



Primary Point



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Primary Point

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Published by the Kwan Um School of Zen, a nonprofit religious corporation. The founder, Zen Master Seung Sahn, 78th Patriarch in the Korean Chogye order, was the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. In 1972, after teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, he founded the Kwan Um sangha, which today has affiliated groups around the world. He gave transmission to Zen Masters, and “inka”—teaching authority—to senior students called Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, “dharma masters.”

The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, 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 29. The circulation is 5000 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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what is Zen?

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Zen Master Seung Sabn

First you must ask, “What am I? What is the purpose of my life?” If you answer with words, this is only thinking. Maybe you say, “I am a doctor.” But if you are with a patient and you are thinking, “I am a great doctor,” then you cannot perceive your patient’s situation—you are caught in your thinking. Thinking is only understanding; like a person in a hospital you will find that understanding cannot help you. Then what? If you don’t know, you must only go straight—don’t know.

Don’t know mind cuts through thinking; it is before thinking. Before thinking there is no doctor, no patient; also no God, no Buddha, no “I,” no words—nothing at all. At that point you and the universe become one. We call this nothing-mind or primary point. Some people say this is God, or universal energy, or bliss, or extinction. But these are only teaching words—nothing mind is before words.

Zen is attaining nothing mind and then using nothing mind to help our world. How can you use it? Make nothing mind into big-love-mind. Nothing mind never appears or disappears. If you do correct meditation, your nothing-mind becomes strong and you perceive your situation clearly! What you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch are all the truth, without thinking! So your mind is like a mirror. Then moment to moment you can keep your correct situation. When a doctor is with his patients, if he drops I-my-me mind and becomes one with them, then helping them is possible. When a doctor goes home and is with their family, if they keep 100% parent mind, then understanding what is best for their children is clear. Just like this. The blue mountain does not move. The white clouds float back and forth. ☸

The Whole World is a Single Flower

Zen Master Dae Bong

TRUTH CANNOT DISAPPEAR



I would like to thank Gye Mun Sunim JDPS and all the people of the Kwan Yin Chan Lin Zen Center here in Singapore and everyone else who has made this Whole World is a Single Flower Conference possible. Whether you came from just down the street, or from the other side of the world, I thank you for coming to share yourselves with each other. Lastly, I would like to thank all the teachers, monks, and nuns who have contributed to this conference.

At the end of World War II, Zen Master Man Gong wrote the famous calligraphy, “The Whole Word Is a Single Flower.” Why? The end of the war marked the end of thirty-five years of oppressive occupation of Korea by the Japanese. This period was very difficult and painful for the Korean people. Zen Master Man Gong’s role during the occupation was very interesting. He wasn’t a monk who just stayed in the mountains, got enlightenment, and enjoyed a good reputation through teaching people.

After the 1910 annexation of Korea, the Japanese tried to crush Korean culture, language, and religion. Part of that strategy was to control Korean Buddhism, which was seen as

a force of resistance. There were about three or four thousand temples in Korea at that time. They were all governed by twenty-five head temples. The Japanese governor general who was in charge of ruling Korea called the twenty-five abbots of the head temples to Seoul for a meeting. Man Gong Sunim was the head of one of those temples, so he also was called to this meeting. At this meeting, the governor general said, “All Korean Buddhists follow you twenty-five great monks. My predecessor, the former governor general, only wanted to help Korean Buddhism. I also want to help Korean Buddhism. So for Korean Buddhism to become strong, Korean Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism must become one school.” What that meant, of course, is that they would follow the rules of Japanese Buddhism. That meant small things—like wearing black robes—but, it also meant following forms which would weaken Korean Buddhism. These included allowing monks to marry, eat meat, and drink alcohol, which was the rule in Japan. The Japanese authorities wanted all the major temples headed by married monks. The penalty for not following the rules set forth by the Japanese government could mean imprisonment or execution.

After the governor general finished speaking, Man Gong Sunim walked to the front of the room, pointed at the governor general and demanded, “Do you know where the mountains, the rivers, and the great earth come from?” The governor general was silent. Suddenly Man Gong Sunim shouted, “Katz!” He pointed to the governor general’s mouth and said, “Then that mouth is the gate to hell. Your predecessor didn’t want to help Korean Buddhism, he wanted to destroy it. If you want to help Korean Buddhism, don’t touch it.” Then he left and went back to Dok Sahn Mountain. Six hundred meditation monks and nuns refused to follow the Japanese style and the Japanese didn’t touch them. The rest of the monks and nuns went over to the Japanese style, which is why there is still a married monks order in Korea. The occupation continued until World War II ended and the Japanese were forced to leave. I’m sure everybody was joyous, just like they were in Malaysia, and here in Singapore. Maybe some of you were alive at that time and remember—certainly your parents or grandparents were.

At that time, Man Gong Sunim took a petal from a flower of the national flower, dipped it in some ink, and wrote, “The Whole World Is a Single Flower.” I always wondered why this calligraphy is not really beautiful writing; it was written with a flower petal, not a brush. But there is no bitterness in this calligraphy. There is no anger. There is no exclusion. Everybody, everything is part of this single flower. Man Gong Sunim’s mind at that time is already the end of all differences.

Long ago, Buddha picked up one flower. Only Mahakashyapa understood. In that flower are the 84,000 sutras. All the truth of the universe is in Buddha’s flower. And in Man Gong Sunim’s calligraphy is the end of all differences, the end of desire, anger and ignorance. Whether he had attained enlightenment or not, the moment he wrote “The Whole World is a Single Flower,” that was the end of all differences. You don’t have to wait until your practice is ripe. One moment of truly open, wide, accepting, compassionate, inclusive mind is it. That is Buddha.

We are very lucky in this hall. If we were all from the same backgrounds, all from the same lineages and teaching... of course, it would be easy to get along. But if you have different ideas, then how do you get along? Simple... don’t hold on to them. Appreciate the other person’s idea. Who cares who is right or who is wrong? For example, this is a glass of water. English people say “water,” Chinese people say “sui,” Korean people say “mul,” and Malaysians say “ai.” So I ask everybody here, is this water, sui, mul or ai? *[clapping]* Clap? Why are you clapping, we’re not done here... I ask Achan B—Is this water, sui, mul or ai?

Achan B: “As long as it’s not gin, I don’t mind.”

ZMDB: “Sorry?”

AB: “As long as it’s not gin—gin, a type of alcohol, maybe the closest is sake... because sometimes you can’t tell the difference.”

ZMDB: “That’s too complicated an answer for me.”

AB: “That’s all you’re getting.”

ZMDB: “My mind’s complicated. So another way to answer will be...” *[he drinks the water and hands it to Achan B to drink, which he refuses.]*

AB: “I have faith.”

ZMDB: “He has faith. He trusts me. That is a mistake!”

I will say something about trust. There are three kinds of thieves in the world. The first kind of thief steals your car, your credit card, your TV. I’m sure you all worry about that. Actually, this first kind of thief cannot hurt you. The second kind of thief steals your nation. The name for that kind of thief is “hero.” That is somebody like Napoleon. The second thief is more dangerous. But the most dangerous thief is the third kind—they steal your mind. The name for that is “holy person.” So watch out, you’ve got two holy people up here stealing your minds right now! *[clapping]* You applaud? Be careful.

One of the last things Buddha said was, “Be a lamp unto yourself.” We are Buddhists, right? If you believe there is something perfect outside of you, then that is the same as other religions, not Buddhism. Why do other religions fight all the time? Buddha said, “I am a doctor with many kinds of medicine.” He didn’t try to give the same medicine to everybody. So if you like one kind of medicine, take it. Don’t worry about the kind of medicine other people are taking, or force them to take your medicine. That is true Buddhism.

I have a Buddhist story about that. It’s a story about dog racing, which took place in America about twenty-five years ago. Dogs are put into a cage. There’s a rail on the inside of the track. And there is a mechanical rabbit on the rail. The mechanical rabbit goes around the track. When the dogs see the rabbit, they chase it. They think they can catch the rabbit, but they can’t because someone is controlling its speed. But they chase it around until they pass the finish line. Then human beings win or lose money on their bets. One day, there was a dog named Clear Mary in a race. That’s interesting—Clear Mary—because we say Zen means a clear mind. Nothing special. Just that your mind is clear. Clear Mary was very fast and had won many races, so many people bet on her. On this particular day, all the dogs went into the gate, as usual, the gates opened, the dogs saw the rabbit, and started to chase the rabbit. Everybody was cheering, hoping to win

money. However, halfway around the track, one dog stopped. The other dogs kept chasing the rabbit, but this one dog just stood there watching. All of the people on the stands were looking at this one dog, Clear Mary. Naturally, the people who bet on her were really upset. They started yelling, “You stupid dog! Run! Run!” But Clear Mary just stood there watching the other dogs chase the rabbit. Then she turned around and looked the other way, back from where she came. Then suddenly she jumped over the rail, shot across the center of the track, and as the rabbit came around, she leaped at the rail and grabbed the rabbit.

When our teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn heard this story he said, “This dog has Zen mind.” That is very interesting. Our life is much like this dog race. We are always chasing something outside. We want a car, we want a good relationship, we want a good body, we want enlightenment, we want nirvana, we want to find our true self. We always want something. [laughter] But this one dog just stopped. Then she turned around and looked the other way. Then, suddenly, everything became clear. The situation no longer controlled her. Then “Boom!” She jumped over the rail and caught the rabbit.

In our lives, it is the same. If we don't stop and look at ourselves, then “my” situation, “my” condition and “my” opinion always controls me. If we don't hold on to words, and thinking, onto “I, my, me,”—then we can find what is controlling us. Do you think that truth did not exist until the Buddha appeared? It must have existed before Buddha appeared. That means that even if Buddhism disappears, which the Buddha predicted, we are OK, because truth cannot disappear. So it doesn't matter what anybody else is doing. It doesn't matter what the monks do, it doesn't matter what your teachers do, it only matters what you do. Our teaching is to find your true self and help this world. Then the whole world is a single flower. Thank you. ☸

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authenticity

Zen Master Bon Soeng

This talk is inspired by the life of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Through his teachings and his action, he was a consistent example of authenticity. Being with him would shake the foundations of my “I, my, me” mind. Things would feel surreal; my usual evaluation and control would loosen. In its place would appear spontaneity and humor. He showed me how one can be committed to a vow of service to the world, while at the same time completely enjoying the moment. His teaching expressed spontaneity, a moment-centered life lived with the purpose of attaining true self and helping this world.

He did not push us to understand the sutras, or be experts (as he was) in the Buddha’s teaching. Rather, he pushed us to attain the Buddha’s mind, which means to understand our true selves and manifest it in a way that helps others. About three years before I received inka—authorization to teach—a group of us were out to lunch with Zen Master Seung Sahn. My brother asked him, “When will Jeff become a teacher?” He replied: “When he learns how to eat noodles.”

This poem, to me, expresses the heart of his teaching.

ORIGINAL FACE—Zen Master Seung Sahn

*Your true self is always shining and free
Human beings make something and enter the ocean of suffering
Only without thinking can you return to your true self
The high mountain is always blue, white clouds coming and going*

When Shakyamuni Buddha had his big awakening, he was gazing at the morning star. In that moment, he completely realized that he and the universe were one thing. Even to say “one thing” takes away from the completeness of the experience. His experience was complete, no trace of “I.” He realized that not only were he and the universe one, but that it was true for all beings, all of us. Zen Master Man Gong’s famous calligraphy states: “The whole world is a single flower.” Just as a flower is made up of stem and petals, pistil and roots, so is the complete universe made up of parts which are themselves complete.

Your true self is always shining and free You are already complete. Hui Neng, the sixth Patriarch, said, “You should know that so far as Buddha-nature is concerned, there is no difference between an enlightened man and an ignorant one. What makes the difference is that one realizes it, while the other is ignorant of it.” The Buddha’s teaching says that without cultivation you are already complete. Our authentic, real self needs no cultivation. True self is always shining and free whether we are aware of it or not. Our task, our practice, is to become aware and to actualize our true self, to be it in this very moment.

Zen is not about self improvement. We don’t strive to become something, or to overcome our deficiencies. We practice to allow the natural, authentic unfolding of Buddha-nature to manifest. Our effort is about clearing away delusion and ignorance. This means getting out of our own way, allowing this magnificence, this authentic true self to manifest. In this way healing and world peace are not an impossible, distant dream, but exist right now, right here in this very moment.

Human beings make something and enter the ocean of suffering Our true self may indeed always be shining and free, but most of the time we experience painful difficulties in our lives. We are constantly dissatisfied with the ways things are. The Buddha said that we suffer because either we don’t have what we want, or we are afraid of losing what we do have. Moment to moment we struggle to control and force the world to fit into the mold of our desires. That is what Zen Master Seung Sahn is pointing to when he says that human beings make something.

Listen to this sound [*hit.*] Each of us hears this sound. Before thinking we can recognize it for what it is. Just [*hit.*] But some of us don’t like that sound: “Why did he hit the table so hard?” Or some of us really liked it, “That is so great. I really could get the deep meaning of that sound.” Either way, we are making something. The sound itself is just as it is. How I feel about it is making something. This making something creates likes and dislikes. Then, as the Buddha said, if I don’t get what I want, I suffer. If I do get what I want, then I am afraid I might lose it. Or, I might like this sound, but the next sound might hurt my ears and I won’t like it. We are perpetually at odds with, and trying to control, our reality.

In Buddhism we talk about the three poisons: greed, aversion, and delusion. These three poisons point to the way we make something and enter the ocean of suffering. Can you recognize them in your own life? Can you see how your desire for things, or rejection of things, colors your perceptions and actions in the world? Can you admit to the inauthenticity of your actions driven by these three poisons?

The first poison is greed or desire. I want, I need, give it to me, please, please, please. I really want it. I need to get it and I need to figure out a way to get it. Maybe I can just take it. I know it is YOURS, but I need it more than you. And anyway, my needs are more important than yours. I’m even willing to fabricate a story in order to get what I want. And I will repeat this story over and over until I finally believe it—mostly.

Greed interrupts the natural flow of things. Adding my desire into the equation of life, trying to change or alter the way things are to bring me satisfaction, ultimately leads to suffering.

Aversion or hatred is the second poison. Aversion is essentially rejection. Get that thing away from me. Hatred and aversion arise in response to something we don’t like or want to happen to us. It often leads us to push away, at worst culminating in violence. Hatred and anger can overwhelm us, causing us to act in inauthentic ways in order to get relief from these feelings. The natural, authentic flow of life is rejected, and more suffering is the result.

The third poison is ignorance or delusion. This poison follows directly from the other two. Our greed and anger force us to act inauthentically and lose contact with the original, natural flow of things. This inevitably leads to a sense of separation. To live with that separation, I make up a story or narrative to explain who I am and why my greed and anger are justified. More and more, true self is lost, and I live in the dream of my narrative. This is fundamental delusion. The more contrived our delusion is, the more we suffer. The more rigid we become trying to justify and bolster our story, the more we suffer, and the more we cause suffering for those around us. This “making” of likes and dislikes, good and bad, right and wrong, leads us farther and farther away from an authentic, natural unfolding of our lives.

Only without thinking can we return to our true self Without thinking means before thinking, or not attaching to thinking. Seeing things as they are, not how we would like them to be. Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” A Zen student asks, “If I don’t think, then what?”

Before-thinking is easy to talk about, but difficult to practice. Our desire, anger, and ignorance are so powerful, so encompassing and solid, that we don’t even recognize their impact. Many people who first hear about before-thinking find it absurd. Others feel that it is impossible to not attach to their thinking.

This leads us to the realm of Zen practice. Though our delusion seems enormous, and our suffering feels so daunting and profound, Zen practice offers us a way to deconstruct our delusion. We can live a more centered and grounded life, in order to work with our desire and anger, so that we can reconnect with that authentic natural self which is always shining and free.

Quiet the mind. Breathe gently and deeply in and out. Observe what is happening just now. Find your balance point where desire and anger don’t control you. Allow your actions in life to come from this place, and mindfully pay attention to the results. This is true Zen practice.

From the Chinese and Korean Zen traditions we learn that it takes three things to practice Zen—great question, great courage, and great faith. These three greats form the foundation of practice. Together they show us a path, a way to live which will bring us into more alignment with what is natural, authentic, and true. In this way we can find our true self and help this world.

Great question is the first of the three greats. Great question means asking the question, “What am I?” and “What is this?” Asking these great questions brings our meditation and mindfulness alive. As we sit in meditation, these questions bring energy and focus to our silent work. Mindfully asking these questions as we go about our everyday lives offers a way

to bring our meditation out of the dharma hall. What is actually happening right now? What do I feel and think about it all? How are my thoughts and feelings colouring my view of what is happening right now?

Moment to moment we are called upon to respond to all sorts of situations and conditions. How clearly can we really see what is going on? As was said in the discussion about making something, usually our view of the moment is coloured by the three poisons. Using great question as a focus of our Zen practice, we can begin to observe the moment more honestly, more free of the biases of our desire, anger, and delusion. As we let go of our biases, we can experience our lives more directly and honestly. We use these questions to clarify our life.

Great courage is the second great. Great courage means to make a great effort, whether the moment is difficult or easy. This effort is critical to Zen practice because our delusion is so strong. Life is very uncertain, and we are very vulnerable. We cling strongly to our own delusion to protect us from these risks and uncertainties. In our Zen practice, we need to push beyond what is comfortable. This is one of the important lessons we learn in a meditation retreat. Much of the time during retreat we are unhappy and want it to end. Just making it through helps us build a stronger center. We need to become better able to observe our desire and anger without losing ourselves in them. I may want something, but by applying great effort, I may not need to satisfy my desire. I may be angry but I may not need to strike out. I can watch it, observe it, and not act on it. We need great courage to honestly face our feelings and thoughts as they are, so as not to be lead astray by them.

Great faith leads us back to the true self, which is always shining and free. We believe in our true self, in the authentic unfolding of life. This is not about believing in something outside ourselves. We are the universe, the universe is us! As we begin to see the falseness of our own delusion, we can

begin to experience directly the completeness and authenticity of this moment. We can have faith in our own experience. When standing in the rain, we get wet. It is possible to believe our own senses, untainted by the three poisons. Listen to the wind. Hear it and appreciate it for what it is. Feel it on your face and you experience truth.

These three greats, practiced moment to moment, grounded in meditation and mindfulness, offer us all an active and dynamic way to practice Zen. They help us actually relax the tight grip of our feelings and thinking and return us to our true self.

The high mountain is always blue, white clouds coming and going Here we return to the realm of the natural unfolding of the universe. The mountain itself is always blue, whether we realize it or not, whether we like it or not. The clouds coming and going do not bother the mountain. In fact, they coexist peacefully. The mountain helps the clouds form and the clouds give moisture to the mountain. In the same way, our struggles and triumphs nourish our awakening.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, enlightenment is depicted as a two-headed dragon of wisdom and compassion. In a moment of centered authenticity, wisdom and compassion appear. We have the clarity to see things as they are and the courage to open our heart. We naturally treat the world and the things in it with love and compassion and are concerned about others, not only about ourselves.

Authenticity is the path to peace and healing. Don't try to be someone other than yourself. Allow our Zen practice to help you listen deeply to your true self—your deepest and most authentic expression of the Buddha's mind. There are 86,400 seconds in one day. Imagine how many experiences we live in all these seconds. How will we live them? Will we remain lost in the dream-created by the three poisons, or will we wake up to this moment's magnificent unfolding of Buddha-nature? ☸

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THE LIGHT OF THE

Chong An Sunim JDPS

In our historical era, Shakyamuni Buddha discovered spiritual ways humankind had barely known before. He opened a clear path to enlightenment, which serves the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering. This means reducing the suffering that we inflict on ourselves and others, and ultimately, it extends to freedom from birth and death, liberation from the cycle of becoming.

Progress on the path is most dynamic when great masters are present. In this talk, I will outline some changes in our tradition, as well briefly portray some paramount figures: human beings who gave direction to all of us by virtue of their attainment.

It is very fortunate that Gautama Siddhartha had over forty years to promulgate his teaching. This gave him ample time to see where to begin, how to continue, and how to end his effort. Upon attaining enlightenment, he started to teach what is now the essence of the dharma, the Avatamsaka Sutra: *If you wish to thoroughly understand all the Buddhas of past, present and future, then you should view the nature of the whole universe as being created by mind alone.*

No matter how profound this teaching is, the Buddha had to realize that his first students did not understand it, let alone attain it. Therefore, he started with something more conceivable, the Four Noble Truths. Although this approach was fraught with the danger of seeing the world as existing by itself, independent of human mind, the Buddha did start where students could see what he meant.

Who would not see impermanence? Who would not see the immediate root of suffering: attachment to impermanence? In this way, the First Noble Truth, the fact of suffering, could easily be comprehended.

How attachment develops and what forms it takes are presented in the Second Noble Truth, where the fundamental cause of all misery to sentient beings is outlined: wrong views, which can prompt us to believe in some inherent, unresolvable duality between humans and the world. Ignorance is the root of all desire and anger.

The Third Noble Truth presents the end of suffering, which is simply cutting attachments by not dwelling in ignorance, in other words, stopping to make opposites. In practice, this means attaining not moving body, not moving speech, and not moving mind. The resulting consciousness is before thinking or movement. It is clear like space, clear like a mirror.

The Fourth Noble Truth outlines how to use our clear mind so as to put an end to suffering. This is called the Noble Eightfold Path. It is truly remarkable that all the eight paths begin with the word *correct*. At the same time, since it gives no explicit and absolute definition of what is correct, the path should lead to *attaining* what that is.

It is very clear why the term *correct* cannot be defined by some explanation. If anyone tried to do this, dualistic views would be developed, and the very essence of the path, that is, liberation through non-duality, would be lost. The question is left for us to cope with: What is correct? What is helpful for all beings? What is it that helps us attain the supreme teaching, which is beyond all ignorant views, anger, or desire?

The Buddha and his students had to practice together for many years before the teaching on transcendental wisdom could appear. Nearly all pieces of the Prajnaparamita scriptures boil down to the same point, where the phenomenal world becomes void of any characteristics that we see as inherent.

The teaching on non-self and emptiness would not work without first carefully studying how this world appears to



us. Without describing the problem clearly, the solution cannot be found, and the creator of all our woes cannot be identified. This world is originally empty, functioning spontaneously without any self or permanent quality, to no end or special purpose.

This is why the Heart Sutra says that originally the five skandhas are empty and thus we are saved from suffering and distress. This means that if we do not create suffering, there is no suffering. Without the fact of suffering, the other three Noble Truths do not come about either.

Now the truth laid out in the Avatamsaka Sutra is brought home, and those who practice persistently can eventually discern how the mind creates the world. Finishing his great work, the Buddha reminded his students about impermanence and the importance of practice: "This world is on fire—strive endlessly!"

Although this recognition gave rise to numberless sutras and shastras, the underlying practice to attain where suffering comes from and how it can be overcome gave way within a few generations to thinking and rethinking what the Buddha had said.

Therefore, the 28th Patriarch, Bodhidharma, had an immense job. His teacher, Prajnatarā, told him to bring the light of the lamp, the true dharma, to China. Sutras had been flowing to China for centuries before that, and there were countless temples, and many, many monks and nuns.

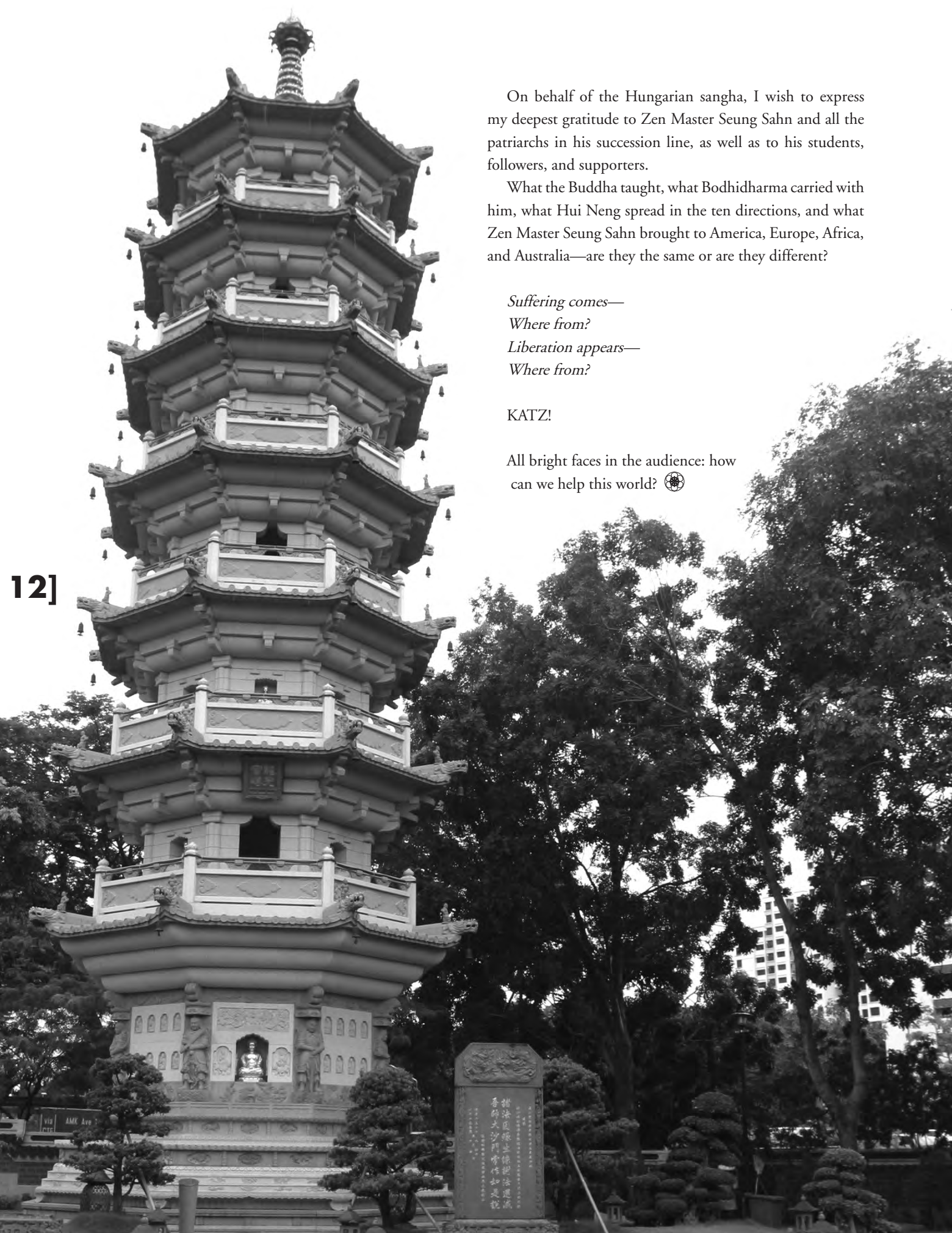
Nonetheless, Bodhidharma had to employ what is now the Four Principles of Zen to teach those who would listen to become practitioners again. The task was not easy; this is evident from his encounters with scholarly monks in various temples, and his abruptly-ending conversation with Emperor Wu.

It is vital to cut attachment to words and speech. Thus the first principle says: Do not depend on the scriptures. The second says: Seek for a transmission which is beyond the written word. The third emphasizes the importance of directly pointing to the human mind. The fourth outlines the result: enlightenment by perceiving human nature.

In our nature, we find the origin and cessation of all phenomena and attributed qualities. If we look into ourselves deeply, we no longer ask for an external explanation of what suffering is, what a human being is, and why this world reacts to humans in the way it does.

After Bodhidharma's time, was there any need to renew the way the teaching functions? Yes, certainly. Six generations later, Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, almost lost his life because the relics attached to the patriarchal succession of the Buddha were coveted by a monk. In critical situations, as well as in everyday life, attainment is qualified by how one functions. Hui Neng destroyed the robe and the bowl, so that their presence could no longer hinder or endanger anybody who became ripe in the dharma. Moreover, he had the monolithic succession line fan out into five distinct schools, soon to go to everywhere in Asia. The fruits of these seeds are still fresh and alive today.

In the 20th century, several Asian monks and nuns received instructions from their teachers to carry the dharma to the west. One of them was Zen Master Seung Sahn. Through his tireless efforts, the light of the lamp is now shining on more and more of us. We have a much better chance than before to attain the correct way, where our situation, relationship, and function all become part of the bodhisattva way to offer the path of awakening to this world.



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On behalf of the Hungarian sangha, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Zen Master Seung Sahn and all the patriarchs in his succession line, as well as to his students, followers, and supporters.

What the Buddha taught, what Bodhidharma carried with him, what Hui Neng spread in the ten directions, and what Zen Master Seung Sahn brought to America, Europe, Africa, and Australia—are they the same or are they different?

*Suffering comes—
Where from?
Liberation appears—
Where from?*

KATZ!

All bright faces in the audience: how
can we help this world? ☸

ZEN IN LAS VEGAS

Thom Pastor, JDPSN

It is wonderful to be here in Singapore at the Whole World Is A Single Flower Conference. It is also an honor to be given an opportunity to speak to you a little bit about why this sangha gathering is so auspicious, and why Zen Master Seung Sahn considered it so important.

Almost everyone in the world, if you were to meet and ask them, knows or at least has heard about Singapore. It can be said that Singapore is a world class city, not unlike Paris, Rome, London, Hong Kong, New York, and other world destinations.

Where I call home has gained in thirty short years world-wide popularity as well. I live in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA. Las Vegas is known for its neon, fancy hotels, restaurants, and gambling.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said that everyone wants things, chases things, and is attached to those things. These are the maxims which command Las Vegas. The spiteful snakes of sex, money, rich food, and power are the deities of choice there, insulated by an industry that not only tolerates them, but, in fact, exalts them.

I did much of my early Zen training in Los Angeles at Dharma Zen Center with Zen Master Ji Bong, and became a dharma teacher in 1994. Around that time, Zen Master Seung Sahn would visit Las Vegas fairly often, primarily as a patient of the famous Korean acupuncturist, Dr. Ju Cheon Lee. One night, over dinner, knowing that I had recently become a dharma teacher, he looked at me, smiled and said, "So, maybe a Zen center will now appear in Las Vegas?"

"That would be wonderful," I replied, and suggested he might send someone, a monk or nun, to oversee this undertaking, a response he acknowledged with a laugh, "Oh no, no... This is your job!" I learned never to argue with Zen Master Seung Sahn! Shortly thereafter, Great Brightness Zen Center appeared. We are now in our twelfth year.

"Everybody comes into this world carrying nothing," Zen Master Seung Sahn has said. "Everyone leaves for someplace, also carrying nothing. We cannot take anything with us. Yet in between, everybody wants things, chases things, and is very much attached to things."



Zen Master Seung Sahn realized that human beings the world over, whether in Paris, Rome, Singapore, Las Vegas, or elsewhere, have the same desires and wants, but he also taught that if we "put down," our wanting, attaching, checking, and holding, then we can attain the same mind as Mahakashyapa when the Buddha held up a single flower and Mahakashyapa simply smiled. At that time the whole world became a single flower. The wisdom is timeless. When you think and I think, our minds are different. However, your before-thinking mind is your substance. My before-thinking mind is my substance. The whole universe before our fragmented opinions, judgments, and opposites thinking is just like this—complete and undifferentiated.

Since our Zen Center opened in Las Vegas, many, many people have come there. Many have already experienced the futility of chasing after things, and the resultant suffering born out of their attachments. In Buddhist circles, Las Vegas has often been called "big, desire mind." The allure of instant riches, good times, and sense gratification has its list of clients. From prostitutes, gamblers, alcoholics, and drug users desperately seeking their true life's direction to Anglican priests, rabbis, and Christian clergy, families with small children, and everyone in between, Great Brightness Zen Center has welcomed them all.

So the question arises, are Las Vegas, London, Paris, Rome, New York, and Hong Kong the same or different examined from this mind light?

When we quiet the mind and look carefully at our experience, we see that this world is a world of constant change and insecurity. Anything that arises in our life, no matter how hard we try to stabilize it, will pass away. Whatever appears is transitory and thus can never last. Consciousness and object reveal themselves to be continually dissolving like snowflakes on a hot oven. Whatever appears is not dependable, and there is no refuge, no anchor, no safe haven.

The quest for instant gambling riches, pleasure and sense gratification is hollow, and at its core, devoid of substance.

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I would like to quote Zen Master Seung Sahn from his dedication speech for our Zen Center in Las Vegas. He said “In this desert, an oasis has appeared. If there is no oasis in the desert, there is no place for people to drink water, and if you have no water to drink, you soon will die. Las Vegas has been called the city of desire, or the city of sin. A Zen Center in this city of desire is just like a beautiful oasis appearing in this very dry desert. This effort will produce much dharma water. This dharma water will give great enlightenment to the thirsty students, and will help save many beings.

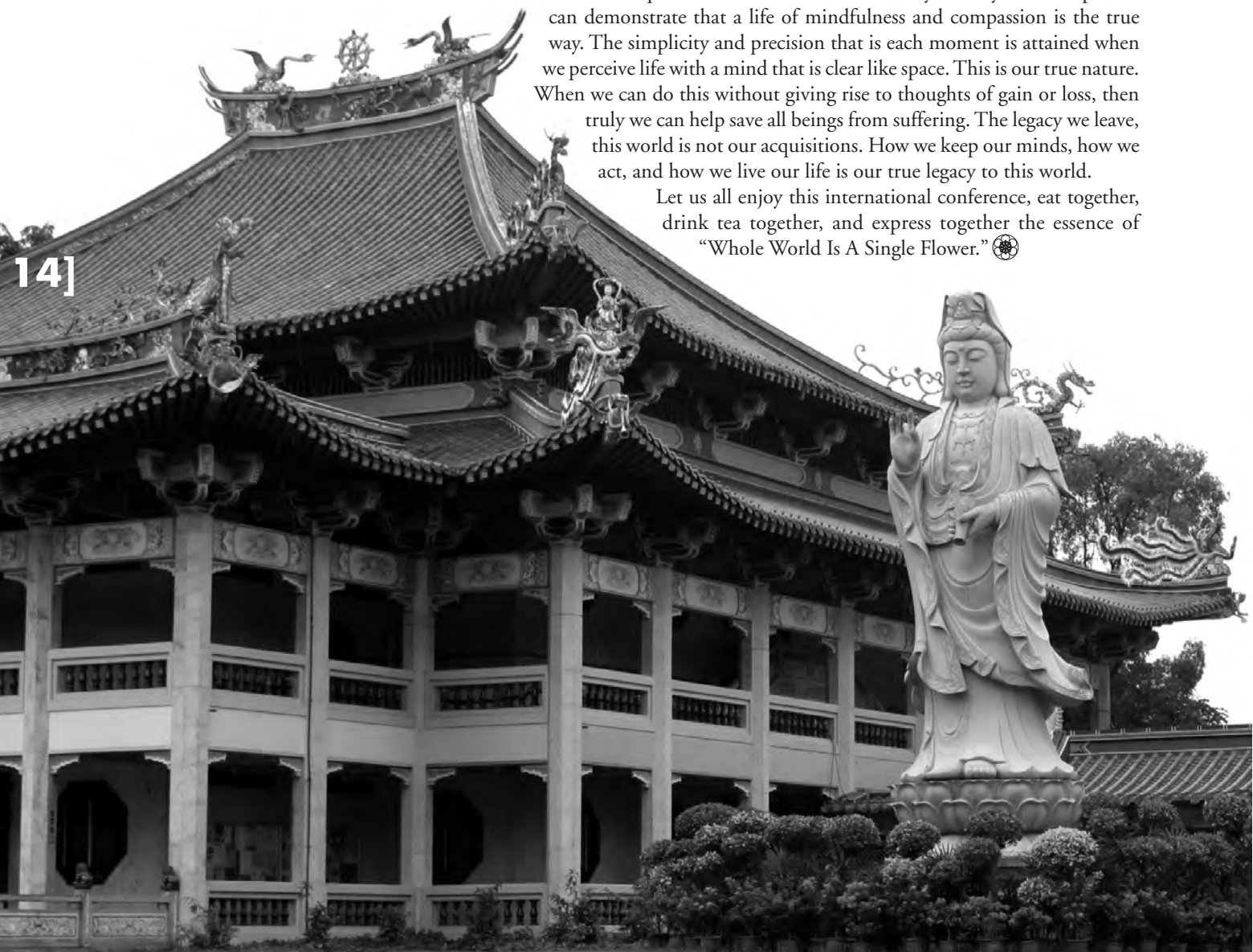
“Our Buddhism is not just getting happiness for ourselves. Our Buddhism is finding our own mind light and using this illumination to shine on all beings. If we find this mind light together, then this truly can become Great Brightness Zen Center. Dae, or great, means no opposites. Myung, or bright, means no shadow. If we acquire our true nature’s light, then there is no shadow.”

So whether we make our home in beautiful Singapore, or Paris, Rome, London, Hong Kong, or New York, our jobs fundamentally are the same. Thirsty students are everywhere. Buddha, some 2500 years ago, said this world is an ocean of suffering. What was true then, is true now. With over 6.5 billion people on this planet, all of us must share equally in this great task of offering dharma water to thirsty students.

How do we quench the insatiable thirst of I, my, me? By our example, we can demonstrate that a life of mindfulness and compassion is the true way. The simplicity and precision that is each moment is attained when we perceive life with a mind that is clear like space. This is our true nature. When we can do this without giving rise to thoughts of gain or loss, then truly we can help save all beings from suffering. The legacy we leave, this world is not our acquisitions. How we keep our minds, how we act, and how we live our life is our true legacy to this world.

Let us all enjoy this international conference, eat together, drink tea together, and express together the essence of “Whole World Is A Single Flower.” 🌸

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Buddha's Tooth

Couplets for the Great Hero

On a beautiful day, the Buddha was born
He was a prince, a royal son

Bright as he was, he left his home
To find the answer to humans' woe

Six years he sat, all alone
Saw the star and he awoke

What is life? What is death?
How are we born to reap all that?

Think a little but do not know
Save yourself from all that woe

If you want to bite your karma's root
You've gotta have the Buddha's tooth!

—Chong An Sunim JDPS

North Crestone Lake

Those feet that have been here
before your feet
created this trail. Other lives
have followed this thread of dust and stones
switchbacking up through Douglas fir and aspen,
have crossed chattering streams on worn logs,
felt the alpine meadow expand
like a deep breath,
climbed scree slope and snowfield
to gaze down on this lake, held
like a chip of rainbow
in an upturned palm, with fingers of peaks
brushing the sky around.

For a moment your mind stops
while what is here before your mind
continues. Now the shape of this
lives within you, as it lives
in others who have been here.
They say there are ten thousand doors to freedom.
When you meet another being,
this place in you can bow
to this place in them.

—Chris Hoffman

Imagine

Sometimes we encounter prose written for one purpose or another. With some simple editing, and perhaps a word change here and there, it becomes a poem. Was this the writer's true meaning?

The following poem was derived from a descriptive naturewalk sign along the Swamp Walk, Lincoln Park, Lexington. It is slightly modified from the originals by the transcriber, Gary Kahn.

Imagine releasing a toy boat
And following it down the banks of Vine Brook
To the Shawsheen, then to the Concord.
Run the quick rapids into the Merrimack.
Meet the tidal waters at Newburyport.
Our toyboat has floated through a watershed.
One of three.
North to the Merrimack.
East to the Mystic.
South to Charles.
Next time, maybe, another direction.

—Gary Kahn

Dharma

I can hear it.
I can see it.
I can smell it.
I can taste it.
I can feel it.
I can touch it.
I can experience it.
With mind and body.
The Dharma that is all ready full.
Why change it?
It is just like this.

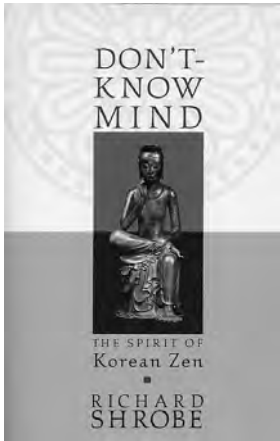
—Mu Shim Sunim JDPS

The Man and Woman in the
Floorboards of the Zendo

Had I not been here I never
would have seen them. Now
they show me my mind.

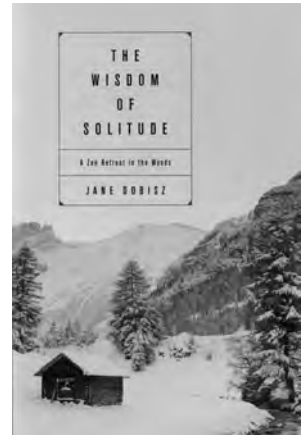
—Chris Hoffman

A fresh approach to Zen

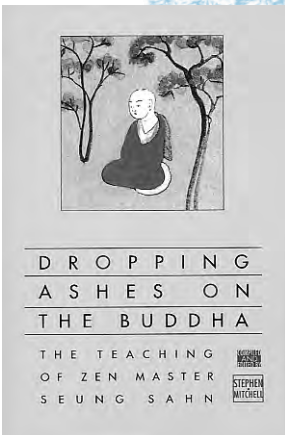


Don't-Know Mind: The Spirit of Korean Zen. Zen Master Wu Kwang uses stories about Korean Zen Masters from Ma-tsu to Seung Sahn to present Zen teaching applicable to anyone's life. 128 pages. *Shambhala. ISBN 1-59030-110-2. \$14.95*

The Wisdom of Solitude. The story of Zen Master Bon Yeon's solo retreat is threaded through with Zen teaching and striking insights into the human mind when left to its own devices. 160 pages. *Harper SanFrancisco. ISBN 0-06-008595-9. \$21.95*



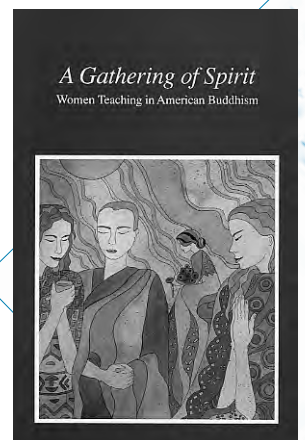
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Wanting Enlightenment is a Big Mistake: Teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Compiled and edited by Hyon Gak Sunim. Foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn Shambhala, 2006. 199 pages. *Shambhala. ISBN 1-59030-340-7. \$15.95*



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. \$12.00*



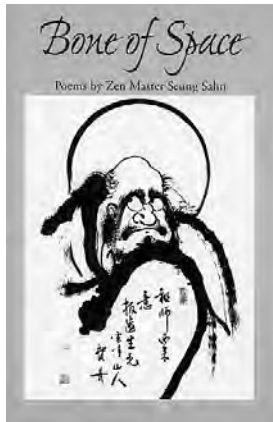
A Gathering of Spirit: Women Teaching in American Buddhism. Edited by Ellen Sidor. Talks and discussions from three landmark conferences at Providence Zen Center. Third edition, 1992. 156 pages. *Primary Point Press. ISBN 0-942795-05-9. \$11.95*



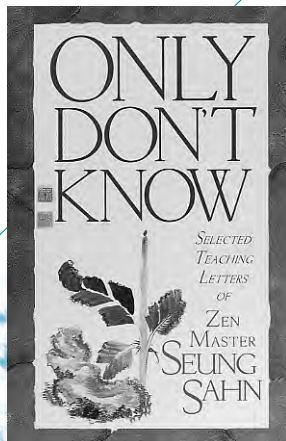
The Whole World is a Single Flower: 365 Kong-ans for Everyday Life. Zen Master Seung Sahn. CD-ROM version for Mac and PC. Audio recordings of Zen Master Seung Sahn's commentaries together with the full text of the kong-an collection. 2006. 2 discs. *Primary Point Press. ISBN 0-942795-15-6. \$30.00*

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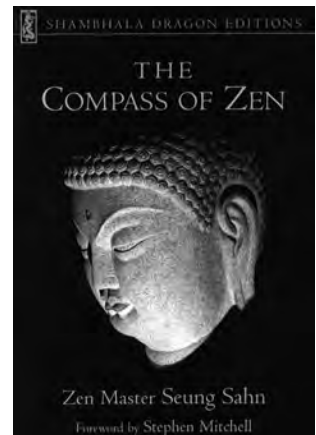
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Bone of Space: Poems by Zen Master Seung Sahn. This collection captures a master's thoughts during everyday life—while traveling, talking on the phone, attending a friend's funeral. Primary Point Press edition, 1992. 128 pages.
Primary Point Press.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

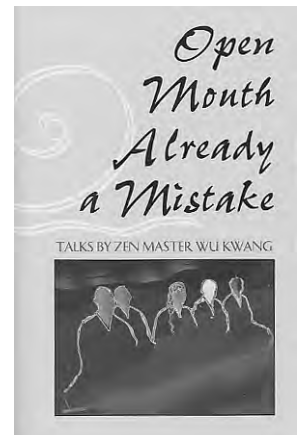


Compass of Zen. Zen Master Seung Sahn. Compiled and edited by Hyon Gak Sunim JDPS. It is a simple, clear, and often hilarious presentation of the essential teachings of the main Buddhist traditions—culminating in Zen—by one of the most beloved Zen Masters of our time. 1997. 394 pages.
Shambhala. ISBN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



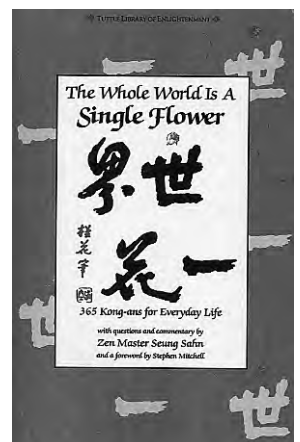
Only Don't Know: Teaching Letters of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Issues of work, relationships, and suffering are discussed as they relate to meditation practice. 1999. 230 pages.
Shambhala. ISBN 1-57062-432-1. \$14.95

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



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.
Primary Point Press. ISBN 0-942795-07-5. \$30.00



road trip

*Michael Zinke
Great Lake Zen Center*

When I was young, I remember that my father was always reading maps. We never really went anywhere, but he would spend hours looking at maps of our state, the surrounding states, and even the entire United States. He knew all the major roads, where they went, what towns they went through, the fastest route from here to almost anywhere. He knew just about every major and minor river and where it started and where it ended. One time on a trip home, I noticed that I had crossed the East Branch of the Skunk River. The name just struck me as being funny, so I mentioned it to my dad. He knew exactly where it was and even told me where the West Branch of the Skunk River was. Yet, with all the reading he did and knowledge he had about roads, cities, and states, we hardly ever went anywhere.


I used to look back at that and laugh and wonder what that was all about, and then one day I caught myself doing the same thing. When I stopped and thought about it, I realized that I also spent a lot of time looking at maps. I don't know, maybe it's just a guy thing, or maybe it's some strange genetic trait passed on from my forefathers. But I remember a couple of summers ago, my wife and I talked about going to the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Before long, I had the maps out and was planning a road trip. Within a day or two, I had mapped out several different routes from here to the Outer Banks. Not just one route, mind you, but I had probably four different routes through as many states as you could imagine. I even had several different routes for the trip back home. But something came up and the trip never happened. The following summer, we thought about going down and checking on some land we own in Tennessee. Of course, that was then expanded to go farther, as long as we were in the area, we might just as well go to Asheville, North Carolina—it's right down the road a piece, and as long as we were that far south, we could just as well continue on to Savannah, Georgia and check it out. I always wanted to see Savannah. Out came the maps, and several routes were once again plotted. Both to and from, several selections, just take your pick of states to go through. Of course, something else came up, and that trip was postponed also. But I continued to look at maps and atlases, and at the very mention of a trip, I

would start plotting routes again and again. Never taking the trips, but always prepared.

You can probably see where this is headed, right? Nowhere. As long as you plan, plan, plan, you never go anywhere. Someday you have to stop planning and just go. You can be like my father and know every major road in the United States, but until you actually get in your car and drive on those roads, you will always be right there in your driveway where you started.

Many times we plan to do things, whether it be to go to practice or go shopping. But the results are the same if we only plan to do these things and never get around to actually doing them; then we never get to practice or we never go shopping. We can apply this same principle to a lot of other things in our home life and our work life. As the end of the year approaches, I am reminded that I had planned to take several classes to fulfill my development plan objectives at work for the year. But, so far, I have only planned to take the courses, I haven't actually taken the courses yet, and the year-end is quickly approaching. So planning to take the courses is as far as I have gotten, and that isn't going to meet the objective, which was to actually take the courses.





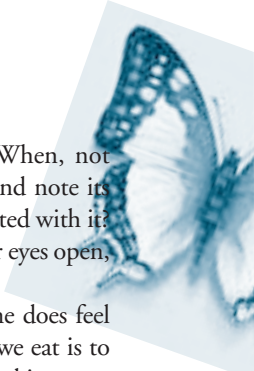
As I talk to other people about Zen practice, I run into many people who say they have read a lot about Zen. They haven't practiced Zen at all, they don't apply Zen to their daily lives, but they have read a lot, and know probably far more than I do about historical facts and figures relating to Zen. But reading about Zen and not practicing is like reading maps and not going anywhere. Over the years, I have heard many teachers say "put the books down and practice." Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that reading about Zen is fine, but someday you have to put down the books and start sitting on the cushion. We have to take all of those great ideas that we read about in all of those books and start applying all of those things in our daily life. That way, when we see someone who is hungry, we know that we need to feed them. If we see someone who is suffering, we can help them find the origin of their suffering, and correct the situation.

Planning is a necessary part of life. We need to plan for the future, but we must remember that when we plan for the future, we have to do the planning in the present

moment. After we make those plans, we have to act on them, follow the plan that we laid out. Many people don't plan and have no way to handle bad situations that arise. But having a plan that is never followed is of no use to us, either.

There is nothing wrong with looking at maps and planning trips. There is nothing wrong with reading all the Zen books you can find. There is nothing wrong with planning. Just remember that all of that planning is empty unless you start the car or sit on the cushion. You must put the plan into action to reap any benefits of the plan.

So, the next time you pick up a map and look at all of the different ways to go from point A to point B, remember to start the car and actually experience the trip. The next time you enjoy reading about Zen in a new book, put the book down, and sit on the cushion for a while. Experience the trip, experience Zen. You'll be happy you did. 🌀



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HARD PRACTICE

Anne Rudloe

Excerpts from her book *"Butterflies on a Sea Wind"*
(Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2002)
continued from Primary Point Fall 2004

Students who would like to study the way must not wish for easy practice. If you seek easy practice, you will for certain never reach the ground of truth or dig down to the place of treasure. Even teachers of old who had great capacity said that practice is difficult.
Zen Master Dogen

By the first day of the second week of the retreat, I was angry at the system because I was once again fighting drowsiness instead of just being able to enjoy the retreat. Once again, just getting up each morning was a test of commitment and strength.

All through the early morning sitting, I was preoccupied of how formal practice did and didn't fit in with family commitments, and I couldn't wake up. Mental energy, I suddenly realized, can control sleepiness. When there was less worry and more energy, sleepiness wasn't a problem. When energy failed, sleepiness appeared like a scavenger to pick my bones.

When I described the sleepiness at the next interview, the teacher pointed out that constant mental chatter and thinking requires a lot of energy and makes one tired.

"There are several sources of sleepiness in meditation. Aside from the physical need for rest, sleepiness can be a

subconscious way of avoiding the situation. When, not if, you get sleepy," she said, "try to observe it and note its sensations. Are there particular emotions associated with it? What's happening that you don't like? Keep your eyes open, do walking meditation. Deal with it a while."

It made sense. As the mind calms down, one does feel less tired and need less sleep. A lot of the food we eat is to fuel the brain, so maybe a lot of the sleep we need is to rest it from its spinning. The world does look a little different with less sleep. The day-night-day-night perception of how time passes may begin to change, and insight may develop a little more easily. It is possible to develop a clear, powerful mind that is no longer such a slave to physical demands. A physically sheltered and structured setting like a meditation retreat is a better place to practice this skill than in the midst of daily demands.

But the familiar schedule still seemed harder than usual—getting up, being tired, and doing all the sitting. It was definitely tougher in this long retreat, maybe because I didn't have anything better to think about. It was a good example of the kind of thinking that makes us even more tired, things like comparing this to that, liking this, not that.

My habit of trying to understand Zen and kong-ans was partly the result of years of analytical scientific training. However, my habit of analysis also allowed me to avoid being intimate with my feelings. Intellectualizing and abstracting practice was a defense against living it. It was okay to "figure it out" so long as that was a secondary part of the practice, used to help people through their tough spots. But if I used "figuring it out" to insulate myself from the silent fire of practice, it would subvert the whole thing.

All this thinking! What happened to the peaceful mind I'd had at the beginning? Now I was lying in bed figuring out the process of figuring things out when I needed to be asleep. It took so long to get to sleep that I was sure the next 4:30 AM wake up would be horrible. I got up thinking, "The body will be tough. Don't add mental hassles. Just do it peacefully." And getting up wasn't too bad.

Once again, physical energy came from the state of my mind independent of sleep. The level of mental tension made sitting physically hard one day and easy the next. If I could stay in this retreat for several months, maybe I could explore that relationship enough to resolve it finally. But there wasn't that much time.

What would this day bring? I had a secret illegal stash of chocolate I'd been saving until it was needed. After almost no sleep the night before, this was the morning, and the candy was awesomely good. Out on the porch, the high wind that had been blowing constantly almost all night long was gone. The quiet stillness poured through me. This stillness was what was so impossible to reach in the meditation room with fatigue, backache and guilt distracting me. Here was a whole sky full of awareness—a sky glowing with moonlight and early morning light, three stars gleaming through the branches of a maple tree and one dove cooing in the sharp cold.





At the interview with the teacher later that morning, I related the experience out on the porch and how frustrated I felt having to go back into the meditation room, with its backaches and struggles, to walk away from what this retreat was really about.

“Don’t attach to good feelings or bad feelings; learn from both, accept both,” she said. “When it’s time to go to the meditation hall, just go to the meditation hall. And even if there’s a special moment, when it passes, it just passes. You can’t hold it, and if you try, you miss the next moment.”

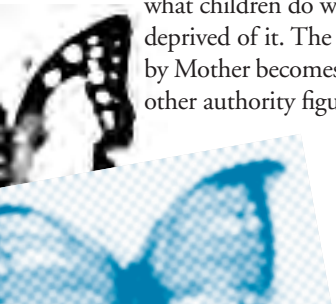
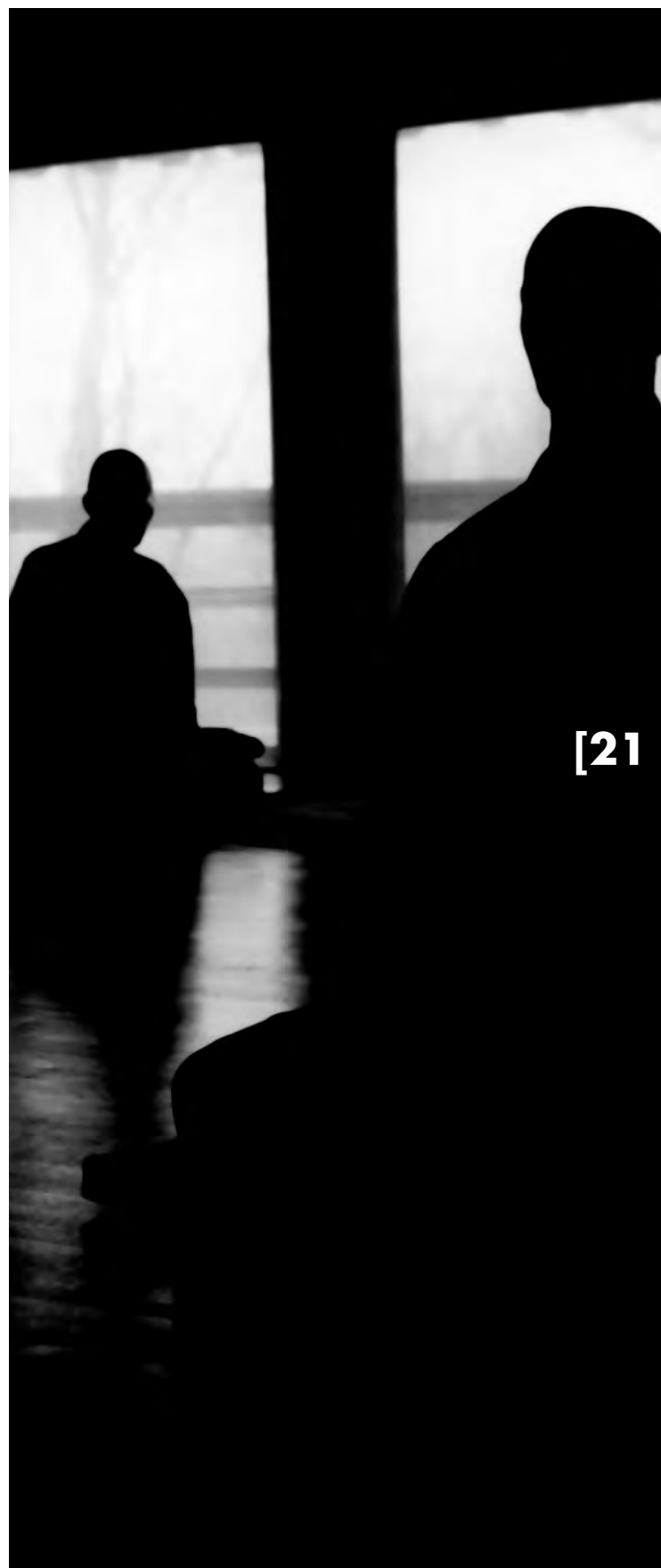
That night, the Zen Master gave a talk. “It’s not so important to be right,” she said, “to be a leader, to be compassionate, to be whatever idea you have of what you should be. It’s just important to be *there*, and to be present fully. If you can be there, be clear, and trust yourself, you will know what to do with the specifics of the situation.”

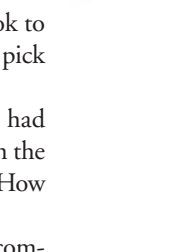
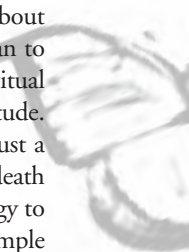
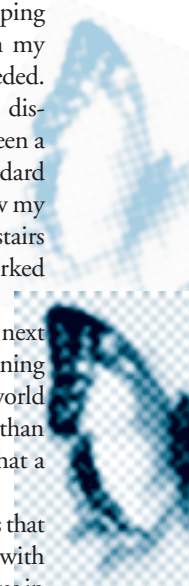
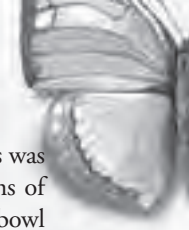
Several questions followed. How do you deal with those who take advantage of giving way to their needs? How do you handle an emotionally painful situation? Is it better to hide it or let the pain show? Her answer was basically the same. Just be fully present, be clear and trust yourself, and you will know what to do with the specifics of the situation. Zen never gives the answers. Specific questions are clarified but tossed back, teaching us to face and solve our problems for ourselves.

I began to relax and enjoy the experience of just sitting there listening to a talk. Everything was already complete for just a moment. What was I trying to achieve here? A set of girl scout badges? A little star to sew on my gray jacket for each kong-an solved?

At the next morning’s work period, I was assigned to sweep some wooden stairs that weren’t dirty. Coming from a household where hours were engulfed in a futile attempt to create order out of never-ending domestic chaos, I was deeply offended at the pointlessness of it all. But by the time I got to the bottom of the “clean” stairs, there was a pile of dirt that had been there and invisible. So! Pay attention. Things weren’t as they seemed if you looked close enough. Unlike the endless, hopeless struggle at home, this activity polished and repolished to maintain a high standard of order and cleanliness. But using everything as a symbol of something else was analysis. Maybe I should just quietly sweep the floor without all this worry about whether or not it was necessary.

Although I was less sick with fatigue than I had been, I still dozed at sittings, and meditation seemed about as unproductive as it ever had been at any retreat. I was also having fantasies of being acknowledged as special somehow by the Zen Master in front of all the others. Maybe next time, I’d come up with an answer to hanging from a branch so brilliant and original that it would dazzle even her. This idea was more of the endless efforts of ego trying to reassert itself. It was what children do when they compete for attention and feel deprived of it. The little child’s endless desire to be noticed by Mother becomes the adult’s desire to be noticed by some other authority figure—God, the Universe, whatever.





At the next interview, after my newest solution to hanging from a branch died, I asked the teacher about my apparent lack of progress in this retreat relative to insights gained in previous ones.

“It’s not a linear process, and you can’t measure what’s happening by a simple yardstick like insights per hour. The things happening are more subtle than that. The world is infinite, and if you try to measure it by what you get and how fast you get it, you’ll never perceive the infinite qualities of the world.”

Oh. Of course. Whatever.

Feeling glum about everything, I went for a walk into gorgeous fields and woods with late afternoon sun that turned roadside ditch weeds into spectacularly beautiful stuff. Beauty was spread with such an extravagant care, free hand on this earth. The sky, clearing after a rainstorm, was a spectacular white/purple/blue swirl. The natural things were such powerful teachers.

In the formal Zen setting, all the distractions of a social organization were a problem. Outdoors, human structure was irrelevant. If a Zen Master teaches by pointing directly to reality, a tree, a prairie, a sea are even more direct in how they teach us. Reality manifests itself with no immediate awareness of anyone watching, more than any human Zen Master could, and you’re forced to let go of your personal issues when faced with that impersonal stillness—forced to ask only, What is this?

Yet my buzzing human mind was as real as the straight stillness of a tree, so maybe if I just let the mind buzz awhile, and didn’t worry about it, it would eventually settle. Even when nothing seemed to be happening at a retreat, something was stirring beneath the surface, because life was always different afterward. Things were always happening—the question was whether or not I’d paid enough attention to notice them.

Then came dinner preparation. I couldn’t find some of the dishes that were needed, but unlike Florida weekend retreats where a whispered “Where’s the bowl?” was okay, no talking at all was permitted. Irritated, angry opinions arose in a flood even while somebody handed me the bowl.

It was an extremely simple meal—English muffin, peanut butter, apple, water—that really allowed appreciation of the smallest, simplest smallest things. More opinions, this time approving ones, came but always with a judgment.

We ate following a complex formal ritual that involved putting certain foods in certain bowls in a certain order. Eating was done in silence, with one’s attention totally on the food. Without keeping the mind totally present and focused only on the present situation, it was impossible to do the ritual correctly. The silent attention made things vivid and intense. There was not only the flavor and texture of the food but also the muscle movements and feel of teeth grinding into fruit. A saltine cracker was a feast. Not only a lovely ceremony and a meditation on eating, the meal was also incredibly efficient. The last step was to rinse the bowls

with scalding hot tea. And then we drank the tea. This was followed by a final rinse with water. Instead of gallons of soapy water being dumped after doing dishes, only one bowl of clear, unpolluted water was left to pour out.

During the next morning work period, I was sweeping clean stairs again. Obviously this job wasn’t based on my standards of what was meaningful, or what work was needed. But I wasted so much energy and generated so much discontent by worrying about the matter. It would have been a lot simpler to just do the work to the Zen Center’s standard and stay mentally free by not being concerned with how my opinion differed from that of the staff. Sweeping clean stairs was used as a teaching technique, and obviously worked quite well on that level.

Then I switched to a crew of several people loading next winter’s firewood into a room next to the huge wood-burning furnace. Despite Zen admonitions to not classify the world into “good” or “bad,” that work was a lot more satisfying than sweeping the stairs. It was essential work, something that a lot of human beings had done for thousands of years.

We were accidentally killing lots of moths and spiders that were hiding under the loose bark and got stored away with the wood. I pointed the situation out to the monk who was in charge of the work detail. “Yes, that’s so,” was all he said.

It was classic Zen. He confirmed the observation but didn’t solve the conflict with the Buddhist precept about not killing anything. That was my job. We didn’t mean to kill anything so their deaths wouldn’t impair our spiritual development—was that it? But this was still a selfish attitude. Tell that to the dying moth. Or was the lesson here just a realistic acknowledgement of the ubiquitousness of death and dying? If I wanted to take the extra time and energy to save those little creatures, I should have taught by example and got them off the logs as they came in, not just made speeches about the issue. Just get clear and then take action. But I also had to be clear about how much labor it took to heat this place, and whether we could afford the time to pick over every log with tweezers.


When the bell rang the next morning, my mat had somehow slid to one side, and I was sleeping directly on the concrete floor. That was fine, the floor felt soft and cozy. How else could I have known that cement could be so soft?

The prospect of the next interview felt like an exam coming up—the Zen Master was waiting for an answer to the kong-an. But that self-consciousness was only ego. Unlike an exam, there’s no passing or failing in an interview, nothing to gain or lose. The teacher’s job is only to see where you are mentally and then give you some help. So relax, I ordered myself, don’t worry about making a good impression, and just communicate openly.

(...)

After missing the kong-an yet again, I was full of questions. “Why is it so hard for people to perceive reality if it is indeed right under our noses, right here, right now?”

“It’s not hard to perceive, but it’s hard to believe that that’s




it because it's so simple. People can't accept that that's all there is to it," the Zen Master responded.

Oh...okay.

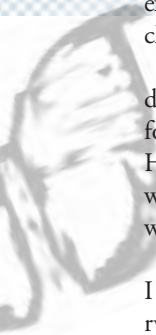
"Why be so meticulous in our actions? Those stairs I keep sweeping aren't dirty."

"It's like polishing a sword. The more you polish the blade, the sharper it is and the better it works. Being meticulous is sharpening the sword of your awareness, of paying attention, it's seeing and hearing all the teachers that are constantly present, it's being aware of a correct situation, and of knowing a human being's role and doing it."

Okay, so once more unto the steps with the broom, I thought ruefully. During work period, I swept the steps with a hand brush and got lots of dirt. Clearly, there was still a lot to learn about being meticulous.



The next day's work practice consisted of cutting brush that was in bud. I made a casual remark that it was sad to cut the limbs as they budded, and the man I was working with gave a long, unsolicited sermon about why it was okay. I disagreed with everything he said and was suddenly grateful for the silence of a retreat. Silence ensured that the only teaching either came from within or from a trained and experienced teacher who spoke from years of practice. I didn't cheat by talking anymore.



That afternoon, I gave up trying to focus on the floor during meditation and sat staring out the window at the forest. Once again some small sense of peace appeared. Hawks, wildflowers, a cardinal nesting, the New England weather flipping from hot to cold and back again—reality was surging loud and clear there in the woods.

I was still adding up lists of what I received for this effort. I still didn't totally trust that I'd be sustained without worrying about what I gave and what I got back for it. Maybe in a really long retreat all this incessant observing and speculating would just naturally fade away into stillness. Sitting in the woods and marshes at home was great, but it was impossible to meditate there for more than an hour or two before being swept back into the endless busywork of work and family life. Weeks or months of sustained effort were only possible in a formal retreat where all the logistics were set. Then maybe some insight would be more likely.

An intense long-term effort couldn't happen until I could really relax within this retreat lifestyle, day by day, moment to moment, instead of counting the days until the grueling effort ended. Only when it wasn't grueling and exhausting anymore, and the body wasn't utterly miserable, would I be able to focus. That might take a long time, so why not quit trying to rush things? I asked myself.

A day in this reality is not just another day aimlessly rolling by. Personal daily life is the froth, and turmoil on the surface of the ocean. The bigger the waves, the deeper their turbulence reaches. However, there is always a zone beneath all the waves where the uproar gives way to peace. Find it, rest in the calm, and then come back into the turbulence and get to work.



The key is to view the sitting time as personal time that is the same as rest time. One can't do that until the aches and drowsiness aren't so overwhelming, and until it is possible to stay awake during the rest periods. Then they become the same thing, and the retreat is restful and healing instead of a huge struggle. Wanting to get something more out of Zen practice than the immediate experience of it is a bad Zen sickness. Just relax, slow down, enjoy the training, and then enjoy life. There's really no difference anyway.

Doing the retreat rituals or chores carefully is a technique to keep the mind focused, away from personal ego and its issues. Similarly with bowing, chanting, breathing, or wearing uniform clothing, we let go of the personal melodrama for a little while and become just another human being doing what humans have always done—asking, What's the point? All these activities help to keep the chattering, self-centered mind with its opinions, grief, and desires at bay for the duration of the retreat. Eventually that mind becomes less strong in all situations. When the experience becomes healing, one experiences a new perspective. It's not how many days until the retreat is over, but how many days of this special space are left in which to experience how life is when the mind is not continuously reacting to events?

The next morning I sat facing an east window at dawn. First a star sparkled through a tree branch, then the brightness and color of the dawn, and then the rising sun, glowing on the leaves of a tree, appeared. The gold, orange, and pink rays of sunlight in my squinting eyes and the iridescence of spider silk gleaming in the sun one minute and then invisible the next, became the filaments of interconnectedness through which energy flows. Each of these beautiful events lasted only a few moments, and then disappeared to be replaced with the next.

That moment, each moment, was an endless vastness of beauty, yet such moments arise and dissolve endlessly. One after the other, they endlessly disappear and new ones arise like water flowing through our fingers. There's nothing more transient than these beautiful moments, and yet there's an endless supply of them.

At a talk that day, the teacher began with an observation. "In this moment of sitting, we form a relationship with the cricket sound and everything else in the moment, with each other. The quality of our energy and attention determines this relationship and that in turn literally determines what will happen tomorrow and next week. Sit steadfastly, not to get it done or to get a reward—just to be there, awake and alert—that's Zen," she said.

"We spend so much time trying to be something other than what we think we are. It's very difficult and very painful. It's important to just be in touch with what we are, to be aware of and enjoy the gifts we have, and to avoid the obviously destructive things in society. The way we are in each moment determines the quality of our life and our environment. If we really take care of ourselves, then we will also take care of everyone around us.

"When we are caught in thinking and wanting," she added, "then just focus on breathing to get free of it and get back into awareness of this present moment. Peace is absolutely beyond reach when there is desire, grasping, fear of the future, and frustration in the present."

Okay. Good advice. Sit like a mountain, and stay focused and present in each moment. I crossed my legs, folded my hands, and began. Half an hour later, the plan wasn't working out so well. I began to wonder what we'd have for lunch, and how much longer until the slap of the stick signaled the end of the sitting. But waiting for something to be over was throwing away all the moments between now and the end. Those moments are precisely all we have in life—why throw them away heedlessly?

The more we learn to pay attention closely, the more likely it is that any given moment will open into a transcendent experience. However, sitting in the hope of some specific result is wanting something. Being focused on desire mostly precludes anything from actually happening.

There had been easier moments than this in past meditation periods, even moments of great peace and beauty. But even if I could describe one of those moments, it was of a past time. It wasn't right now and right now is what is important, so what was happening right now?

Sleepiness was happening right now. It was the worst ever and absolutely no flow of insights or mental special effects helped break it up. No matter how much meticulous attention I paid to being miserable, it didn't seem very likely to unfold into some dazzling moment of spiritual breakthrough. I'd trade the whole effort for an hour's nap. Maybe after that, life would be different.

It was really hard to pay attention to this moment when I was the next in line for an interview and anticipating that moment with the greatest aversion because I still didn't have an answer for the hanging from a branch kong-an. The kong-an was impossible and unyielding.

At the last interview before the end of the retreat, I walked into the room with a totally blank mind. Usually I entered armed with my newest and best response for the kong-an, the one that at long last surely had to be the solution. But every answer I could dream up for the hanging from a branch kong-an had already been rejected. Nothing was left to try. I'd just sit there in embarrassing silence until I was dismissed.

I bowed, the teacher bowed, and I sat down. At least it would be over with soon.

She got straight to the point.

"Okay, Anne, you're hanging from the tree by your teeth, tied hand and foot. The man under the tree asks his question. *What can you do?!!*"

Her eyes bored into mine.

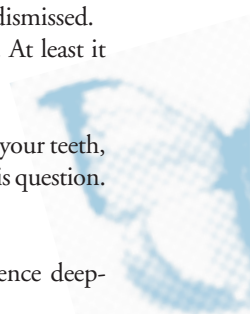
Seconds ticked by endlessly. The painful silence deepened.

"What can you do? Tell me!" she demanded again.

Suddenly something came to mind and I tried it.

"Correct!" She laughed.

Correct?! *That* was it?? My God, of course!



Walking back to the meditation room, a moment of mental clarity appeared, and I stopped. It didn't matter how I got to this moment in time and space or where I went from there. Everything was present and everything was perfect just then.

Instead of being still and experiencing it, and letting go of "I" in the process, "I" seized it. "Ah, there's one," I thought. Instantly it vanished, passed downstream and away in the flow of the river of time with its floating debris of mental babble. Underlying the stillness of the Zen meditation hall, internal mental stillness and letting go of the ego is critical for this experience. There wasn't, any and I didn't.

Inevitably I spent the next sitting period trying to get that good feeling back. Was that enlightenment? Whatever it was, the sensation hadn't lasted long enough to know. But striving and wanting to bring it back just made it more impossible. I was my usual semi—opaque, little, individual self who couldn't reclaim the feeling by reaching for it.

Just practice correctly and maybe that mental state would arise again sometime, I thought. Sitting in a meditation room prepares the mental substrate so altered mental states can arise unexpectedly. Maybe a master is someone who could continuously maintain that state, express it, and act out of it freely and spontaneously, I thought, rather than having a brief taste and then wondering what it was and where it went.

Packing to leave, I wondered whether I was glad to go or would rather stay. Short retreats are good to clarify issues of daily life but one isn't likely to get past individual issues and into the mental place where a more profound experience can arise. Short retreats are like a mind baths. We do them regularly just like we take frequent baths for the body. The retreat washes the mind, lets it drop some of its accumulated ignorance, anger, worry, hopes, and desires. Then more time passes and painful mental states build up again, just as the body gets dirty again. So we go back for another bath.

Going between retreats and daily life may seem like jumping out of the frying pan, into the fire, but which is the frying pan and which is the fire? We may learn to not make frying pan and to not make fire. Just moment to moment, do what is needed.

A dawn and sunrise couldn't happen in five minutes; it needed at least an hour. Maybe if I sat for a month, or a year or three years.... But that kind of wondering was pointless. Zen means coming peacefully when it's time to come, and going peacefully when it's time to go.



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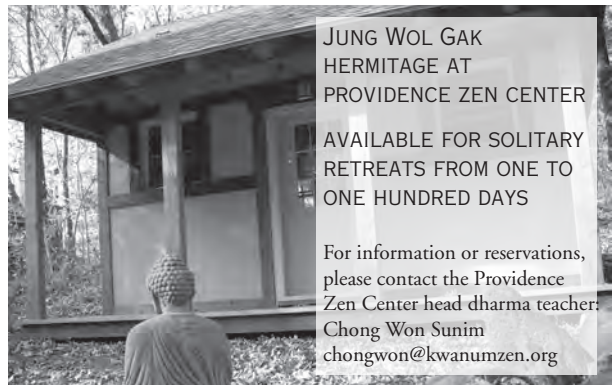
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