boundless compassion, boundless wisdom, boundless life, boundless merit is already completely realized in you. Just bring it out and use it for yourself and for sentient beings, life after life. If we aim to reach nirvana, to reach the state of ultimate liberation through this conference, you have to reach *jnana* (knowledge). Jnana does not realize just naturally. After you let go of anger, greed and ignorance, in that place free of anger, ignorance, and attachment, find the question, "What am I?" Once you let it go, this boundless treasure of true self will reveal itself. That's the teaching of the Buddha. That's the teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn.

The old sage sat.
When you see an object, don't just see the object—see the mind.

[Raises the Zen stick, then hits the table with the stick.]

If this is the object, where is the mind?

There is this thing that is object and the mind; mind and object appear.

People! Do not look at the object, but seek for the empty mind!

[Raises the Zen stick, then hits the table with the stick.]

KATZ! ♦

Biography of Seol Jeong Sunim

Seol Jeong Sunim was born in 1942 in Ye San, in Chungcheong province in South Korea. He was ordained as a monk at Su Dok Sa Temple in 1955. His teacher was Zen Master Won Dam, who was one of Zen Master Man Gong's students.

After he graduated from Hae In Sa Temple's traditional sutra school, he entered Seoul National University in his thirties and studied horticulture. He served as the abbot of Su Dok Sa in 1978, the



Photo: Allan Matthews

chairman of the legislation committee of the Jogye Order reform council in 1994, and the chairman of the eleventh central committee of the Jogye Order in 1996.

After he determined to die practicing in a Zen Center, he has been practicing in Zen temples such as Bong Am Sa, Sang Won Sa and Jeong Hye Sa. He is currently the Jo Sil (Zen Master) of Hwa Gye Sa and also the Bang Jang (the Superior Patriarch) of Su Dok Sa.

Great Vow Life After Life: Where Do We Go From Here?

Panel from the Whole World Is a Single Flower conference, October 2014, South Korea

“I didn’t bring my wallet.”

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS

This theme is very serious. And for me it’s quite abstract to talk about. So I just would like to share two very short stories.

I was practicing at the Providence Zen Center during one Kyol Che, my first Kyol Che in the United States, and my first in another country. I was 27 years old. At the end of the retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn visited America from Korea. I was kind of young, and my energy was high because it was at the end of Kyol Che.

It was two months for me of silent practice. I felt the same thing from the others, too. He arrived with some other teachers—Dae Bong Sunim and Dae Jin Sunim—and they gave us a speech, which was very short and in “kimchi English.” I could totally connect, because my English was also kimchi English. He told us, “Human life has no meaning.” Each word just hit my mind. That was true, human life has no meaning. That’s what led me to cut my hair and take this path. Then he said, “This no-meaning is very important, it has a very important meaning. If you attain this meaning, you will understand this no-meaning is the most important thing in a human’s life.”

The second story is something I experienced more re-

cently. You can just imagine, I have been so busy, especially for the last two weeks before this conference began. I had to go to the bank for some business, and immediately I withdrew a million won [*Approximately \$900 in U.S. dollars. —Ed.*] for some conference fees. Because I was so busy, my brain was completely stuck. So I wanted to drink a coffee in a coffee shop near Hwa Gye Sa Temple, and that would give me some chance to relax. I completely

forgot I had one million won in my bag, and I realized that I hadn’t brought my wallet. I ordered a latte and then I realized that I didn’t have a wallet. “I’m sorry, I don’t have a wallet, I didn’t bring my wallet.” Most of the workers in coffee shops, especially big brand coffee shops, would probably refuse to give me the coffee. This was a tiny, local coffee shop owned by one man. He gave me a large latte with a heart drawn in the foam. What is great vow? I saw the great vow from this man. Completely become one with the situation, just help people.

So, the subtitle for this panel is, “Where do we go from here?” Here is my answer; I will stay on this chair until this panel is finished and then I will tell you where I go after the panel is finished. When you completely become one with the situation, your great vow is already there.



Photo: Michael Schutzler

If you have peace inside yourself, then we can make peace.

Zen Master Ji Kwang

Eighteen years ago, I was writing a book. It was an important book for me, and I wrote it in Korea, where I lived at the time. This project was supported by a Korean university, for which I am thankful. Part of this book was about Zen. Since I lived in Korea, I used the opportunity to visit Zen Master Seung Sahn at Hwa Gye Sa Temple. I went to him at least three times, asking him about certain aspects of my research. I remember one occasion when I told him about an interesting experiment done by Japanese researchers. They were doing EEG readings, and they found out that during Zen meditation, there are regular, calm alpha waves, and even theta waves. It mattered to me, because it scientifically proves that there is something happening in our body and our brain during Zen meditation. Full of excitement, I told this to Dae Soen Sa Nim. He listened, and then he said without hesitation, “Bodhisattva waves necessary!”

So Zen is not a matter of our brain; it’s not a matter of keeping a special mind. It is, rather, a state of being. How are we connecting to this world? This is an important point, and I have another unusual story about that. It’s about Milarepa, the great Tibetan yogi. He was practicing strongly for three years. At one point during his practice, a demon appeared. He saw this demon and he wasn’t so afraid, but he thought, “I have to do something.” He already knew many techniques. So he thought, “OK, I’ll try this samadhi technique.” Very strong, only “don’t know.” Deep samadhi appeared. Everything became one. Beautiful alpha and theta waves. When he came out of this samadhi, the demon was still there. Not only that, he was bigger!

Milarepa was shocked. “OK, I’ll try something stron-

ger.” So he did only mantra practice: very strong, powerful mantras. “Om mani padme hum, om mani padme hum . . .” The whole world was only mantra. Everything turned into this sound. When he came out of his strong practice, he saw this demon still there—grown bigger! Now he became a little afraid. He decided, “OK, so then, the most strong and powerful practice is necessary.” So he tried visualization. The whole world—everything—became light: a very powerful meditation. Only very high-class teachers can do it. For a long time, everything became light and pure energy. But when he came out of this visualization meditation, this demon had grown really huge. Then our Milarepa was really lost. Sitting there, he thought, “I don’t know what to do.” There was nothing left but to just look at the demon. After doing so for a long time, he felt a great sorrow. He connected 100 percent with the demon; then he stood up and embraced it. After that, the demon disappeared.

It’s an interesting story. In the end, the bodhisattva mind appeared, right? Only bodhisattva waves! So Zen is not a medicine. It’s how you connect to this world and to our fellow beings. It’s not necessary to fight your demons. How do we use our mistakes? How do we use our karma to help? This is the important point.

During our complicated lives, we will always have problems. But there is no need to fight. So be kind to yourself. Then you can be kind to others. Love yourself. Love your demons. Then, you can love others, and the bodhisattva way is possible. “The great vow, life after life” means waking up each moment. Connect. Love, help, don’t fight. It starts with us. If you have peace inside yourself, then we can make peace. That’s where we go from here.

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Photo: Jim Stanford

From left: Zen Masters Dae Bong, Wu Kwang, Soeng Hyang and Bon Shim.



Under the sky there is world peace.

Zen Master Dae Kwan

Good afternoon. Are you awake?

[Audience: Yeah.]

Wow, very soft awake.

[Audience: YEAH!]

OK, start from this vow, OK? So we start from this awake vow.

I'd like to share with you from my own personal experience how I came to Zen. I was in a Theravadan tradition for quite a long time. I came to join a three-month retreat in Korea. That was the first time I encountered Zen teaching, including kong-an practice and Zen stories. At that time of my life, Zen kong-ans and Zen stories from the past were just legend. They could not connect with us. But in the January retreat, every day we practiced; every day we went to kong-an interviews, listened to the dharma talk. Suddenly, something appeared. "Wow, Zen really connects with each one of us."

At that time I heard Zen Master Su Bong, who talked about Zen Master Seung Sahn wanting to bring the Zen tradition back to China. And when I heard this, tears ran, not from my eyes, but inside my heart. And at that time, one sentence came from inside, not from the brain. It said, "I can die for you, Zen Master."

For us Chinese, we can study Chinese Buddhism easier than any of you here, because many Buddhist translations are all in Chinese. But I think Zen Master Seung Sahn had a different way to offer this Zen practice, especially from a Chinese point of view. Soon after the retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "Oh maybe you'll go back to Hong Kong and start a Zen center there." Then, actually I had a little confusion—half of me wanted to do that, but the other half wanted to go back to Thailand. I had no problem with Thailand. I liked my Thai teacher, and I loved the forest. But there is this vow. So I want to help to bring Zen back to China.

Until we started a Zen center in Hong Kong 22 years ago, nobody in Hong Kong had heard of Korean Buddhism. When we went out, they would say, "You are practicing a in cult." Many senior monks there were familiar with only the Chinese tradition, so when they saw us, they didn't even want to look at us. Even when we bowed to them, they looked at us like we were transparent. We had that kind of hard training in Hong Kong.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching helped us to go through those difficult situations. He always said, "Don't check. Don't check people. Don't check your feeling. What are you doing now? Just do it." Actually, if you're not checking people and you're not checking yourself, what appears? This attitude of accepting people. Apart from merely accepting, you also respect them, even though they don't like you. That you respect them is an important message to me, to sail through all these difficult situations.

Zen is originally from China. It's not from Korea; it's not from America. Originally it's from China. This is our heritage; this is our teaching. So after all these years with Zen Master Seung Sahn, we're finally building a good connection with Hong Kong Buddhism. Many, many

other monastics appreciate our tradition, and we've become good friends. In fact, in Hong Kong we have one place, Gak Su Temple, that is surrounded by much natural beauty. In that region are many other temples, all coexisting. At the beginning, they too didn't want to know much about us. But now they talk about "don't know" and "just do it." And finally, one of them also sent a nun to Mu Sang Sa Temple last year to attend a three-month

retreat. If you study the history of Zen Buddhism, you'll see that many great Zen masters appeared during difficult times. Now all of us face difficult situations in the world. Many countries are not at peace, and there are many conflicts—many splits in the family. So this practice of Zen to understand my true nature is very important.

We have a great monk from China, from Jo Ah Sahn. He also has a big mind; he also wants to help China. He wants to make an international school. He is building a Zen temple where Zen Master Nam Cheon killed the cat. You understand that place? He is building an international temple there, and maybe in the future we can have another international conference in that place. The last I heard about him was that, when somebody asked him, "What is practice?" He said, "Under the sky there is world peace." Under the sky. That means that in this world there is already peace. That is a speech from a Zen master. So may we start from here.

Thank you very much.



Photo: Allan Matthews

When you find Zen, what do you do?

Zen Master Soeng Hyang

Well, we've just heard such good news from some of our regions, but I don't have such good news from the United States. At a lot of our Zen groups, we have maybe 15 to 25 people, and then we have 15 and then we have 20. It's a little bit like that.

Recently I was listening to public radio and they were doing an experiment with college students, studying people's ability to do meditation. They were asked to sit in a quiet room with no stimulation, or they had another choice: they could be hit by a small electric shock every five seconds. About 75 percent preferred the electric shock. This is how difficult silence is for many Americans: they'd rather get an electric shock!

Sometimes I go to a movie and they have the previews first. BOOM BA-BOOM BA-BOOM—tremendously exaggerated noise and activity. So yesterday when I was listening to the talk about how we can help children with meditation, I personally didn't feel much hope. So many people are used to being so stimulated. There is a high attrition rate for those who do come to practice. I think we've all experienced having someone leave the practice, even after they have been practicing for many years. I used to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn, "What did we do wrong? Why did they leave?" He'd always say, "More suffering is necessary." I think it's difficult to believe in yourself, to trust the process of Zen practice. When you first start practicing, often you feel worse. You start watching your brain and watching all your thoughts, and you think you're getting worse, not better. So coming to this practice and staying requires great faith, great courage, and a great question. You have to develop the ability to see your thinking, and it can be painful at times. It's not an easy path.

I was thinking about a story that I heard Zen Master Seung Sahn tell. It's about a sparrow. She lived in a large forest. This bird was very evolved: she never checked, held or made anything! She was always paying attention, and was so gregarious that she knew all the animals in the forest. She not only knew the animals, she also respected and

loved them. One day a very rapid, horrible fire started. It was a dry, windy day. The sparrow was of course paying attention, and she flew straight up. She used her intuition, saw a pond, filled her beak, flew over the fire and dropped the water. Over and over and over, this action of dropping one drop of water onto the forest fire. And then, finally, totally exhausted, she fell into the fire.

I love that story. So . . . who died? Did her efforts even help? If we think that way—life, death, the fire was put out, it wasn't put out—that's a big mistake. We all know this fire. We need to know the fire, the suffering, the pain. It's impossible not to see it. But, again, we're very smart, so we find all these ways to avoid looking at it. We have movies; we have books; we have all kinds of things to distract ourselves. Human beings are very smart, but intelligence will not show us the way. Only a strong vow and strong direction will bring us to knowing how to put out the fire.

Dae Kwan Sunim was saying how much she likes Zen. Part of the attraction was the kong-an practice. When I met Zen Master Seung Sahn, I didn't know much about Zen, but I'd read about kong-ans. So that was the first thing I asked him, I asked, "Do you teach kong-an practice?" "Yes, yes, I teach kong-an practice!" Then I said the worst thing: "Are you Japanese?" "No, I'm not Japanese!" I was so stupid, so I said, "I didn't know they had Buddhism in Korea!" Then he got even more upset! But he still was so nice to me. "I am giving a dharma talk this Sunday. Please come!" So, most important, if we want to help this world, we have to love what we do. So I went to that dharma talk. He loved what he did. He loved Zen. And he taught it really well. You see, when he was talking, he was spitting, spitting out everything [*makes spitting sound*] because he was so enthusiastic, so excited. If I see someone that excited about what they're doing, then I stay with them. We have to be excited—spit it out! Whatever we do, just find that we really trust it; we really love it; we want to share it. Then this world will be healing rather than burning. Thank you.

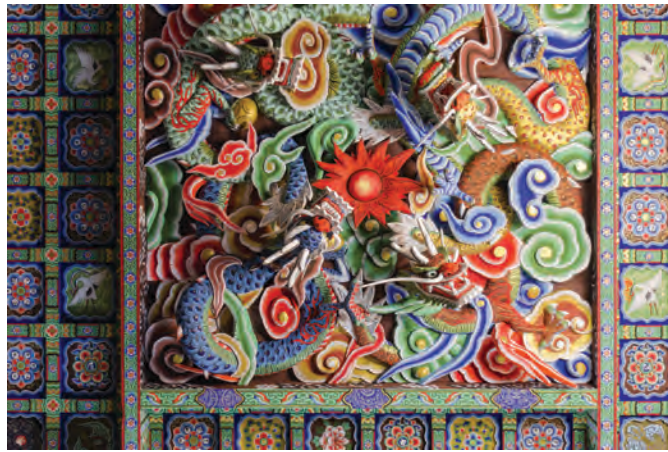


Photo: Allan Matthews

Questions and Answers

Question: Is there a way to pass on our excitement about Zen and learning life skills from Zen without it sounding preachy? Because, for me, what is important is that we're not trying to convert anybody, not trying to pass on our opinions, but pass on what we've learned from Zen.

Zen Master Soeng Hyang: Somebody has to come to Zen, you don't bring Zen to somebody else. I worked for the same nursing agency for long time, and I did two hundred-day retreats while I was working for this agency. And they were a wonderful group of people—social workers, nurses, doctors, nurse's aids and chaplains. The last time I came back from one of those retreats—they liked me, I worked there a long time—and I looked great because I was thin and my eyes were bright. And maybe ten of them said, "Bobby, you look so great, you'll have to tell us all about it. What were you *doing?*" I said, "I was doing my Zen practice." "I want to hear all about it!" The next day, they forgot. They never asked me again. And they were really high-class, good bodhisattva people, but they have to come to a practice. Even if I walked on water, they would not have asked me for Zen teaching. For me, I read one sentence in a book, and then I was looking all over for a teacher. It has to be that way, I think.

Moderator (Andrzej Stec JDPSN): What that means is we have to look good every day!

Hye Tong Sunim JDPS: I would like to ask her to please ask the question again.

Q: Is there a way to impart what we've learned personally? What I've learned from Zen is an important life skill and I'd like to be able to share or pass this to someone else without sounding preachy because I'm also personally self-conscious when someone tries to be preachy with me and I don't want to seem like that.

HTSN: OK, my answer: What are you doing right now this moment?

Q: I am sitting here listening with my ears and my heart.

HTSN: That's the best speech from the Zen tradition, and we always try to pass it on to anyone else. But many times it doesn't work. Just like Zen Master Soeng Hyang

said. So sometimes maybe preaching is necessary, if that works with someone. Maybe not, but maybe sometimes it works. So we just use it to share these experiences. This is my experience.

Zen Master Ji Kwang: Here comes the demon-story answer. What do you not like? Or whom do you not like? *[The questioner doesn't answer.]* There is someone you don't like, right? There's somebody you maybe really hate, right? Be serious.

Q: Yes.

ZMJK: Go and embrace him. That will be—*exciting*. And that's a good way to pass Zen on to someone.

Q: I have a question for Zen Master Soeng Hyang. I didn't understand your sparrow story and I would like you to elaborate.

ZMSH: Oh, you don't understand the story? Come over here.

[When the man was almost to the edge of the stage Zen Master Soeng Hyang stood up and threw the contents of her water glass at him. The audience burst into laughter and applauded. The questioner was laughing, too.]

Q: I would like to ask Zen Master Soeng Hyang if a cancer patient were going to die, how are you going to tell him where to go?

ZMSH: That's not my job.

Q: If they ask the question, "Where am I going? I am so afraid!"

ZMSH: I did this job for 27 years. Nobody asked me, "Where am I going?" Maybe because I was in America.

Q: But this is Singapore . . .

ZMSH: I already answered you. Nobody asked me.

Q: So I'm asking you.

ZMSH: You're asking me? To the cemetery.

Q: Some people have told me that they've gotten into Zen because they've gotten some great sorrow in their life, some great tragedy happened and they began to practice Zen from that. That wasn't my story, that didn't happen to me. But what you said, about just reading a line in a book and looking for a teacher, I did that, too. But it's not some sorrow. How did you come to Zen? Why did you search for a teacher? Because if you ask me I don't know. I don't

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know why I searched for a teacher, but here I am.

ZMSH: Yes, people come for different reasons. That's not important. When you find Zen, what do you do? So don't drop out. Stay with it.

Moderator: So I will ask the other panelists, why did you start practicing Zen? Did it come from big suffering, or was it something else?

ZMJK: I have a short story. Once a person was looking for food at the beach. So he was walking around only trying to find shells and seafood for cooking. It was quite exhausting. But then when he opened one shell, he found a beautiful shining pearl inside. Although he didn't look for pearls, he found a treasure.

HTSN: I had a lot of suffering. But these days it's easy for me to forget. I think that's one of the benefits from Zen practice. Maybe Zen masters are able to forget faster what has already passed. To me, it doesn't sound true that you or we didn't have suffering. We had. Maybe because of the benefit from the practice, I think we are able to forget, and we focus on what's happening in front of me. As some teacher already said, once we see who's actually got that kind of capacity, to forget about something past, the next thing we have to do is great vow. What is this practice for?

ZMDK: From my experience, if a person is ready, the teacher will appear. Actually, at a different level, when somebody really opens up your mind, sometimes it's from a book, but sometimes it's from some incident, but it depends on whether you are ready or not.

I have a story to share. My father is a Buddhist. Actually, he brought me to Buddhism. I was born in a family with a different religious culture. So my father always thinks he is a teacher. We visited many temples together. Nobody can teach him. But he liked Dae Soen Sa Nim, because he said Dae Soen Sa Nim can answer any question. He said he had a question he wanted to ask Zen Master Seung Sahn, so I brought my father to meet him. Then he said, "Zen Master Seung Sahn, I have a question. I have some property I want to sell. What time is good to sell this?"

Then Dae Soen Sa Nim, very fast, replied "Spring, you sell."

But it's true. By spring, somebody bought this property. Then he always hit me and said, "You are Zen master.

I ask you. Shall I buy this stock? You never tell me what to buy. You're no good!" Then, he is always strong and his voice is louder than me and I don't have the energy to talk to him. A few words and I shut up.

Before he died, the first day of the new year, he called me. "I want to die. When am I going to die?" He asked me that. I said, "When you die, that day you die." I just said that to him.

Less than one month before he died, I visited him; I fed him; I brought him food. His whole life is practicing Pure Land Buddhism. He only practiced "Amita Bul, Amita Bul." Then on that day he told me, "I don't believe in Amita Bul anymore. I asked Amita Bul to take me to the Pure Land. He still left me here to suffer. I don't believe. I don't chant Amita Bul anymore." So I asked him, "Uncle,"—after I became a nun, in our tradition we don't address our father as "Father" but rather "Uncle." So I asked him, "Uncle, now your body is suffering. But if you die, does your mind go to the Pure Land or does your body go to the Pure Land?" Suddenly, his mind stopped for a few seconds. Then he said, "OK, let's chant." Then we chanted together, the Great Dharaṇī and Amita Bul.

When he was dying, I was with him. I said, "Are you ready to go? Is your mind detached from all the things you worried about during your lifetime?" Then, with his breathing mask on, he nodded his head. Then peacefully he left; he died.

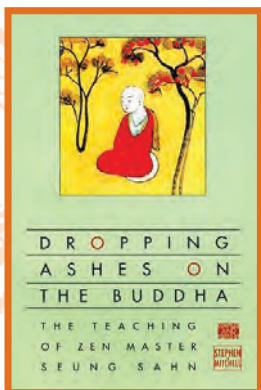
So what I am saying is, somebody has to be ready. There is always dharma in front of us. Everything is a teacher in front of us. Are we open to that teaching? Are we open enough? Are we ready to see things as they really are? If you can really see things as they are and accept things as they are, actually that is what this vow is beginning. Because at that moment, you and everything already connect. In that connection you can really give whatever they need. It's not about our ideas. This is why we are here. We practice to have that kind of mind. And this mind, it's not just on the cushion, but we have to exercise it in our everyday life with our family, with our workmates, with our friends. And slowly it will affect the community and society and finally the whole country. This is the message Zen Master Seung Sahn always kept saying to us all the time during his life. Thank you. ♦

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Photo: Jan Sendzimir



A FRESH APPROACH TO ZEN



The Teachings of Zen Master Man Gong. Translated and edited by Zen Master Dae Kwang, Hye Tong Sunim, and Kathy Park. Zen Master Man Gong (1872-1946) received transmission from Zen Master Kyong Ho, and is one of the truly towering figures in modern Korean Zen. He and his students played a central role in re-establishing the Buddhist tradition in Korea after centuries of suppression during the Chosan dynasty. Zen Master Man Gong was the grand teacher of Zen Master Seung Sahn. 56 pages. *Kwan Um School of Zen. ISBN 962861015-5. \$10.00*

Don't-Know Mind: The Spirit of Korean Zen. Zen Master Wu Kwang uses stories about Korean Zen Masters from Ma-tsu to Seung Sahn to present Zen teaching applicable to anyone's life. 128 pages. *Shambhala. ISBN 1-59030-110-2. \$14.95*

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Dropping Ashes on the Buddha: The Teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Compiled and edited by Stephen Mitchell. A delightful, irreverent, and often hilarious record of interactions with Western students. 244 pages. *Grove Press. ISBN 0-8021-3052-6. \$14.00*

Wanting Enlightenment is a Big Mistake: Teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Compiled and edited by Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS. Foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn. 199 pages. *Shambhala, 2006. ISBN 1-59030-340-7. \$15.95*

Only Don't Know: Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Issues of work, relationships, and suffering are discussed as they relate to meditation practice. 230 pages. *Shambhala, 1999. ISBN 1-57062-432-1. \$16.95*

Elegant Failure: A Guide to Zen Koans. Drawing on over 30 years of practice and teaching, Zen Master Wu Kwang has selected 22 cases from *The Blue Cliff Record* and *Wu-men-kuan* that he finds deeply meaningful and helpful for meditation practice. In *Elegant Failure*, he provides a wealth of background information and personal anecdotes for each koan that help illuminate its meaning without detracting from its paradoxical nature. 256 pages. *Rodmell Press, 2010. ISBN 1-93048-525-5. \$16.95.*

Compass of Zen. Zen Master Seung Sahn. Compiled and edited by Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS. Simple, clear, and often hilarious presentation of the essential teachings of the main Buddhist traditions—culminating in Zen—by one of the most beloved Zen Masters of our time. 394 pages. *Shambhala, 1997. ISBN 1-57062-329-5. \$24.95*

Ten Gates: The Kong-an Teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Zen Master Seung Sahn. Presents kong-an practice in action, through real interactions between the beloved Korean Zen Master and his students as they work via letters. 152 pages. *Shambhala, 2007. ISBN 978-1-59030-417-4. \$14.95*

Open Mouth Already a Mistake: Talks by Zen Master Wu Kwang. Teaching of a Zen Master who is also a husband, father, practicing Gestalt therapist and musician. 238 pages. *Primary Point Press, 1997. ISBN 0-942795-08-3. \$18.95*

The Whole World is a Single Flower: 365 Kong-ans for Everyday Life. Zen Master Seung Sahn. The first kong-an collection to appear in many years; Christian, Taoist, and Buddhist sources. 267 pages. *Reprinted by Primary Point Press 2015. ISBN 978-0-942795-17-2. \$17.95*

Butterflies on a Sea Wind. Anne's compelling narrative describes both the physical and mental demands of retreats and the challenges of integrating Zen concepts into modern day life. 179 pages. *Andrews McMeel ISBN 0-7407-2721-4. \$12.95*

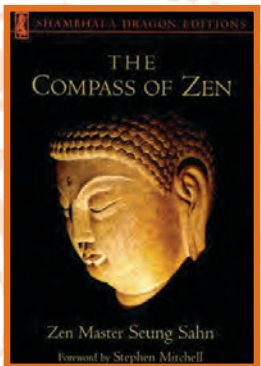
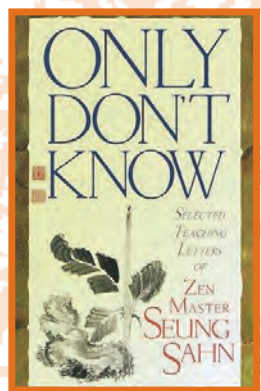
Wake Up! On the Road with a Zen Master. An entertaining documentary that captures Zen Master Seung Sahn's energy and presents the core of his teaching. 54 minutes. *Primary Point Press, 1992. VHS: ISBN 0-942795-07-5. \$30.00 DVD: ISBN 0-942795-14-8. \$30.00*

Chanting Instructional CD. The morning and evening bell chants, daily chants, plus special chanting. If you're ordering this CD to learn the chants, we suggest that you also order a copy of the chanting book if you don't already have one. *Primary Point Press ISBN 0-942795-13-X. \$10.00. Chanting book: \$12.00.*

The Whole World is a Single Flower: 365 Kong-ans for Everyday Life. Zen Master Seung Sahn. CD-ROM version for Mac and PC. Audio recordings of Zen Master Seung Sahn's commentaries together with the full text of the kong-an collection. 2 discs. *Primary Point Press, 2006. ISBN 0-942795-15-6. \$30.00*

Zen Buddhist Chanting CD. Chanting by Korean monk Hye Tong Sunim. Includes Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra, Kwan Seum Bosal chanting, Sashi Maji chanting, Homage to the Three Jewels, The Four Mantras, and an extended version of Kwan Seum Bosal chanting. *Primary Point Press ISBN 0-942795-16-4. \$15.00*

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The Five Desires: Living Wisely with Ourselves

Editor's note: Periodically we've had a series of topical articles about fundamental Buddhist principles. For this issue, we've asked the European teachers to offer their views on the five desires: money, sex, fame, food, and sleep. Desire, at its root, is our own original nature. Desires point to essential elements of our lives. Clinging to desire, we seduce and delude ourselves. Seeing into desire clearly is seeing into our nature clearly, and living wisely with these essential components of our lives. We present these articles to offer guidance in how we participate with our own humanity.

Desire for Money: You Can Change Your Wanting-Karma

Ja An JDPSN (Bogumila Malinowska)

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Money and sex are like
a spiteful snake.

Put your concern
with them far away.

—Zen Master Seung Sahn,
Temple Rules

Money does not stink.
—Latin saying

In Buddhism we know that human beings have some desires that hinder and obscure their lives. Those desires are very intelligent, and they often appear as important values. Buddha spoke about five main human desires: money, sex, sleep, food and fame.

I want to say something controversial. Our late teacher, Zen Master Wu Bong, said one day that all those five desires, if digested, will become our treasures. That means originally that those things are not good, not bad. It's only human attachment and wanting more and more that makes them poison. If humans could use all those five desires correctly, then they wouldn't be a problem.

Here is an example about how the desire for money and using money correctly changes the value of the money.

Since ancient times, people understood that money may be a reason for murder, theft, war, hate, jealousy, low or high self-esteem, competition, suicide, and so forth. These circumstances and feelings associated with money can lead to the conclusion that money is something bad, in the same way that sex, fame and other desires may be seen as bad. From that perspective, it would be better if people—especially those who choose the spiritual life—didn't even touch money.

There is a famous story about a monk who was much respected in his small community. People often visited him to get advice. One day, however, the monk changed

his behavior. He started to ask for money from everyone who came to his place. After some time, the people became unhappy. It was unpleasant for them to experience greed from this monk, but they still needed his advice.

Then winter came, along with much severe weather. Near the end of winter, heavy rains came that lasted for a month. There was not enough food, not enough clothing, and everywhere was cold and wet. The greedy monk asked a senior person from the community to come have a talk. Then he gave him all the money he had collected. He instructed the person to buy food, clothes and wood for everyone in the community. All the people were overjoyed. But they also felt ashamed. The whole community realized the reason for the monk's greed, but they still asked him for more explanation. After they apologized to him, he told them that a long time ago during meditation, he had a feeling about the future of this community, about the flood and the hunger, so he decided to collect money.

People can deal with money in different ways. Some people collect money for pleasure, to possess things and to get a special feeling from owning them. It possibly gives them a feeling that there is something permanent in their life. Other people want money to get other things: fame, sex, good food, a lofty position, nice companions, a good home, or even many good places to live and visit, traveling, possessing great pieces of art, experiencing situations people dream of, being beautiful. The list of those things becomes longer and longer as time passes, generation after generation, and there is always more to acquire. There is nothing inherently wrong with all these things, but people mostly want them to forget about both their own emptiness and the human responsibility around life and death.

One other side of money and our desires is that many times, those desires obscure the very beauty and treasure of this moment. This is a story about that.

Ryokan, a Zen master, lived the simplest kind of

life in a little hut at the foot of a mountain. One evening a thief visited the hut only to discover there was nothing in it to steal.

Ryokan returned and caught him. "You may have come a long way to visit me," he told the prowler, "and you should not return empty-handed. Please take my clothes as a gift."

The thief was bewildered. He took the clothes and slunk away.

Ryokan sat naked, watching the moon. "Poor fellow," he mused, "I wish I could give him this beautiful moon."¹

There is another story about a man who wanted the money to buy a house in the most expensive place, somewhere like London or New York. He was working hard and also put some money into the lottery. He was always thinking, "If I get a house in the most expensive area then I will feel good." Finally, he won the lottery and he could buy a house in the most expensive area, where he was able to live with the most wealthy people. He was very happy.

After he moved to his new home, he decided to go for a walk to see the neighborhood. As he was walking and looking around, he realized that his home was small, and all the other houses looked better than his. He was upset and devastated. He was thinking only about how his house was so small, and how all houses around it were better.

This is a very sad story, about how having money and things cannot fill you up, and instead of giving happiness, it only makes one feel even more empty, even more hungry. He lost the sense of his life completely. It was because his mind was so hungry.

Is there any way to cure the desire for money, sex, food, sleep, fame and hunger?

Zen Master Seung Sahn said,

We can save money and send food over to Africa and India; that's OK. But many problems will remain. Taking away the primary cause is very important. It's like a game of pool. You hit the ball

directly into the pocket, and that's one ball in the pocket. But the high-class technique is to hit this ball and that ball and other balls, so that all of them go into the pockets. Zen-style action is like that; we can give money to help hungry people, but if we hit people's hungry minds, we can help change their minds so that they can help their own country. The high-class technique is to help people help themselves.²

The last story I want to tell is about Zen Master Seung Sahn's advice given to a student who was complaining that it was impossible for him to focus during meditation. He said, "When I sit, I always think about a few things: money, sex, a good job and again, money, sex and a good job. I suffer a lot. How can I stop?"

Dae Soen Sa Nim said, "You must do a thousand bows every day for a hundred days."

The student continued complaining, "I don't need more suffering. Why do I have to suffer even more?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn answered, "This suffering will help you to get rid of your constant thinking, and possibly you can change your wanting-karma."

After a hundred days, the student started a relationship with a nice girlfriend, got a new job and some money. Dae Soen Sa Nim used to say that it is better to do something (he meant strong practice) if you want something, rather than thinking about it endlessly. By doing something, then possibly we can start correct Zen practice. Then we can move from "for me" to "not for me;" beyond merely "getting something" to "then what?" As Zen Master Wu Bong taught, when we do that, then the five desires truly become our treasures.

Notes

1. From *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2008), 32.

2. Zen Master Seung Sahn, from a dharma talk given in the United States on March 1, 1985. <http://www.kwanumzen.org/?teaching=how-can-sitting-save-this-hungry-world>

Desire for Sex: Our Breeding Season Lasts All Year Long

Igor Piniński JDPSN



In the Temple Rules, Zen Master Seung Sahn writes: "Money and sex are like a spiteful snake. Put your concern with them far away."

This is a controversial sentence. There are often questions about it during dharma talks.

Sexuality is an important element of our human body and psyche. How can we put our concern with it far away?

In most cultures, sex has been surrounded by regulations and restrictions. Everywhere in the world, you can go to jail because of sexual behaviors that are considered wrong. Just what exactly is considered wrong differs between countries.

Why is sex considered so dangerous? Probably because

it's the strongest desire we have, the most difficult to control and therefore capable of creating lots of suffering.

I live in a village where there are a lot of cats. Every year in February and March, in their breeding season, I can see male cats walking around that are dirty, skinny, bleeding from their wounds, stressed and looking miserable. Maybe they have some short moments of pleasure, but most of the time they have to chase, run, fight and struggle. When the breeding season is over, they return to normal life, in which they have time for eating, washing and grooming themselves, and playing. And they look definitely much happier. Only the cats who have been castrated show no interest in the breeding rituals and avoid all of its pain and stress. They don't seem to be sorry that they are missing something important, and they live approximately twice as long.

I don't think human beings are much different from cats, except our breeding season lasts all year long. Does this mean that if we all get ourselves castrated then this world would become a happier place? I don't know, and I hope we will not need to find out. Desire for sex is part of our lives. It is present in our culture, in social life, even on spiritual paths.

One of my favorite writers, Terry Pratchett, used to make a lot of fun of spirituality, and Zen in particular. He once wrote something I'll try and recap from memory: *What would be the point of being a hermit who, after years of meditating and renouncing sex had attained great spiritual powers, if there were no young women passing by the meditation cave from time to time, who would see you and say "Ooooh . . ."*?

Because we are human, there always exists the potential for sexual attraction between us. I even heard people say that the monks and nuns who vowed to live in celibacy are actually very sexy. Naturally, that's not what they intend, but it's present. So what can you do about it?

Speaking of celibacy, I'm not a monk and never wanted

to be one, so I don't know how it works in their lives, and what they do about sexual desire. Maybe one of them will write something about it here one day. But some believe that celibacy is essential for making progress on a spiritual path. Still, what is the relationship between celibacy, sexual desire and spiritual practice?

I believe it's good for each of us to decide what we want to do with our desire for sex and how we are going to control it. Each of us has to face this decision, whether we want to or not. Some pretend they don't have that ability or that there is nothing to decide. Some of us embrace this as a decision, not only to make spiritual progress, but also to live a happy life. Monastic vows are one such way to make a decision. Another is marriage, and it works for me. But even within these two choices, we still have to decide how to relate to our sexuality. There are also other ways that may work for other people. The key point, in my opinion, is to be clear about it and honest with ourselves and with others: "Am I potentially available for sex, or not?" And that's not easy, because when playing with our desire for sex, and others' desires too, this "maybe, who knows?" approach seems much more attractive. Thus, it is more seductive to pretend we aren't making a choice and don't bear responsibility.

So, keeping monastic vows, marriage vows or any other kind of vow is not enough. Moment to moment, mindfulness is necessary, not only with keeping celibacy or being true to your wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend/whatever, but with all your speech and actions, because our sexuality is always present. Fighting it makes no sense to me, because if we do, it will fight back and finally can take control of us. Keeping this spiteful snake far away is not a good idea to me, either. You may forget it's there and one day you may step on it. I'd rather see it for what it is and act with understanding, clarity and compassion toward ourselves and others.

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Desire for Fame: Unsurpassed Humility

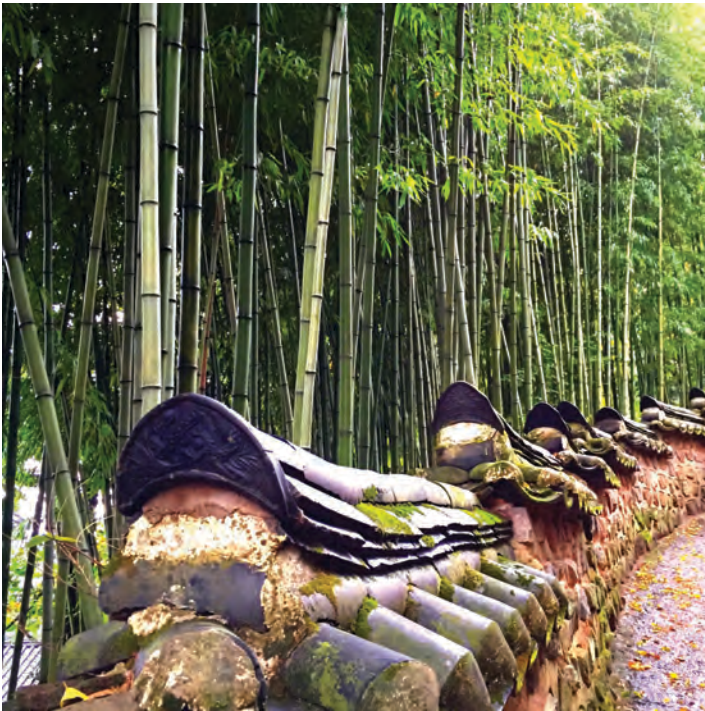
Andrzej Piotrowski JDPSN




What is wrong with fame? Nothing at all! Like everything in the universe, it is not good, not bad. A strong voice makes a strong echo. That's all. In the case where our actions are beneficent, it can be natural feedback from the world that we have done some-

thing valuable, that our contribution to society is appreciated, that people see us as somebody who can enrich

human culture in some specific way. As long as our intention to help this world in the best way we can is pure and sincere, fame is only a by-product of our activity. But the problem is that our "I, my, me" mind wants to make that its business. That's the birth of ignorance and distortion. This kind of mind produces constant desire, which poisons our original clarity and makes us blind. Because this "I, my, me" is by nature something unreal and empty, it needs constant approval as food to exist, even at the cost of other beings. It is like a hungry ghost that never




Photos: Barry Briggs


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has enough. In fact, desire for fame usually means, “I am, and I want to be better than others.” Or, “I want to be great and admired.” This kind of attitude is easily ascribed to people who have high social position: artists, actors, athletes, politicians, celebrities and the like. But it doesn’t only refer to those kinds of people. Desire for fame often becomes a companion of every human being. It can be secretly hidden even in our spiritual path. Let me share with you a funny and ridiculous story.

Somewhere there was a monastery inhabited by many monks and guided by a highly respected abbot. He was really special: the pure embodiment of wisdom, compassion, humility and all noble virtues. At least it looked like this. He was the first one to help others, the last one to expect any profits, always ready to shoulder the hardest task and silently serve his fellows. Although he didn’t look like a sinner, he always liked doing repentance practices, apologizing often to everybody for everything. All monks loved and admired him and were happy to have such a teacher. In fact, he became famous not only in his monastery, but in the whole country. They thought he was a saint: a holy, fully enlightened man. The energy of inspiration radiated from him like the light from the sun.

But one day something strange happened. During the sermon, while preaching about the holy life, he said, “Please look at me! As far as humility is concerned, nobody can surpass me.”

And what happened? Kind of an earthquake, yes? In one moment, everything was turned upside down! They felt cheated, like buying a nice box of food and discovering that it is completely rotten. Even one drop of poison can make a whole pot of nutritious soup inedible.

Our practice and teaching always puts the essential question in front of us: “Why do you eat every day?” “When you do something, why do you do this?” “What kind of intention is your activity rooted in?” The problem of “I, my, me” mind is that it looks for happiness but finds only temporary satisfaction. It is unstable, weak and easy to destroy by external, impermanent circumstances. Fame easily becomes infamy. Success easily becomes defeat. Attachment to and constant desire for them make our minds crazy, never satisfied and always hurting others. That’s why Buddhism instructs us to meditate correctly and get insight into this old “I, my, me” habit. It is originally empty and doesn’t exist outside the deluded mind. When we realize its emptiness and delusion, desire for fame—and all other desires as well—loses its power and control over our lives. Dissatisfaction turns into complete mind. Our true self doesn’t need any acclaim or applause. It is always here and now, present and ready to help and love others. Then all beings reflect and return our love, and we are already bodhisattva celebrities without even knowing or being concerned about it. That’s correct fame!

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The Wheel of Food: Together Eat, Together Die

Namhee Chon JDPSN



Not long ago, I asked one young resident woman at the Zen Center Berlin, Sophie Vandenkercove, to give an introductory dharma talk. Since we both share a passion for making kefir, I suggested she talk about the fermentation process. She happily agreed and gave a beautiful speech about bodhisattva bacteria:

Since my wish to keep a pet at the Zen center could not be met, I am happy now to own kefir grains to raise. A kefir grain is a mixture of yeast and bacteria. It is white in color and has the shape of a mini-walnut. It needs to be fed with milk and must be kept in a warm place to feel well and to grow. So I take care of them. While they are growing, a process of fermentation takes place. At the same time, something

good happens to me: I get this delicious and nutritious kefir drink! These kefir grains most probably don’t think, “We want to keep clear mind and help other beings.” They are just naturally helpful, while they are doing what they do. And they do it without wanting to be someone or something else. Through them I realize the meaning of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching: “If you are clear, you help the whole universe.” And thanks to them, I hear Zen Master Seung Sahn asking me strongly the question: “Why do you eat every day?”

Kefir grains are complete as they are and in what they do. We are the same, so long as we do not make anything special. So at this point everything is just simple and clear: If you are hungry, what do you do? Eat. If someone is hungry, then what? Give food to this person. Thus, eating food is dharma, and giving someone food is dharma.

So why is food considered one of the obstacles that

binds us to suffering?

We certainly all need food to sustain our body and mind. This is neither good nor bad. But humans unfortunately become attached to many things, and thus some follow the wheel of food instead of turning the wheel of dharma. What does following the wheel of food mean? It means: I am hungry—I don't eat. I am not hungry—I eat. If someone is hungry—I keep my food for myself.

We call this attachment not only to food, but also to the idea of an independent being called "I": I want this food; I don't want that food. Food for my health, for my body, and everything for me! The whole universe becomes our stomach. The more we eat, the hungrier we get, hungry not only for food but also for love, appreciation, satisfaction and so on. Here we run wild like a gerbil in a wheel, and there is no stopping, and there is never enough.

How big is the pile of shit we produce in our lifetime? It is indeed our choice whether we ferment and transform our food into humus—from which flowers of insight and compassion can grow—or whether we make only a stinking pile of pollution.

This choice starts with why and with what mind we eat food. A chant that monks and nuns sing in some Zen halls in Korea before each meal, makes this point clear: "As we

receive this food, may all sentient beings including ourselves come to realize our true nourishment, which is the happiness of meditation, and to be filled with dharma . . . Food is a medicine for curing the decay of the body. Let us take it for the purpose of perfecting our practice."¹ The food we eat helps us to return to our original true nature. Our practice to find our true nature does not seek to live well and die well, since our true nature is not dependent on life and death. Rather, our practice goes beyond life and death.

Once a student asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "Sir, let's say there are several shipwrecked people in a small boat in the vast ocean. They are all starving and only a little food and water is left. What should they do? Who should take the food?" As fast as an arrow Zen Master Seung Sahn answered, "Together eat, together die!"

What is this thing that remains always clear during all times of together eating and together dying? If you attain this point, the whole universe says, "Thank you! Please enjoy your meal!"

Notes

1. From Martine Batchelor and Son'gyong Sunim, *Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

"Why did you come here? To sleep?"

Zen Master Bon Shim



Rather than resting the body, rest the mind. If you completely attain mind, the body has no problems. If both mind and body become clear, For the God-man, a high class job is not necessary.¹

Zen Master Seung Sahn said that sleep is the most powerful demon. I had been struggling with it on the cushion for a long time, until its power started to loosen. Every time when we are daydreaming on the cushion or any other place, we are dreaming; we are separated; we are losing connection. In that moment we don't know what is going on and where we are. If that happens, no big deal, next moment we may be awakened and in tune with no-mind again.

Zen Master Seung Sahn told an interesting story about a monk who couldn't help himself. Every time he sat on the cushion, he would fall asleep. It bothered him a lot, because he was a sincere practitioner, so one day he went to Zen Master Seung Sahn and asked him for advice. He was told to put a roll of toilet paper on his head while he was sitting, so every

time he moved, the paper would fall down and wake him up. Not only would it wake the monk up, but the whole room would hear it and laugh at him. It continued for some time, but since he truly wanted to stay awake, he tried very hard and never gave up. Finally there was no noise from the side where the paper monk (as he was named) sat. Thanks to his determination he managed to develop strong concentration, and finally, he became a great monk.

Sleep is a close cousin of laziness. They belong to the same family. According to Buddha's teaching, sleep and laziness are one of the five deeply rooted hindrances on our Path.

When I went to Korea to sit Kyol Che, it was very hard to get up at three in the morning. I had to motivate myself: "Why did you come here? To sleep?" I used this medicine each time when I started to fall asleep during the rest of the Kyol Che. This experience taught me how to work with my hindrances, gently and with patience.

We are very lucky: with the tools we have, we can truly do everything. The only question is if we can wake up from this self-centered dream.

Notes

1. Mu Mun Kwan, Case 9. Translation by Zen Master Seung Sahn.

A Wedding Talk

“When you think about it, Dad, hope and fear are the same thing.”

Dharma teacher Garret Condon of the New Haven Zen Center gave this talk at the wedding of his daughter, Carolyn Condon and Matthew Jacobs on Sept. 27 at the Trinity College Chapel in Hartford, Connecticut. Garret and fellow dharma teacher John Elias officiated at the ceremony—the first Buddhist wedding at the Trinity College Chapel. They have been advisors to the Trinity College Zen Group, co-sponsored by the chapel and the New Haven Zen Center, for 18 years.

Garret Condon

I'd like to share a few thoughts about this extraordinary couple.

Buddhists have an optimistic view of human beings. We believe that humans are naturally kind and wise. The practice of Buddhism is to see through some of our small-mindedness and rediscover that deepest self—the “big mind” that we share with all beings. Returning to this big mind is what we mean by awakening.

Buddhists talk about enlightenment, and sometimes it sounds mystical and magical. Someone once asked my late teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, to give a concise definition of Zen Buddhism. He said: “Zen is about understanding your mind and helping other people.” Wisdom and compassion. Very simple—not necessarily easy, but simple.

On this path toward wisdom and compassion, Buddhists identify six so-called paramitas, or perfections, which are really behaviors and virtues, which, if we nurture them, provide the elusive “win-win.” Cultivating these virtues gets us closer to our true selves, and also creates a kinder and more peaceful world around us.

The six perfections are: generosity, morality, effort, meditation, wisdom and patience. Because we are naturally endowed with wisdom and compassion, we all have the seeds of these perfections—and some of us have very healthy plants grown from these seeds. I want to talk briefly about the soon-to-be-married couple and the evidence of the paramitas in their lives.

Generosity

Seven years ago, Matt became acquainted with the Condon family at a turbulent moment in family history. Let's just say there was a lot of suffering and death—some of it tragic, all of it difficult. He didn't really know us and we

didn't know him well. Through it all, Matt had only one phrase on his lips: “How can I help?” And in every case, he helped in any way he could—driving, comforting and sometimes just being present. It was more generosity than I could have mustered at that age, and it reflected not just on Matt's character, but on Willie and Headley's values and the way they had raised their kids.

Morality

Morality in the Buddhist sense is not simply obeying the rules. It's about being able to discern the correct response in every situation. Matt and Carolyn wanted their wedding day to be a statement about their own ethical values, which is why we'll all be eating wonderful vegetarian food later tonight. They just took in a rescue dog who had been badly neglected by his former owners. That little dog is going to have a great life with Matt and Carolyn. I see in both of them the commitment to

act ethically and consciously in their daily lives.

Effort

The perfection of effort is about committing ourselves to putting our energy behind the quest for real wisdom and selfless compassion. It also means that, from moment to moment, we focus on what is right in front of us. If this perfection is the battery that powers the rest, then it's well charged in Matt and Carolyn's case. They bring energy and persistence to their personal, social and professional lives. You need only see Matt pivot and spin from breakfast to conference call, or follow Carolyn as she searches for obscure film footage in the Library of Congress to see constant effort.

Meditation

Living mindfully is at the core of Buddhism. Although

(Continued on page 26)



Photo: Shana Sureck Photography

Book Review

Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong

By Norman Fischer

Shambhala Publications, 2013

Review by Barry Briggs JDPSN

Zen Master Seung Sahn had a unique talent for encapsulating essential Buddhist teachings in just a few words, and these slogans continue to inspire and motivate practitioners around the world:

Put it all down.

Only go straight!

Don't make anything.

Just do it!

Of course, Zen Master Seung Sahn wasn't the first Buddhist teacher to use slogans; for example, Atisa, a 10th-century master from Bengal, developed a set of 59 practice slogans with a specific function: the development of compassion.

Over time, Atisa's slogans were integrated into Vajrayana Buddhism and became the *lojong* mind training practice. In Tibetan Buddhism, *lojong* training develops *bodhicitta* (literally, "enlightenment mind"), the aspiration to save all beings from suffering.

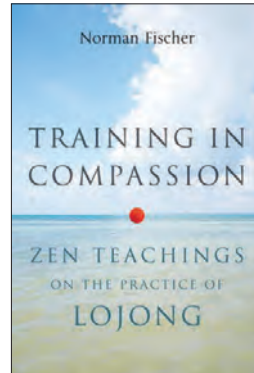
The *lojong* slogans range from intuitively obvious (*Be grateful to everyone.*) to others that seem more opaque (*This time, get it right!*). When employed in sequence and over time, the *lojong* slogans promise to reveal our deep connection to all beings.

At first glance, the *lojong* methodology may seem quite foreign to Zen practitioners. After all, Zen is sometimes described as "wall-gazing" practice—sitting quietly with mind and keeping a clear direction. Zen usually does not employ a structured framework, and certainly doesn't project an outcome.

So, when Norman Fischer, a widely respected Zen teacher, writes a commentary on the 59 *lojong* slogans, we might take note.

Fischer received dharma transmission in the Shunryu Suzuki lineage of Japanese Soto Zen in 1988 and serves as the guiding teacher of the Everyday Zen Foundation. He has published more than a dozen books of essays and poetry. Notably, he has served as a vigorous advocate for interreligious dialogue, saying:

I feel that in our period it is the challenge of religious traditions to do something more than simply reassert and reinterpret their faiths, hoping for loyal adherents to what they perceive to be the true doctrine.



In this spirit, Fischer turned to the *lojong* slogans in his most recent book, *Training in Compassion*. In explaining his motivation for writing about a practice associated with Tibetan Buddhism, Fischer notes:

[This] has to do with what I consider a serious weakness in Zen: its deficiency in explicit teachings on compassion . . . Since Zen is so fixated on cutting through complications and focusing on a few simple, profound points, it assumes rather than encourages compassion.

While Fischer's commentary follows the linear method of the slogans, he encourages readers to approach *lojong* training in any way that make sense; for those already engaged in dharma practice, this method might trigger a profound insight into an unexpected aspect of training.

As sometimes happens with dharma teachings, each of the *lojong* slogans can contain the entirety of the buddhadharma.

For example, Fischer's commentary on the slogan "Abandon hope" exposes how hope (an aspect of desire-mind) can shape our approach to practice. We begin practice with hopes and expectations, of course—otherwise we'd never enter a meditation hall. But Fischer notes that expectations can change over time—and even disappear:

Practice disappears as a vehicle for self-improvement, and the only thing important for you to know is to live your life, which means to continue with your mind-training. Shunryu Suzuki called this "practice without a gaining idea."

So this slogan is telling you: when you are excited about your progress or discouraged about your lack of progress, let go of that silly thought. Abandon all hope and go happily on.

Abandon ideas, fears, hopes and all the rest, and go happily on! And, as the last of the slogans says, "Don't expect applause!"

Many of the *lojong* slogans bring us face to face with the arrogance of certainty, a needed medicine for those who think they're getting somewhere with practice. For example, consider the injunction to "Do good, avoid evil, appreciate your lunacy, and pray for help."

Why would anyone wish to appreciate his or her own

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lunacy? And to whom would we pray for help? Fischer investigates this unlikely slogan by writing:

Bow to your own weakness, your own craziness, your own resistance. Congratulate yourself for them, appreciate them. Truly, it is a marvel, the extent to which we are selfish, confused, lazy, resentful, and so on. We come by these things honestly. We have been well trained to manifest them at every turn.

An ancient sutra says, “It [enlightenment-nature] and dust interpenetrate.” This means that the mind, in all its wonder and lunacy, and inspiration and confusion, is already complete.

“Pray for help” simply means: we are not alone. If we truly perceive this, we can let go of self-centered ideas and turn to others for help—not (only) for oneself, but for all beings. In Korea, Buddhist practitioners sometimes greet one another with “Seong Bul hapshida,” which means “Let’s become Buddhas together!” That’s the spirit of “pray for help.”

A few of the *lojong* slogans, such as “Don’t be a phony,” can hit like a blunt instrument. Let’s face it, when we first begin practice many of us are phonies. We mimic our teacher’s pet phrases and sometimes even their intonations. We model the behavior of older practitioners. In my experience this is a natural process, the process of “praying for help.” But, at some point, we must find our own expression of the buddhadharma. Then, compassion

comes fully alive.

For a Zen practitioner, *lojong* training can seem overly methodical and analytical, and it can present a seductive risk to those who want something from practice. Fischer understands the risks and investigates the *lojong* with humility, insight and wit; these qualities help us understand the profound wisdom behind each slogan.

Taken together, Fischer’s commentaries present a remarkably complete view into *bodhicitta*, the spacious mind of profound compassion. And just as Fischer never forgets the great vow implicit in each slogan, he also never loses sight of his own great vow:

If we are now facing hard times, much better to face them with patient, compassionate hearts than with fear and panic. We have always needed one another. Our love for one another is both natural to us and something we need to strengthen through cultivation. We need sermons we can understand and use. We need many reminders and encouragements.

Life asks so much and we so often fall short. The developers of the *lojong* mind-training system surely knew this. Yet they also knew that compassion is a profoundly human quality, fully attainable by each person.

Fischer’s book explores how to bring just a little more compassion into everyday life. A little more would matter a lot. ♦

A Wedding Talk (Continued from page 24)

Carolyn and Matt don’t have a formal Buddhist practice, both have been involved in what I would call meditative activities: Carolyn in yoga and Matt in martial arts. There is more work there for them to do. Remember, there is nothing specifically Buddhist about mindfulness—there are many different paths to the same reservoir of wisdom and love. It doesn’t always involve going to a zendo or a church or an ashram. Sometimes it means stopping and listening to the rain.

Wisdom

When Carolyn was about seven, she and I were sitting at the kitchen table in our apartment on Dover Road in West Hartford. I was reading a magazine and she was coloring with crayons. At one point, she stopped and looked up and said, “When you think about it, Dad, hope and fear are the same thing.” I looked up, thought about what she had just said and I responded, “Aren’t you seven? How do you come up with this stuff?” And this is one of many such examples. I had to become a Buddhist just to keep up. So, I think between them, there are many seeds of wisdom to cultivate.

Patience

Finally, there is patience. Well, it took them seven years to get here, so I guess they have plenty of patience!

Marriage Vows

We vow in our married life together to continually break through our preconceived views of each other and see clearly.

We vow to let go of feelings that arise from selfish desires, attachments, and fears, so that we can open our hearts to one another.

We vow to be compassionate with one another and with all beings.

We vow to practice peaceful and ethical occupations and to support each other in our work.

We vow to support one another in creating a compassionate and loving home.

We vow to always be mindful of each other and to let go of our ideas and beliefs so that we can see each other clearly.

We vow to encourage each other to walk the bodhisattva path together. ♦

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"Clear mind is like the full moon in the sky. Sometimes clouds come and cover it, but the moon is always behind them. Clouds go away, then the moon shines brightly. So don't worry about clear mind: it is always there. ... Thinking comes and goes, comes and goes. You must not be attached to the coming or the going." -Zen Master Seung Sahn

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