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Just Seeing Is

Commentary on Case 41 of
The Whole World is a Single Flower

Buddha-Nature

It is enlightenment nature.
Above is the dwelling place of all Buddhas.
Below are the six realms of existence.
One by one, each thing is complete.
One by one, each thing has it.
It and dust interpenetrate.
It is already apparent in all things.
So, without cultivation, you are already complete—
Understand, understand.
Clear, clear.

[holding the Zen stick] Do you see?
[hitting with the Zen stick] Do you hear?
Already you see clearly. Already you hear clearly.
Then, what are this stick, this sound and your mind?
Are they the same or different?
If you say “same,” I will hit you thirty times.
If you say “different,” I will also hit you thirty times.
Why?
KATZ!
 $3 \times 3 = 9$



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Just seeing is Buddha-nature. Then, what is not Buddha-nature? So, Buddha-nature means not Buddha-nature. The name for that is Buddha-nature, okay? This is our Zen teaching style's basic form, our kong-an interviews always begin with this point. Buddhism's teaching is actually quite simple, but human beings' consciousness is very complicated, so it is always checking and holding on to something, *very* complicated. Zen teaching's job is to take this complicated mind and make it simple, simple, simple... until finally, there's nothing. All clean. Nothing. If you are nothing, then a new idea will appear; that new idea is the truth. When your mind is clear, then everything you hear, see, smell, taste or touch is the truth. That is a very important point.

A long time ago in Korea, three famous masters from different traditions were talking about the path. The Confucian master said, "See clear, hear clear—then everything becomes clear."

The Taoist master said, "It is clear like space. Keep your mind clear like space."

Finally, the Zen Master said, "Moment to moment, do it."

The three masters have different styles of speech, but the meaning is the same. Confucianism means keeping the correct situation, correct function and correct relationship at all times. Never think about the past, present or future. Only this moment: correct situation, correct function and correct relationship. This is Confucianism.

Taoism means keeping a mind that is clear like space. Don't make anything. Don't make mind, don't make body. Don't make "I," don't make "you." Everything is clear like space, then reflective action is possible.

The Zen Master's speech means: don't make anything, moment to moment, just do it. Just do it means don't make past, don't make present, don't make future, don't make sky or earth, don't make anything. Moment to moment only, "What are you doing now?" This is very important. When you are doing something, just do it, okay? When you eat, just eat. When you sit, just sit. When you are working, just work. When you are teaching, just teach. When you listen, just listen. Moment to moment, just do it! Moment to moment just do it means correct situation, correct function and correct relationship.

These three teaching styles are almost the same, only the technique is different. But Taoism and Confucianism don't have enlightenment. Taoism and Confucianism understand truth and how to attain truth, but they don't understand how truth functions correctly in our life. Only Zen practicing teaches us how to attain truth and make this truth function to help all beings. Even Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism do not have this teaching style. "Just do it" is the basic form of our Zen teaching. If this goes into your consciousness and you do some practicing, then it can appear in your life—that's most important!

If you want to understand the realm of Buddha,
Keep a mind which is clear like space.
So, let all thinking and all external desires fall far away.
Let your mind go anyplace, with no hinderance.

Then, what is keeping a mind which is clear like space?
If your mind is not clear, then listen to the following:

It is enlightenment nature.
Above is the dwelling place of all Buddhas.
Below are the six realms of existence.
One by one, each thing is complete.
One by one, each thing has it.
It and dust interpenetrate.
It is already apparent in all things.
So, without cultivation, you are already complete—
Understand, understand.
Clear, clear.

This is very clear teaching. Taoism and Confucianism do not have this teaching, even Buddhism doesn't have it. Only Zen has this teaching. Boom!—right to the point. What is your true nature? What is universal substance? Very important!

[holding the Zen stick] Do you see?
[hitting with the Zen stick] Do you hear?
Already you see clearly. Already you hear clearly.
Then, what are this stick, this sound and your mind?
Are they the same or different?
If you say "same," I will hit you thirty times.
If you say "different," I will also hit you thirty times.
Why?
KATZ!
 $3 \times 3 = 9$

However, only explanation style teaching is not enough. Some kind of demonstration is necessary, a Zen demonstration. How can someone get the point? Only through demonstration. If you experience the demonstration, you have already gotten everything.

Questions:

How do you keep a mind which is clear like space?

How do you keep mind which is clear like space? If you make something, then you will have a problem. Even "clear like space" means you have already made something. So don't attach to speech—moment to moment, just do it!

"Understand, understand, clear, clear." What does this mean?

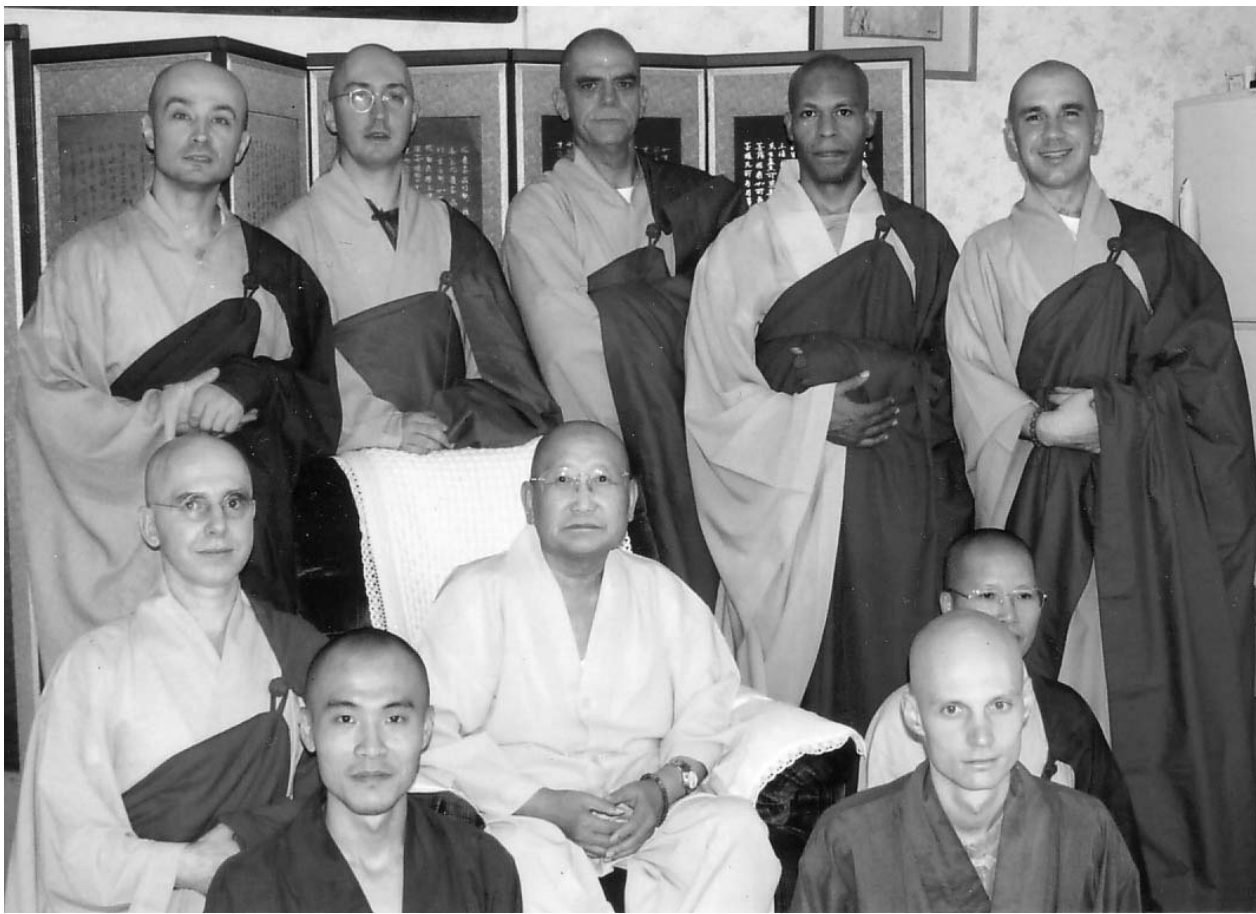
If you make something then you won't understand. If you don't make anything then you can reflect everything. At this point, everything is clear; you and everything are never separate. You and the whole universe become one point.

What does "3 x 3 = 9" mean?

This completes the teaching "picture." If we are making a drawing of a cat, it's very important to draw a tail. If there is no tail, then the drawing is not so good. If you are drawing a cow, you have to have horns.

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Commentary: In the springtime, many flowers. In the summer, the trees are green. In the fall, fruit appears. In the winter, it is very cold. In the beginning, four legs; next, two legs; next, three legs; next, no legs. Where do they stay? Do you understand that? If you don't understand, ask the stone girl. She will have a good answer for you.

Four legs, two legs, three legs. That is a human being. Four legs, baby time. Then when we grow up, two legs. Then, when we are old—three legs. An old person uses a cane, so three legs. These legs are always changing, which means that everything is always changing. If you don't understand that point, then ask the stone girl; the stone girl will teach you everything.

The stone girl's teaching is very interesting. If you are attached to these words, then you won't understand. But if you don't attach to these words, then the stone girl has eyes and a mouth. Okay? Then you can use the stone girl's eyes, the stone girl's mouth, and the stone girl's hands. You can use the stone girl's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Then you can teach this whole world—no problem. ☸

Zen Master Seung Sahn once asked a student,

"Why are you sitting for the winter?"

"Because, I want to."

"That's a number-one BAD answer!"

You ask me the same question, ok?"

"OK. Why are you sitting for the winter?"

"For you."

excerpt from
The Wisdom of Solitude: A Zen Retreat in the Woods by Zen Master Bon Yeon

The mantra this morning is a bare wisp of a filament, quiet, steady, and porous enough to allow in fast-moving shadows on the floor, flickering and changing with the clouds passing, and the wind. Branches, leaves, and the side of my head rush to and fro in silhouette. A plane flies overhead through it all, through me, through the mantra, through the shadows of the branches. This has all been going on for thousands of years, yet it is only now.

No one is in any of it.

FOR YOU [7]



You've no doubt heard the expression "Nobody home." This is usually used in a derogatory fashion, indicating that the person in question is less than brilliant. We Buddhists have found another way to look at "Nobody home."

"Nobody home" means that no matter how much you dissect yourself, down to the cellular level, the electrons, the quarks, the whatever-it-is-called smallest part you can reference, it is moving and changing. There is not one thing in this whole wide world that is fixed. If you find it, it's gone already. Since there isn't one single solitary thing in the whole universe that is fixed, it stands to reason there is no constant "self" that is experiencing any of this. Any reasonable person can understand this—it actually makes common sense.

As basic as it may be, it is the ever-elusive essence of the Buddhist path. This is the point we keep harping on, we keep trying to realize, and we keep coming back to over and over again. Why does it require so much time and energy? Because our habit to approach the world with "my" point of view is so deeply embedded in us that it's difficult to remember the "my" part is just smoke and mirrors. All the problems and confusion we've ever had are based in this misperception that it's happening to "me." Everything. Anger, desire, fear, jealousy, hurt—all of it. Every time we take a closer look, we can see there is no such thing.

Dae Soen Sa Nim has penetrated this phenomenon by changing his habit of looking at life from the point of view of "I" to having no point of view at all. Since he has no point of view, his mind is like the universe: vast, wide, and limitless. This is how he can say such an outrageous thing like "For you." And really mean it.

The fact that he means it and lives it every day inspires me so much.

I tell myself over and over, "If he can do it, I can do it."

This is the kind of ambition the world could use more of. ☸

A LOTUS GROWS OUT OF THE MUD

excerpt from The Wisdom of Solitude: A Zen Retreat in the Woods

by Zen Master Bon Yeon

*it takes horsehit to grow bamboo
and it too longs forever weeps begs to the wind*

Ikkyu

"I want." "I have." "I need." "I," "I," "I." It's endless! If something beautiful comes out of all this suffering and passion, may it save all beings, because it sure as hell isn't saving me.

Today I am so dying for something different to eat, other than rice and beans. If I even so much as *look at* another soybean I am going to throw up. I refuse to ever eat one again. Ever.

I am presently visualizing coffee from Dunkin' Donuts, in one of those fantastic cardboard cups with the soothing pink and orange logo on it. Right now, if you put that in front of me beside the most handsome Hollywood actor, I would definitely choose the Dunkin Donuts coffee. No contest.

I see croissant sandwiches. During sitting I plan my future as a caterer and design menus from appetizers to desserts for fictitious weddings and birthday parties. I keep trying to get back to the breath and to the mantra, but the catering scenarios are coming back with a vengeance. After a lunch of the usual rice and sunflower seeds, I head out for a walk. It's sunny out, almost spring-like. Early afternoon, with this kind of gorgeous weather, the only thing missing really *is* the food.

About a mile down the dirt road, between several pine trees, I see a most unusual sight: a parked car. The orange color doesn't fit in with everything else. I don't know whose it is, but its presence can only mean one thing: *there might be something to eat in that car!*

Could it be?

An open window!

As if in a Yogi Bear cartoon, I spy an actual *picnic basket* in the back seat on the floor. Yes, a *bona fide*, old-fashioned, picnic basket, with the checkered cloth, the little wicker handles and the whole bit.

Lust mind kicks in. I look to my left, then to my right, making sure no other animal can catch my prey. A thought flits across my mind that I shouldn't reach in that window or in that picnic basket, but is instantly overpowered by the feeling of the wicker handle against the palm of my quivering little hand. Lifting the lid, my deepest prayer has been answered: Lorna Doone's!!! How many can I take without the owner noticing an errant Zen student has been here? Perhaps it is a gift from God for all this hard training. Or, is it a test of will? I don't care. Grabbing four cookies, I jam one into my mouth, reserving the others for later. All clarity is gone. The mantra is gone. My body has been taken over by a group of aliens. I hurriedly go back to the cabin propelled by an extreme adrenaline rush and try to savor the other three. Ten seconds of pleasure, then tragically, they are gone. I could go back and get more, but it's two miles round trip and dark now. Plus I'd break the schedule and I can't do that...can I? No, I can't.

Guilty now, I'm out of balance.

"I've strayed."

"I'm no good."

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does! Dae Soen Sa Nim ate only pine needles, he would have never fallen for the Lorna Doones!"

"Jesus Jane, for better or for worse, you chose to adhere to a regimen most people would never have undertaken in a million years. Why not allow yourself this small transgression?"

"Will the owners of the car notice the cookies are missing?"

"Why have I lost my mind like a crazy fool, for a fleeting taste of cookies?"

"What's so powerful about taste anyway?"

"On the other hand, in the grand scheme of things, what's a few Lorna Doones? Why obsess over such an insignificant thing?"

Mind can and will make a mountain out of a molehill, regardless of the content. Like a pebble in a pond, the ripples of each thought go outward in circles farther than you can imagine. It's humbling to know that on a normal day in my usual life back home, this level of mind activity is going on... times ten million. It's just going so fast that I can't notice it.

There is no sutra that can show me the mud of endless desire mind like those cookies did.

Bamboo will grow here, and lotus flowers. ☸

[9



Fall

A precepts ceremony talk by Zen Master Wu Kwang

Down Seven Times

10]

First, thanks to all of you for taking the precepts and also thanks to all of us who reaffirm our commitment to these precepts over and over again in these ceremonies. If we don't choose either complete hedonism or rigid fundamentalism, then the business of living an ethical and moral life is a little bit tricky. The sixth patriarch, giving instruction to a monk, once said, "Don't make good and bad." To not make good and bad is considerably different from "there is no good and bad." Not making good and bad means not constructing in your mind some idea of good and bad, and then pasting it on the nose of the situation in front of you. And then, not fabricating some story to substantiate how you're going to react to your construction at that point. If you do that, you make a big problem.

If you don't make good and bad, if you don't make anything, if you return to zero [*hits table*], then your original empty mind appears in front of you in the moment and allows you to see what is correct in that particular situation. That means you have to find your own inner gyroscope, to find your balance moment to moment, and act correctly. If you are fundamentally connected to the basic precept of cherishing all of existence, then your inner gyroscope will appear naturally. As we practice, it appears more and more frequently. Some karma immediately [*hits table*] goes, but there is also a sticky kind that reappears over and over again. It behooves us all to be patient with ourselves and to look into what we're holding to.

Some years ago, I went to a talk given by the Dalai Lama at a Mongolian monastery in New Jersey. There were a couple of thousand people there, all sitting on the grass listening to a talk on the practice of the Vajrasatva, including Vajrasatva purification and the use of a special mantra. He explained the practice of visualizing this particular Buddhist deity, and then he gave several different





variations: You could visualize the deity up in the air above your head, or you could visualize it out in front of you. You could visualize it sitting on top of your head. You could visualize it first sitting on top of your head and then entering down into your body, into your heart, followed by a special breathing exercise. You could visualize taking in truth and light, and then breathing out the black smoke of all your impurities, which were then to be sent into the ground somewhere. However, he then explained that if you were practicing a kind of yoga where you were conserving energy, you were not to breathe out these things, but were supposed to imagine a fire inside your very being completely consuming your impurities. Next, they handed out a printed version of the hundred-syllable Vajrasatva mantra, and we all chanted it together. It was quite long! After that, the Dalai Lama thanked everyone for coming and remarked playfully, “You have all purified yourselves with the Vajrasatva mantra, so now you can go out and do some more mischief.”

Here, the Dalai Lama has described the actual practice of the precepts. Likewise, even though we have all participated in this ceremony and burnt away our karmic hindrances in an “instant,” we still are not always able to live up to our own intentions. Bodhidharma said, “Fall down seven times, get up eight.” So, please know when the precepts are open and when they are closed, and when to keep them and when to break them. And also when to forgive yourself. Thank you all very much for taking the precepts. ☸



Congratulations to the people taking ten precepts who are now dharma teachers in training, and to those who have taken five precepts. Special thanks and congratulations go to those who have finished their dharma teacher training and received long robes and their dharma teacher certificates today.

Taking precepts is the most “religious” activity we do at the Zen Center. Many of us cringe a bit when we hear some of the language that is in the ceremony. But the meaning of this precepts ceremony is very, very deep. When we take precepts we join a family—not only the family of people who have taken these precepts today, but a family of people that stretches back to the time of the Buddha. The fact that we are sitting here today in Providence, Rhode Island doing this precepts ceremony ties us directly back to the sangha practicing at the time of the Buddha.

When we take five precepts we are given this brown kasa. This kasa that we wear is Buddha’s robe. Of course, our underwear is also Buddha’s robe, but there is room for symbolism in our practice. Each time we put on this kasa to practice, we are asking “What am I, what is it to be alive, and what am I doing here in this world?” By taking these precepts today, you are expressing your commitment to asking these vital questions and sharing that commitment with our community and the world.

It is interesting that the precepts (at least in the

an impossible

English version) are written in the negative. The first is to abstain from taking life. Actually, it is impossible not to kill. To live is to kill. From the moment we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep at night, we break this precept. We kill plant or animal life whenever we eat. When we drive in our cars, we kill insect life under our wheels, even when we aren’t aware that we are doing it. And then, in the middle of the night, a mosquito is buzzing around our head, and without thinking we wake up and hit it, so again we’ve broken the precepts. If you take these precepts with an intention never to break them, you have an impossible task. Nevertheless, these precepts that we take have profound meaning. How can we live a life without killing?

How can we really live a life without stealing? It’s easy to go into a store and not take something that we didn’t buy. But how do we not steal the spotlight from each other? How do we not let our egoic

needs steal energy and attention from those around us? And how do we live so that we bring life to this moment, instead of killing it? When faced with a friend's enthusiasm, can we encourage her rather than find fault and kill her joy? If we state the precepts in the positive, the first precept says, "I vow to protect and nurture life in this world." This first precept asks us to live our lives in a way that is mindful and present, supporting life in each moment.

When we talk about precepts, we often say, "Know when to keep them and when to break them; when they are open and when they are closed." There is nothing absolute in our practice. But how do we know? There is no formula. You can have many preconceived ideas before something happens, but in the moment it is happening, how do you know what to do? If you're confused or unclear, we say keep the precepts. If you keep the precepts, your mind will settle down. With a settled mind you can more clearly perceive the actual moment, rather than being deluded by what you think about it. And with that settled mind you can see what your relationship is to the moment. Then your actions can be clear actions. But, your actions may not be the same as my actions. Your relationship to the moment will be different than mine. Here is a simple story about keeping or not keeping the precepts. You're in the woods and a rabbit runs by. A few moments later a hunter comes along and asks, "Did you see that rabbit?" Well, you're stuck. If you say, "Yeah, the rabbit went that way," then the hunter might kill the rabbit

and you will have broken the precept to abstain from taking life.

So then you may think, well, maybe I'll tell him that the rabbit went the other way. But, if you tell him it went that other way, then you've broken the precept to abstain from lying. You're stuck either way. Usually, faced with a choice like this, we think there is a clear and simple solution because the life of the rabbit is most important. So, lying is better than killing. Theoretically, we may all agree on that. But what if this hunter is followed by three very hungry children? Then the situation becomes much more complicated. To lie or to kill, which is correct? Should the family starve or should the rabbit die? There is no one right answer. Only you can decide in the moment.

It's been said several times this weekend at different ceremonies that today there is much suffering in the world. There is war being waged in the name of the United States, in the name of Iraq, in the name of The Congo, in the name of Palestine and Israel. We're used to war happening all of the time. We've become accustomed to killing, to hatred, and to racism. We've become desensitized and jaded.

Some of us are a little less jaded today because our country is directly involved with this war in Iraq. The suffering in the world has many different faces. Don't try to shield yourself with your practice. "I'll just sit in the dharma room and get nice and calm and let all those problems disappear. It's so beautiful, the incense, the chanting, the serene face of the Buddha. Ah, the world is at peace." With the help of our precepts we can face the suffering directly. From this practice, great love, great compassion and the bodhisattva way is available to all of us. Thank you all very much for taking the precepts. It really gives life and sustenance to the sangha. You've given great benefit to all of us. Thank you very much. ☸

[13

ossible task

A precepts ceremony talk by Zen Master Bon Soeng



DIRECTION

Bowing every morning
one hundred and eight times
to nam pung bosal
bodhisattva of the south wind

Every morning
nam pung bosal bowing
one hundred and eight
thousand times to me

Kneeling every morning
back turned to the sun
ringing a bell, shattering
the hell of dark swords

Demons fleeing into the west
across the high plains
into the Rockies, into the arms
of the vast heavy planet

Sitting every morning, facing
the white wall of the north
which resembles so much
the white wall of the self

Breathing in, thinning to
transparency like space
Breathing out, entering
bird song and traffic

Christina Hauck

Too long apart from gloom
and parting
on this snow washed sun smashed day
I pass by near where
last year the dear died.

Where less snow has fallen
under the lee of a fallen tree
already it's melted off —
for example
beside the tracks.

Allan Davies

ENLIGHTENMENT DAY POEM

Before Buddha was Buddha
everyone called him Siddhartha, and everyone loved him:
father, mother, sister, brother, wife, child, servants, concubines.
When he looked in the mirror, he liked what he saw:
smooth skin and clear eyes, white teeth and long, black, glossy hair.

When Siddhartha left his father's house, he cut his long black hair,
gave away the silks and fine brocade
wrapped a rag around his loins.
He had no use for mirrors.

Six years of searching!
Six years of hunger and fear, boredom and pain!
Six years before he gave up and finally began.
He took his seat under the bodhi tree.
He took a vow not to move until his mind opened
Or his bones turned to dust.

In the moment before Buddha became Buddha, he moved
a little, easing a thread of pain in his neck, glancing up
at the morning star—which isn't a star but a planet
casting back full-faced the burning of a sun.

In that moment Buddha became Buddha.
He heard the stone girl's tears give way to laughter.
He felt the butterfly rousing the dragon to flight.

Right now, when sunlight fills the Kansas sky,
How do you see Buddha's star?

KATZ!

Candles burn bright on the altar,
smiling faces light up the dharma room.

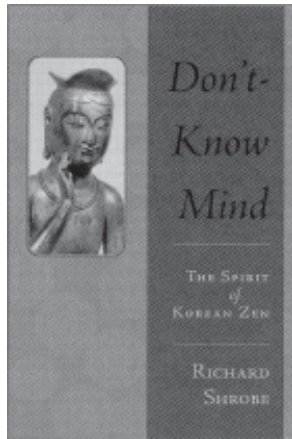
*Christina Hauck
Kansas Zen Center
12/15/2002*



The pictures in this issues are courtesy of Matthew Smolinsky.

[15

A fresh approach to Zen



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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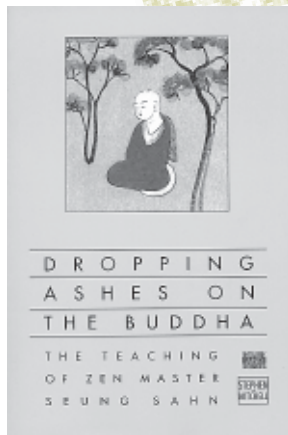


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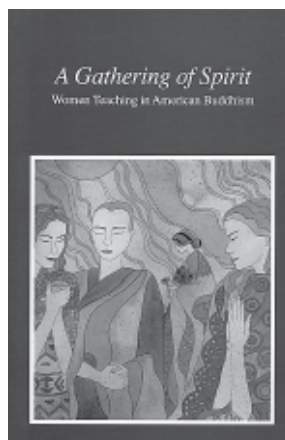
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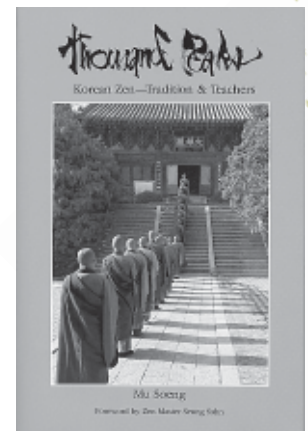
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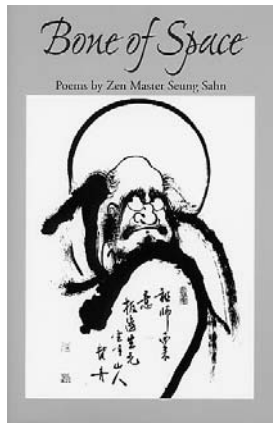
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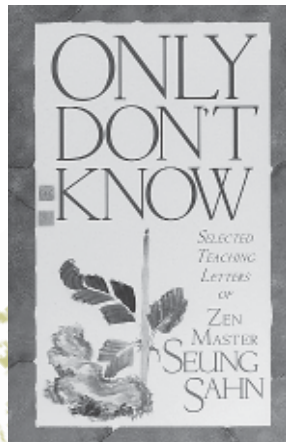
Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen—Traditions and Teachers. Mu Soeng. The spirit of Zen's golden age survives in Korean Zen. Primary Point Press edition, 1991. 256 pages. *Primary Point Press*. ISBN 0-942795-02-4. \$15.95



A Gathering of Spirit: Women Teaching in American Buddhism. Edited by Ellen Sidor. Talks and discussions from three landmark conferences at Providence Zen Center. Third edition, 1992. 156 pages. *Primary Point Press*. ISBN 0-942795-05-9. \$11.95



Bone of Space: Poems by Zen Master Seung Sahn. This collection captures a master's thoughts during everyday life—while traveling, talking on the phone, attending a friend's funeral. Primary Point Press edition, 1992. 128 pages.
Primary Point Press. ISBN 0-942795-06-7. \$15.00



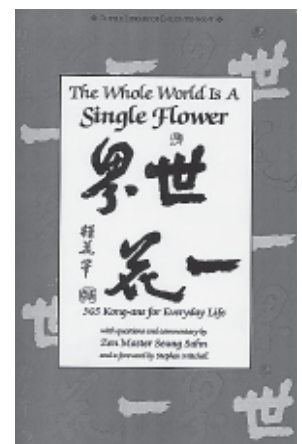
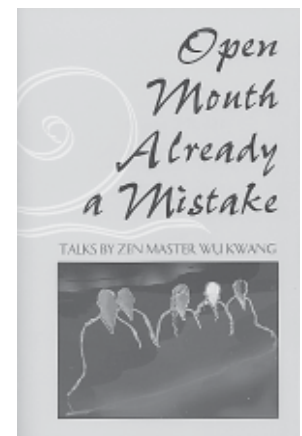
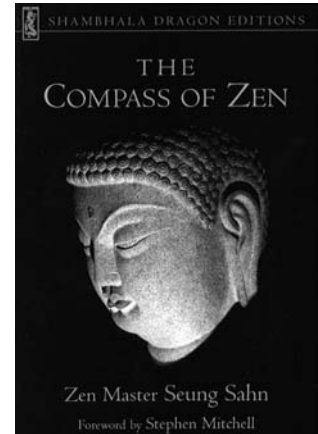
Only Don't Know: Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Issues of work, relationships, and suffering are discussed as they relate to meditation practice. 1999. 230 pages.
Shambhala. ISBN 1-57062-432-1. \$14.95



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. 1997. 238 pages.
Primary Point Press. ISBN 0-942795-08-3. \$18.95

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. 1992. VHS. 54 minutes.
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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. 1993. 267 pages.
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world. I want to share with you some of these teachings, four apocryphal sutras: 1/ the Animal Crackers Sutra, 2/ the Row Your Boat Sutra, 3/ the Noble Duke of York Sutra, and 4/ the Cheerios Sutra.

1/
Animal Crackers Sutra

Fifty years ago, Watson and Crick unlocked one of the secrets of nature, the structure of DNA, the magic code of four letters: A, T, G, and C. This event changed the way that scientists understand and think about life, from cloning to the genome project, and what geneticists now call genetic fossils. In Zen, we say that all the questions return to one question: “what am I?” Scientists also ask the question “where do we come from?” These genetic fossils that geneticists are discovering point to the idea that we all probably come from the same original DNA.

If you look at a box of Barnum’s animal crackers, you will see that on the outside they have drawings of lions, gorillas, polar bears, elephants, tigers, giraffes, zebras and hippopotamuses. The cookies inside, as Zen Master Seung

Children's Sutras

From a talk by senior dharma teacher José Ramírez Abbot, Delaware Valley Zen Center

The first time I heard Zen Master Seung Sahn talk about “anything can be your teacher: a tree, a river, the phone book, the newspaper; no problem,” I thought, “what kind of teaching is this; is this Zen?” I was expecting deep teachings, profound words, the wisdom of the ages coming down from the East. There are 84,000 sutras... but the newspaper, the phonebook? Was Zen Master Seung Sahn out to lunch?

It is hard to believe that the immediacy of life, the immediacy of this moment, is full of teachings, but once you begin to pay attention, to be mindful, you realize that the teachings are everywhere. Now that my daughter Oriana is taking me by the hand and sharing her life with me, I’ve been discovering some Buddhist teachings in her

Sahn sometimes tells his students, are baked in those different shapes. Grabbing one of those animal cookies, you can see that the form, and the name we give it, are different from other cookies in the box, but they are all made from the same dough and, after biting and chewing one of them, we realize that they all taste the same. Yes, this Caucasian Zen Master from Nebraska sitting next to me, and this Latino dharma teacher from Venezuela who is talking to you, come from the same original dough.

The Animal Crackers Sutra points to original substance, to primary point. Keeping the mind that bites into tiger and realizes that it tastes like the elephant, I ask you: What is the original dough?

Row Your Boat Sutra

While growing up in an English-speaking country, or if you were taught English when you were growing up, you probably sang:

*Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream.
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Life is but a dream.*

These days, every time I sing this with Oriana, I can hear the Buddha singing it with us. I can see him composing this poem, because in it you find the most important elements of his teaching. Let's take it from the top and look at it line by line.

Row, row, row your boat...

The last verse in the Heart Sutra, which, like "row, row," is repeated three times, reads "gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha." In this verse, there is an image of reaching the other shore, and for this you need a boat. The Buddha's last words were, "All component things in the world are changeable; they are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation." This means that

you not only need a boat to get to the other shore, but also that no one can do the rowing for you. In other words, do not waste any time, get on your boat and just do it!

Gently down the stream...

We need to row, row, row our boat, but we should not be attached to the boat, the rowing, or reaching the other shore. To reach the other shore, we have to let the process unfold. When you receive five precepts in the Kwan Um School of Zen, you get a nice poem in Chinese, of which the last verse reads: "Spring comes and the grass grows by itself." We have to be gentle with ourselves and not be attached to enlightenment.

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily...

Not being attached to good and bad and the world of opposites, we are at ease with life. We can row our boat merrily down the stream. We let the flow help us with our rowing.

Life is but a dream.

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The last chapter of the Diamond Sutra reads:

*Thus shall you think of this fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.*

Once, someone asked the Buddha, “Are you God?” and the Buddha replied, “No.” “Are you an angel?”, the person continued, and the Buddha answered, “No.” “Are you a saint?” Once again the Buddha answered, “No.” Finally, the person asked, “Then what are you?” The Buddha said, “I am awake.” In Sanskrit, the word Buddha means “awake,” and this last verse remind us of one of the goals of our journey down the stream: to awake to our life.

Once we reach the other shore, we discard the boat and realize that in life, all is changing, changing, changing. As one Zen Master once said, “Renunciation is not giving up the things of the world, but recognizing that they go away.”

“Life is but a dream,” but how do we function in this dream? How do we wake up to our life?

3/

Noble Duke of York Sutra

In the Kwan Um School, we talk about clear mind a lot. We even recite it to ourselves when we sit in meditation. What is this clear mind that we talk about? Zen Master Dae Kwang will tell us that clear mind is the mind that reflects things as they are. There is another children’s song that reflects clear mind and goes like this:

*The noble Duke of York
He had ten thousand men
He marched them up to the top of the hill
And he marched them down again.*

*And when you’re up, you’re up.
And when you’re down, you’re down.
And when you’re only half way up
You’re neither up nor down.*

The last stanza talks about the mind that does not add anything to the situation. In particular, the last two lines show the way out of suffering:

*And when you’re only half way up
You’re neither up nor down.*

There is no point in arguing if we are up or down, or which way is better or worse. The last line points to things as they are: *You’re neither up nor down.*

Children have the gift of clarity. Recently I was watching the movie *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, a true story about three little girls who were taken away from their mothers and placed in a foster home, denied of their identity, 1500 miles from home. Their courage and one-mind took them on a journey back to their mothers. There is a wonderful scene half-way through the movie when two of the girls, Molly and Gracie, find a nest with three eggs. Molly grabs the eggs one by one saying, “One for me, one for you, and one for the both of us.” In just that action we can see wisdom and compassion hand in hand. As Zen Master Seung Sahn always says “First attain enlightenment, then help all beings.” How do we help all beings?

4/

Cheerios Sutra

Every morning, most of us, as part of our morning ritual, sit down to have breakfast. It could be toast, coffee, tea, eggs, cereal, etc. We have many choices for cereal, but most kids like Cheerios. I don’t know if you’ve seen a box of Cheerios lately, but on the side of the box they have this wonderful question, which is a Zen thing because sometimes everything in Zen seems like a question:

“Who are you eating them for?”

This is a very, very, very important question because it points to compassionate action. So I ask all of you, “Why do you eat everyday?”

I hope you all have a big bowl of Cheerios, get on your boat, and row merrily down the stream, helping all beings along the way. ☸

Reflections

Gary Dixon

on a Year



My Korean friend and business associate, Mr. Youngjong Yu, handed me a copy of *The Compass of Zen*, and told me to read it on my way back to the U.S. He had finally run out of answers to my questions regarding Buddhism, and thought that this book, written by Zen Master Seung Sahn, would help me. On the flight home, I opened the book and began to read.

I was immediately drawn to one particular passage in the first chapter. Zen Master Seung Sahn writes, "There are many paths that one can follow in order to attain this point [true self]. We have many religions and spiritual ways. But actually there are just two kinds of religion in this world: subject religions and object religions. Following an object religion means believing in some kind of god or some power or opposite outside yourself." He continues by stating that, "Buddhism is a subject religion. It seeks direct insight into the very nature of existence itself, beginning with insight into the nature of our being, "What am I?", "What is this 'I,' and where did it come from?" This passage is why I came to the Kwan Um School and the Great Lake Zen Center. I wanted to know the answer to, "What am I" and "What is this 'I'?" I wanted to get something.

On my first visit to the Zen Center, I received some basic instruction on how to sit and what to expect during the practice to follow. I was told that we would be chanting in Korean, but not to worry about the correct pronunciation and the meaning of the words. I was also told that we would sit for 25 minutes in the manner I had just been instructed. Panic began to set in. This was not another book read on Buddhism or Zen. This was the real thing!

I chanted, but it wasn't Korean. I have no idea what was coming out of my mouth on that first visit. My nine-month old son is more intelligible. I sat and was uncomfortable sitting still for 25 minutes, but no one seemed to notice, and if they did, they didn't seem to mind my blundering through it. I was made to feel welcome and so I returned to practice fairly regularly.

Before my first retreat, I received a basic explanation of what would take place during the retreat. I was told that the majority of the time would be spent sitting. *How hard can that be?* I was also told that we would eat meals differently, with bowls in a formal manner. *How hard can eating out of bowls be?* Then the bows, we do 108 of them. *No problem! I have done a few of those, too. Sign me up!!!!*

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I knew I was in for a long day when I was out of breath at bow number 27. Things became worse when pain appeared in my legs during the third sitting. Then I embarrassed myself by playing musical bowls at every meal. I went to bed that night tired, hungry, and full of thoughts about sneaking out in the middle of the night to go home and lie in my own bed. But I stayed. And just like my first visit to the Zen Center, no one gave me a hard time. In fact, I received encouragement and support and was told that even the senior members of the sangha have difficulty from time-to-time. Again, I was made to feel welcome, and have since participated in other retreats.

As time has passed, I have become more proficient in these “forms.” I can now chant in unison with others and I can comfortably sit for 25 minutes. My legs have become accustomed to this sitting and it now takes longer for the pain to appear in my legs during retreats. I almost have the bowls memorized and I have even learned how to serve during the meals at retreat. Even the bows are coming along nicely and at the next retreat I intend to do all 108 at the hellish pace of 7.2 per minute. Although I became comfortable with the “form” of our practice, I began to have some reservations.

If you remember from the first paragraph, I came to this practice wanting something. I wanted to know the answer to, “What am I.” and “What is this ‘I?’” After months of practice, I did not feel I was any closer to the answer. Not even a hint of any real progress to inspire me onward. I began to second-guess the way I was practicing. Eventually, frustration set in and I began to think that perhaps Zen practice, or at least our form of Zen practice, wasn’t right for me. I was deep into “I, my, me mind” and “checking.” As a result, I considered quitting.

Then, one evening at the Zen Center, someone read one of the letters from *Only Don't Know*. In this letter, the author writes to Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What am I? I ask this more and more through my day. But there is so much thinking!” I felt as if I had been hit in the head! This was me! In response, Zen Master Seung Sahn tells his student, “not to check your mind and feelings. Only go straight—don't know. If you practice everyday, your checking mind will rest.” I began to practice with new resolve. Thoughts came, but I did not worry. And when they did come, I became better at not getting attached to them. So much for “checking,” but I still had a problem with “I, my, me” mind.





Inspired by the letters in *Only Don't Know*, I went and purchased a copy of the book, and at the same time purchased a copy of another book by Zen Master Seung Sahn, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. In the latter, I was further inspired by the message in chapter 42, "Wanting Enlightenment." In this chapter, Zen Master Seung Sahn states that, "The idea that you want to achieve something in Zen meditation is basically selfish." He explains that if we have thoughts of attaining something, we will never attain anything. There it was, after nine months, the slap in the face that I needed! I had to "put down" this "I, my, me" mind and begin practicing without the desire to attain anything.

This past July, the company I work for merged with another company, and during this process there were many concerns about lost jobs and changing roles. Our practice enabled me to remain relatively calm throughout this ordeal. A few weeks after the merger was completed, I was in California on business and several of my co-workers expressed their thanks to me for helping them cope throughout the merger process. They told me of numerous conversations in which I had told them not to get caught up in the mindset of speculation and "what if" scenarios. I had told them not to worry about what was going to happen or what might take place after the merger is

completed. I told them that they should just worry about their current jobs and that things always seem to work out in the end. I had no idea that my words and actions had made such a difference.

When I returned home, I shared this experience with my wife. She then told me that since I began this practice, I have become more patient and more understanding towards her and my children. She also went on to tell me that even our friends and relatives have commented to her about how they have noticed a change. I had no idea!

A full year has now passed and I am preparing to commit further to our practice by taking the Five Precepts. In the past year, I have learned and experienced many things. I have had the privilege of knowing and practicing with my immediate sangha family at the Great Lakes Zen Center and my extended sangha family throughout the Kwan Um School. What wonderful teachers they all are! However, there is one teaching that stands above all the others I have learned this past year. And, that teaching is: the reason we practice at all is not for ourselves, but for others.

My family, friends, and co-workers have taught me this lesson. And even though I try every day to practice with no desire of attainment, I really have attained something after all. ☸



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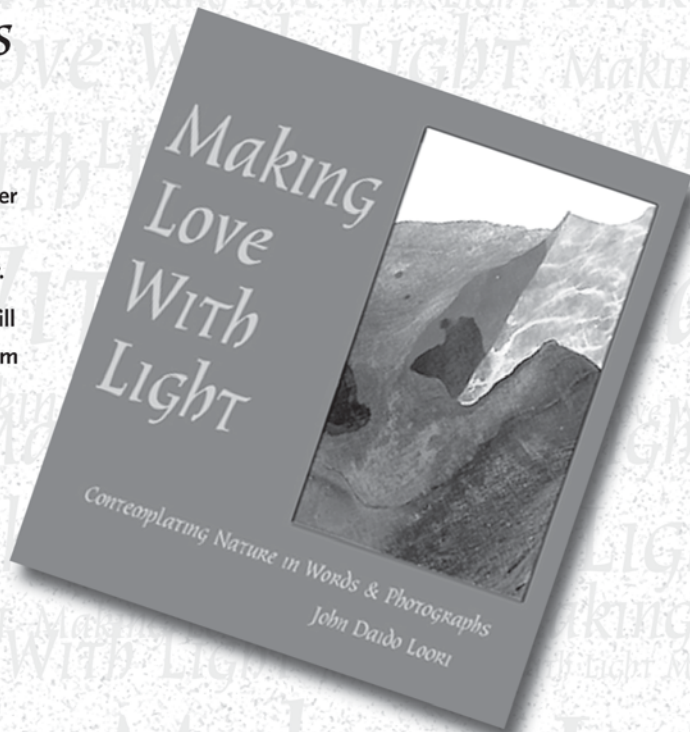
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