

The background of the cover is a close-up photograph. It features a wooden abacus with a beaded necklace draped over it. The beads are light-colored and have a textured, segmented appearance. In the background, a piece of light-colored fabric is visible, featuring a detailed embroidery of a dragonfly. The lighting is warm and directional, creating strong shadows and highlights that emphasize the textures of the wood, beads, and fabric.

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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.

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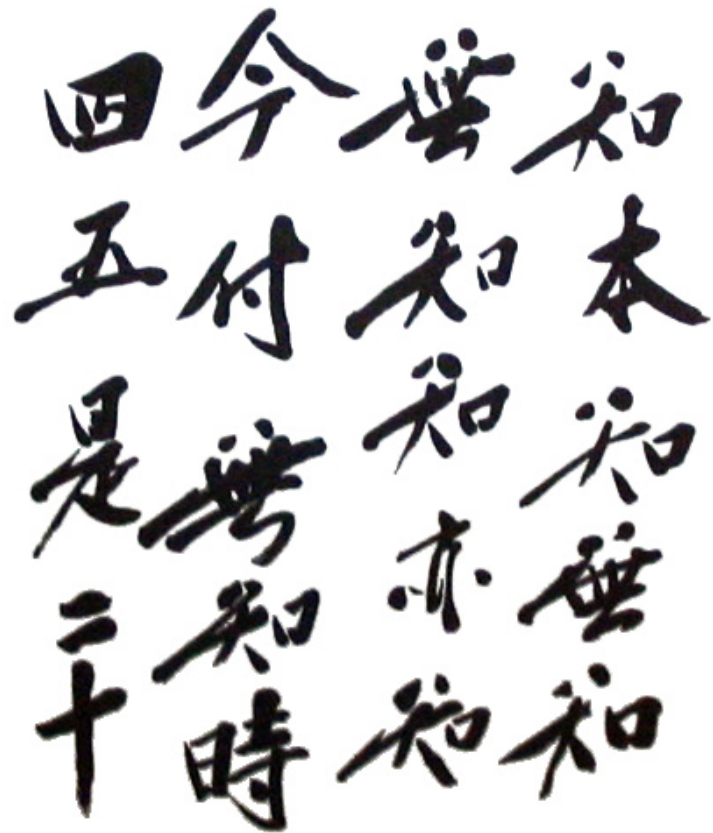
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Correction:

The poem attributed to Mu Shim Sunim JDPS in the last issue of *Primary Point* was written by John Wren. We apologize for the error.



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Don't
Know
Knowing
is
Knowing

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Knowing is originally knowing Don't Know
Don't Know knowing is knowing
Today we transfer this Don't Know
Four times five is twenty

1. What is "Don't Know"?
2. "Know" and "Don't Know," are they one or two?
3. "Four times five is twenty." What does this mean?

Commentary:

Knowing Don't Know—just that is seeing true nature. Human beings know too much, and are thus hindered by what they know. As the saying goes, "Many people all over the world know, but how many truly understand?" If you can put down your views, opinions, and understanding, then the truth just appears right in front of you. ❀

*In original mind there is no this and that - Pure and luminescent, it is without a shadow
It extends freely in all directions - Boston in the West, Seoul in the East*

Transmission poem by Zen Master Wu Bong

On September 24, 2006 Aleksandra Porter received transmission from Zen Master Wu Bong at Warsaw Zen Center and became Zen Master Bon Shim.

DHARMA COMBAT

—I have a question: for many years you have been a dharma master; now that you've achieved the higher and more respected position of Zen Master, now then, how is Zen better than dharma?

ZMBS: You already understand.

—But I'm asking you.

ZMBS: The sky is blue, and trees are green.

—Thank you for your teaching.

ZMBS: How are you, my dharma sister?

—I'm very well, and how are you my dharma sister, or Zen sister?

ZMBS: Whatever you like.

—I have a question: when we read about the history of Zen, since the beginning until today, there are always stories and poems surrounding each enlightenment. Now that you're becoming a Zen Master, what is your enlightenment poem?

ZMBS: You already understand... Oh Buddha, Oh Dharma, Oh Sangha.

—And that's it?

ZMBS: Isn't it enough?

—Oh no.

ZMBS: Go and have some tea.

—Thank you very much, I was so thirsty. Thank you for your teaching.

ZMBS: Hello son.

—Hi mum.

ZMBS: How are you?

—I'm fine, thanks. I have a question: will good and evil ever come to an end?

ZMBS: Cause and effect are always clear.

—And what is the cause and effect?

ZMBS: Isn't it enough?

—Thank you for your teaching

ZMBS: You're welcome.

—Hello.

ZMBS: Hi there.

—When all the creatures in the world will be free and there's only you and I left, what happens then?

ZMBS [*laughs*]: Come closer... [*gives him a hug*]

DHARMA TALK

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

Before Buddha appeared in this world, this one thing was pure and clear. So what did Buddha transmit to Mahakashyapa?

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

All of the great teachers have also pointed only at this one great thing. What did they wish to transmit to us?

[*Raises the Zen stick over her head, then hits the table with the stick.*]

If you want to find it, it is far away from here. But if you don't want to find it, you will waste your life away. So what can you do?

KAAATZ!

When the alarm clock rings in the morning, get up. When you hear the mottak, go to the dharma room. Nothing special.

A long time ago, I heard from Zen Master Seung Sahn: "One after another each thing has it. One after another, each thing is complete." This struck me very hard and I felt that it was what I was missing in my life. Some time later I discovered that this is what is missing in the life of every person. In each of us, there is this original yearning for something pure, clear, luminescent. Some call it true nature, some call it Buddha or God. It is so close to us, but we can't see it.

A long time ago, someone asked Zen Master Un Mun, "Why is it that we are unable to see what is so close to us?" Un Mun answered, "It is because it is so close to us." We are unable to see it, so we try to understand it. But understanding will not bring us closer to it, will not pacify the yearning. We have to experience it. As was said, it is beyond understanding and beyond words. That is why, a long time ago, when anyone asked Zen Master Lin Chi, "What is enlightenment, what is true nature, what is Buddha?" Lin Chi would just respond, "Katz!" To the same question, Zen Master Dok Sahn would just hit the questioner. Gu Ji would just raise his finger. Zen Master Seung Sahn gave us this [*hits the table with her hand*], but we are unable to believe it. We constantly check whether this is true and who said it is true? We have to believe in this one clear thing, then we save this world from suffering. We also have other obstacles: strong opinions and attachment to our understanding. We are unable to let go of them. We have the feeling that if we let go of them, the whole world will cease to exist. In a way it is true—our world will cease to exist. The world of illusions will cease to exist.

A certain Tibetan teacher by the name of Marpa would teach that everything is illusion. But one day his son died and Marpa cried and cried... One student asked him: "Marpa, why are you crying? You have been teaching that everything is illusion!" Marpa answered: "Yes, everything is illusion and my son's death is the greatest of all illusions." If you see that something is an illusion, it ceases to be an illusion. Then things are just like they are. The sky is blue. When someone is hungry, give him food. If someone is suffering, help him. Only correct function, correct situation. But correct also means

natural. Water flows from the mountains. It doesn't ask whether it is correct or incorrect, whether it is good or not, whether it should flow or shouldn't. It just does it. The same with the dog; when the guest comes, the dog barks; it just does its work. What is our work? What is the work of human beings?

There is a story about our original teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn. He used to come here in the past. Always when he came here, he gave very lively dharma talks. He laughed a lot, he shouted a lot, he gestured a lot. When he felt weak and sick, his talks still didn't change. They were very energizing. Everybody was very happy and everybody forgot about him or herself. After one of his talks, I walked with Zen Master Seung Sahn to his room. When he entered the room, he just collapsed into the chair. He was so worn out. He had his eyes closed, and for some time he remained immobile. I was worried and I asked, "Dae Soen Sa Nim, what can I do?" He opened his eyes with an effort and said, "You already understand." It was very strong teaching. The great teacher was making use of every situation, every opportunity, in order to help the students.

At another time during a sangha weekend like this one, there were many people attending and the conversations were lively. There was a lot of excitement. I was also quite excited, conversing with somebody, and something stupid jumped out of my mouth. I couldn't take it back.

Nearby, Zen Master Wu Bong was sitting. He didn't say anything, he didn't open his mouth, he just looked. It lasted for a long period. That was strong teaching. It is not easy to keep clear mind from moment to moment. But we try. This constantly trying mind that wishes to help is enlightenment, is Buddha.

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

If you believe in this, it is a mistake.

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

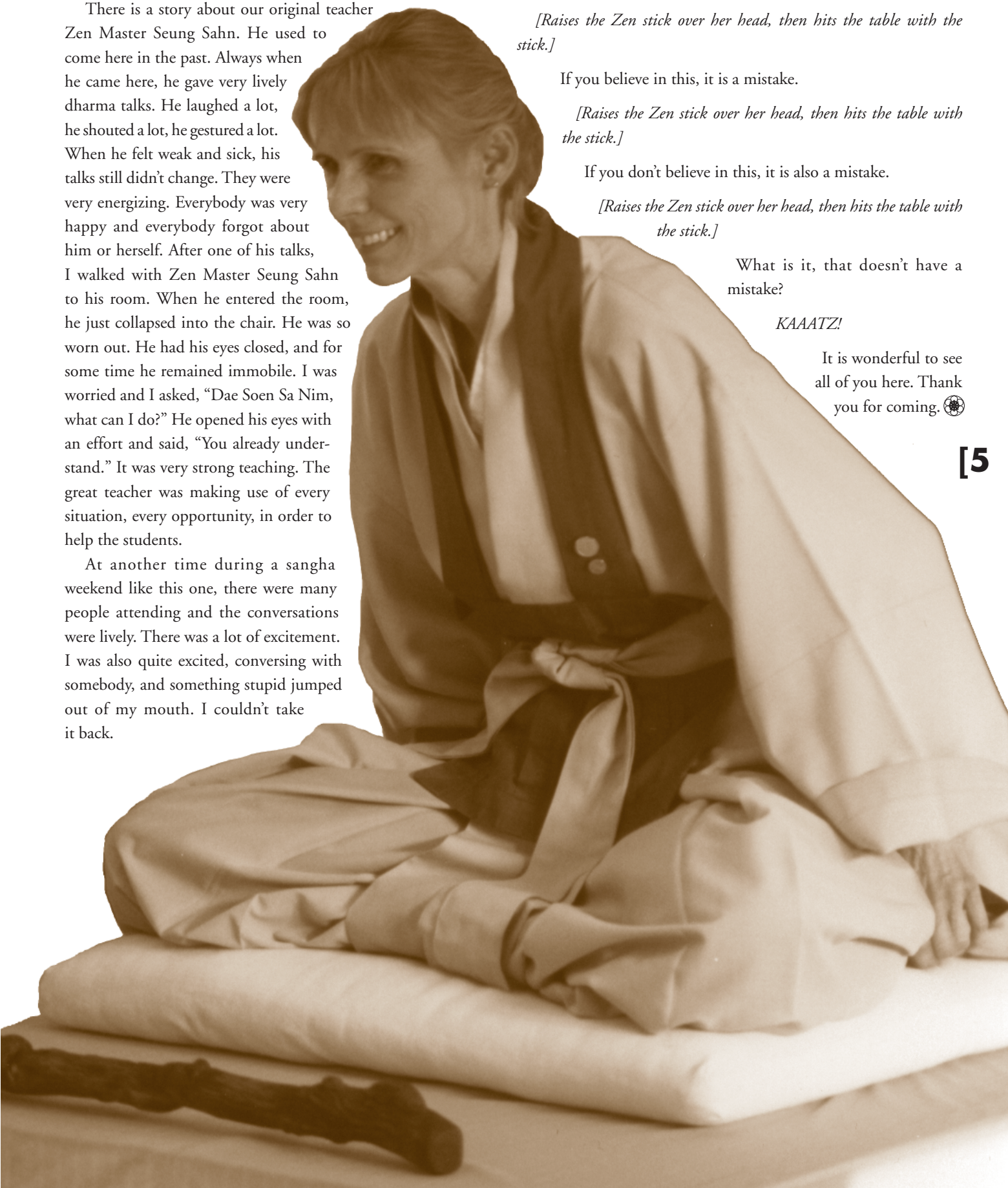
If you don't believe in this, it is also a mistake.

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

What is it, that doesn't have a mistake?

KAAATZ!

It is wonderful to see all of you here. Thank you for coming. ☸



The whole Universe in on fire, with what kind of Sa



In June 2006, the Kwan Um School of Zen sponsored the first-ever Zen conference in Indonesia. This was the first time in history that Zen teaching traveled to Indonesia—amazing! Our School was represented by Zen Master Dae Kwang, Zen Master Wu Bong, Zen Master Dae Kwan, Gye Mun Sunim JDPS, and Chong An Sunim JDPS. Much of the planning for the conference was done by members of Su Bong Zen Monastery in Hong Kong.

VOLCANO MIND

Zen Master Dae Kwan

Recently, several of our Kwan Um School of Zen teachers went to Indonesia. The year before they had a big earthquake. Do you remember? At that time in Indonesia, a Buddhist group wanted us to go and give some Zen teaching. Throughout the history of Indonesia, they had never heard of Zen teaching; they only had Theravada-style Buddhist teaching. Also, most people in Indonesia are Muslim. So they wanted us to go and give some lectures over two days. Six hundred people came to the conference.

Indonesia is a place, like Africa, with many disasters. What does it mean? Do you understand a volcano, an earthquake?.. That's nature. Nature reflects our mind. That's why outside volcano, outside earthquake is not serious. But inside our minds we have volcanoes, we have earthquakes all the time. Sometimes our angry mind appears, boom! Yeah? All of you have experienced this angry mind. Very dangerous! If our mind is not clear, this angry mind can turn into a disaster. America nowadays has many people who are crazy; They bring

continues on page 8



madhi can you escape? ~ Zen Conference in Indonesia 2006



a gun to school and shoot everybody. Why is it like that? Because they have this volcano, this angry mind. In Chinese we say, "If there is a fire inside you, that will block your seeing and your hearing." This fire will just burn up everything.

That's why practicing is so important. Practicing means "return to your true nature." Why do we have so much trouble returning to our true nature? It's because we have a lot of attachments to our thinking, many attachments to our ideas. Zen Master Seung Sahn always used to explain that these ideas are not good, not bad. If you can use them, they can be very useful. But some people are so attached to their emotions, and their thinking, that it makes their lives like hell. This causes problems not only for themselves, but also for everybody else. Like these boys in Colorado, they don't just dislike one teacher or one girlfriend. I cannot imagine how they can go to that school and not just kill one person but kill everybody, kill the teachers, kill themselves too. It's like a moth. Have you ever watched a moth? When they see fire, they only want to fly into the fire. They die, too.

Many of us, if we are not practicing, we are like animals. Our emotions, these volcano feelings, control us. When I was in Indonesia, I talked about one thing: human beings must learn to live in harmony with others. Without harmony, it's the same as a volcano, the same as a tsunami. ☸

EARTH



8]

VOLCANO EARTHQUAKE TSUNAMI WAR

Zen Master Dae Kwang

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

BOOM!

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

Our world is always changing—sometimes fast, sometimes slow. When the change is fast, we suffer a lot. Our world changing fast means volcano, earthquake, tsunami, war. Everything is changing very fast. Even if we think it's very solid, it can go away within a second—SNAP! The Soviet Union was once the second-strongest country in the world, and it lasted over seventy years, but it disappeared in less than a month. That's the meaning of "form is emptiness, emptiness is form."

These words are from the Heart Sutra. There are many different explanations of this sutra, but the meaning lives in our guts—it's not just an idea. Even if you do not experience rapid cataclysmic changes like they've had here in Indonesia, you can experience very slow kinds of change. Everyone will experience this when they are seventy or eighty. Look into the mirror, you'll see "form is emptiness, emptiness is form!"

In the United States and Europe, people are always saying to each other, "Life is short, life is short." There's something very interesting about that phrase. Nobody ever asks, "How short?" So... how short is your life?

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

BOOM!

This point means no form, no emptiness.

At this point, there's not even one thing. There is no this and that. There is no form and no emptiness. There is no bad and no good. There is no win and no lose. There is no "I got" and no "I lost." This point is called our original Buddha nature. If you attain this point, your life will become very clear. If you keep this point, your mind and your life can become clear. But that is not the point of Zen. One further step is necessary. What will we do with this original Buddha nature which we all have? How will we use it to help this world?

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

BOOM!

This point means form is form, emptiness is emptiness.

At this point, if your mind is clear, everything is just as it is, everything is the truth. Our teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn always used to say, at this point, "the sky is blue, the trees are green, the dog is barking, woof, woof, woof." Also, the carpet in this convention hall is red. At this point, everything is the truth. We call it "truth mind" or "enough mind." This point, too, has a job. Perceiving the truth is not enough, our job is to use that mind to help other beings.

So, now you've heard three lines of explanation of Zen Buddhism. Which of those three lines is the best?

KATZ!!

Outside the sun is shining. Inside, bright faces come here to the conference to learn about Zen and how to practice correctly.

These three statements are a little complicated. So, what I am going to do is explain a little about Zen. But before I explain, I would like to thank our sponsor for providing this wonderful place to learn and to share Buddha's teaching. I would also like to thank all of you for coming. This conference is a sharing between dharma friends—it's the result of our good karma.

ANYTHING CAN GO AWAY IN A SECOND

About six years ago, I was leading a retreat in San Francisco. To my surprise, there was an older Chinese man in the retreat. He was very well dressed, his nails were well manicured, and his glasses were quite expensive. During a kong-an interview I asked him, "Where do you come from?"

He said, "I'm from Jakarta. I am a Chinese from Indonesia."

That surprised me because we don't have many Chinese coming to our retreats. So I said, "Why are you here?"

He said, "I have no place to go. I'm in a very unusual situation. I was walking down the street and I saw a sign advertising this Zen retreat. Immediately, when I saw the sign, I came in to sign up for this retreat."

"Why did you come to this retreat?" I asked.

"I am not sure, but I think right now I have nothing."

"What do you mean, you have nothing?" I asked. "You're from Indonesia. Obviously you have the money to fly here. You have very good clothes. Your English is very good. You must be well educated."

He said, "Yes, that's true. I have those things. But I have a very unusual situation. I was here visiting my son, who is attending the University of California here in Berkeley. Yesterday, my wife called and told me that there were some riots in Indonesia. They burnt our business and they also burnt our house. My wife also told me that her passport was kept in the bank and it also was destroyed. So now she cannot even come here. I don't know what to do. So I came to this retreat."

That's a very interesting story. Usually we think we have something. Maybe our body is strong, maybe we are young and healthy. Or maybe our family has a lot of money. Maybe I'm very talented. Maybe I have good job. Maybe I have a good husband or a good wife. Maybe my children are very

smart. Usually we don't understand that all of that can go away in just a second, SNAP!

WE AND THE BUDDHA ARE THE SAME

Many times we think Buddha is different from us. But actually, we and the Buddha are exactly the same. Buddha had a very good situation. His father provided him everything because he was a king. He had everything we desire. But in the end this good situation did not make him happy, it was just outside happiness. The Chinese man from Jakarta, too, had some form of outside happiness. But when Buddha looked closely at our world, he saw that outside happiness did not truly relieve suffering. If you go to any funeral, then you can see it. There's always an underlying feeling that something is very unsatisfactory.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Many people are seeking a way to find the meaning of life. Maybe they practice Buddhism as we are now. Maybe they practice Christianity. Maybe they practice Islam. Everywhere you can find people seeking after the truth. That means, they are not living their lives just for themselves or to indulge their pleasures, they are looking for something. Have you seen that?

Buddha saw four things: an old person, a sick person, a dead person, and a seeker after truth. After that, he could no longer stay in his good situation. He left his good situation to find the answer to why we suffer. Inside, the Buddha had a very big question: WHY? That means, WHY ARE WE HERE?

Are we here for food, to eat? In my country, many people are overweight. They eat as if their whole lives are eating. So, are we here for that? Is that the meaning of human beings?

Are we here for sex? Some people live their whole lives just for the pleasure of sex. Are we here for money? Some people spend their whole lives chasing after money. Do we come here for power? Are we here for fame?

There are people spending their whole lives just trying to please others. Maybe they spend their lives to please their husbands or maybe to please their wives. Maybe, for Chinese, to please their mother and father. Or for Zen students, to please their Zen Master. That's the desire for fame or social acceptance.

THE ANSWER LIES INSIDE

Just like the Buddha, when we truly see these four things, we know these outside things are not the source of true happiness. Buddha had a big question and he did something interesting—he left his good situation to do some practicing. He didn't leave home to find a better life. He didn't leave to get a better job or move to a better place. When I was young, I lived in a city in the middle of the United States. We always thought that if we moved to New York, we would be happy. But when I moved to New York, I found out that New York City was no better than my own town. Many people think that if they can move to Singapore or Hong Kong, then they will be happy. But the Buddha didn't do that.

Also, the Buddha didn't go to the library to read more books about the great question. Sometimes we think we don't understand because we just haven't read the right book yet. Somewhere, at some library, there must be a book that will solve all my problems. It will let me understand what I really need. But Buddha didn't do that. Instead, he went to sit underneath a tree. You may think that's really stupid. Who would go and sit underneath a tree? Why do that?

Buddha knew that the answers to these questions are somewhere inside. Actually, "go and sit underneath a tree" does not mean "go and sit underneath a tree." The way to sit underneath a tree is to start looking inside. We are exactly like the Buddha because, for us, too, the answer lies inside. We all know the Buddha (and Zen, also) always asks the question: what am I? What am I? But it's very interesting, if you ask that question, Zen does not have the answer. It doesn't, but you do, inside. So you and the Buddha are the same. Just look inside.

Zen means finding your true self and helping our world. Very simple! Zen Buddhism is not complicated at all. You may be very stupid or very smart—that doesn't make any difference. Inside, everybody has this original Buddha nature. Inside. So our job is to find that and help this world. Very simple.

ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Our founding teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, had a very interesting life history. He was born in Korea during the Japanese occupation. At that time, many parts of Southeast Asia were under the control of the Japanese. Life was difficult for many people, including the Koreans. During this time Zen Master Seung Sahn was always asking himself what he could do to help his country. You, too, may have the same question inside: how can I help my people? We have tsunamis, earthquakes and volcanoes; all sorts of fighting around the world. Inside, you may ask: how can I help? Zen Master Seung Sahn was in the same situation. He asked what he could do to free his country from the Japanese. And then suddenly, the war was over. Then he thought, no more problem—now we are free.

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE

But then as soon as the war was over, Korea split into south and north. What everybody thought was going to bring happiness actually brought more conflicts and more suffering. It happened like that in Iraq. The war was supposed to bring peace, but what happened? So inside, Zen Master Seung Sahn had this big question: what can I do? Why is there so much suffering? He went to a temple and took some Western philosophy books with him, because he had an idea: he would read all these books, then he would understand what human beings are all about, and then he could help them.

For months, he read philosophy books. One day, an old monk who took care of the woods around the temple walked by his small hermitage. The monk saw this young man reading a book by Plato, the Greek philosopher, and was very surprised. So the monk asked him, "What are you doing?"

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "I am reading these philosophy books so that I can understand what human beings are."

The monk suddenly knocked the book out of Zen Master Seung Sahn's hands and said, "That book will not help you understand human beings."

But Zen Master Seung Sahn's mind was very strong. He looked up at the old monk and asked, "Do you understand human beings?" Very clever. It is just like a story in the book by Plato. It was five hundred years before the modern era. A philosopher, Socrates, liked to ask everybody he met: do you understand yourself? One time a person asked him right back: Do you? And Socrates said, "No, I don't. I don't understand my self. But I understand this 'don't know' very well." Very interesting.

So, when Zen Master Seung Sahn asked the old monk, "Do you understand human beings?" the old monk said, "No, I don't, but I understand that the sky is blue and the trees are green."

Then BOOM!

Zen Master Seung Sahn understood this man was not the usual style of monk. So he asked the old monk, "What should I do? What can I do to understand?" The old monk said, "You should do a hundred day solo retreat. Practice very hard and you will understand." So it is just like the Buddha. He left his good situation and looked inside. Zen Master Seung Sahn did a long retreat and looked inside. You, too, can look inside. The outside situation is not so important. What is important is to look inside.

ENLIGHTENMENT

After the one hundred day retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn got enlightenment. That means he understood something. When Buddha got enlightenment, he said, "How wonderful! Human beings already have Buddha nature, but human beings don't understand that. They don't understand that they already have Buddha nature. And because of that, they suffer." Very interesting. I think that is the most interesting thing a religious person has ever said. It's very, very clear. Every human being has a misunderstanding of what they really are. That means they think they are one thing, but actually they are something else. Because of this misunderstanding, human beings suffer. So, it's possible to find out what we really are. That helps alleviate your suffering, and you can use that to help everyone around you.

After the Buddha got enlightenment, he kept sitting underneath the Bodhi tree. He didn't move. At that time, a god was looking down from heaven and saw the Buddha sitting under the tree, and said, "That is incorrect. You can't keep sitting underneath this tree."

The Buddha said, "Nobody is going to understand what I found. Nobody would believe me."

Then the god said, "No, no, some people will believe and listen." Then the Buddha got up and taught for forty five years.

TAKING THE MEDICINE IS NOT THE DOCTOR'S JOB

Sometimes we may wonder, who are those people who would listen to the Buddha's teaching? Actually, there's no need to look for them, because they're here, right now. The only problem is, we have to do something. The Buddha said, "I have 84,000

kinds of medicine to relieve human beings' suffering, but I can't take it for them."

That's our situation. If you keep seeking out doctors, getting tested, and receiving medicine, but you don't take it, who's to blame? If you say no, this medicine doesn't work, I refuse to take it, then what can the doctor do? You have to take the medicine. Taking the medicine is not the doctor's job, that's your job.

Finding your true self is not the Buddha's job, it's your job. Actually, there's no choice, because one way leads to suffering, and the Buddha points to another possible way, a way to get out of suffering. And there's no other way. That's the clarity of the Buddha's teaching. It is not an abstract, philosophical thesis. It's something that you can feel inside your own guts. It is inside your own heart. It is a question we all own: Why do we suffer? What can I possibly do to help?

When Buddha was born, his mother died. Sometimes we even say Buddha had no mother. Actually, the Buddha did have a mother. In Zen, the mother of Buddha is suffering. No suffering, no Buddha. That's true of us, too. Our life is actually not good, not bad, but it does hurt. This hurting is what ultimately makes us practice so that we can help ourselves and help others.

The Buddha lived some two thousand, five hundred years ago. He came as a teacher to relieve suffering. How is the Buddha doing? Any less suffering? Jesus came two thousand years ago to help to relieve suffering. How's Jesus doing? Still a lot of suffering, yes? This means that all of us have a big job. The Buddha said, "When we are born, we are born into an ocean of suffering." That was his situation, and that's our situation. We all share this job.

[Raises the Zen stick over his head, then hits the table with the stick slowly three times.]

If you understand these three points, then it's possible to understand your true self and help all human beings.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q: How can we attain inside wisdom?

A: How do we attain inside wisdom? How do we attain inside happiness? How do we attain our true nature? In English, we say somebody gets enlightenment. But actually, nobody ever got enlightenment. What happens is they return to their original nature. The Buddha said that everybody already has it. So there's actually nothing to attain. That's only something to return to, inside.

A monk once came to the Buddha and asked, "Buddha, you have given a lot of teaching. There are thousands and thousands of sutras. I know I'm a little bit stupid, but could you tell me your teaching in one sentence?"

The Buddha said, "No problem." And here's the oneness: *Don't attach to anything.* Very interesting!

The great Chinese Zen Master, Hui Neng, got his big enlightenment when he heard just one sentence from the Diamond Sutra: *When thinking arises in your mind, do not attach to it.* Very simple teaching. But how can we actually do it?



TECHNIQUES

There are many techniques which allow you to experience letting go of your thinking. Some are very simple: in Zen we very often teach people to say a simple phrase to themselves over and over again, keeping their eyes half open and breathing normally. The Buddha got enlightenment just following his breath: in-out-in-out-in-out. There are thousands of meditation techniques. In Buddhism alone, there are many techniques: Theravadin Buddhism has many techniques, Mahayana Buddhism has many techniques, Zen too has many techniques, but sometimes the simplest thing is the best thing.

It is like when you are thirsty—you can drink beer, tea, or coke. You can drink many things, but when you're thirsty, what do you think is the best? Water! Meditation is the same—the simpler techniques are the best.

THE JUST-NOW MIND

The basis of all these techniques is the same. It is what we call “just-now mind.” Just now, you can hear the air conditioning. Just now, you see the faces of your mother's friends.

You hear my voice.

If your mind
is clear,
v e r y
b r i g h t,
a n d
v e r y
p r e s -
e n t,
t h a t
i s
t h e
“j u s t -
n o w
m i n d .”

If you can
keep that,
even for
a little
while, you
can let go
your thinking.

That's important, because it is our like and dislike thinking that causes our suffering.

LET GO OF YOUR LIKE AND DISLIKE

These days, many people are concerned about Israel having the

atomic bomb, or that North Korea and Pakistan have atomic bombs. Also, many people are concerned that Iran might make an atomic bomb. One time, somebody asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, “Where do atomic bombs come from?” Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “That's simple. Atomic bombs come from the mind that likes this and doesn't like that.”

Sometimes, people even kill another person because they don't like them. That creates a lot of suffering. What they—and you—should do is let go of the like and dislike mind. If you have a desire, try looking inside, then you can see “I want” mind. It can become very strong and control you. Then you become like a robot, with your “I want” mind the program of the robot.

To relieve suffering, you need to erase the program from the computer so that it can no longer control you. The way to do that is to practice letting go of thinking. Very simple, but you are the only one who can do it. Otherwise, suffering will control you and keep going around and around.

THE WHEEL OF SUFFERING

How long have the people been fighting each other in the Middle-East? More than five thousand years! Who is to blame? Who's winning? Like and dislike mind is what causes them suffer, and just like a wheel it goes around and around and around.

When first invented, the wheel was made out of wood, later it was covered with steel bands. About one hundred years ago we put the rubber tires around the wheel. Nowadays, we have very low profile racing tires on our cars. The style of the wheels is always changing, just like the style of suffering is always changing, but the pain of suffering is always the same. The wheel is still going around. So it is very important to let go. That will help you and help everyone around you.

Enlightenment means just let go of your like and dislike mind and then take care of what's in front of you just now. All of you can do that.

MEDITATION

Meditation is very simple. In fact, the only people who get a result from meditation are the people who do it. People often check their practice and check others' practice. They'll never get anything. So it's very important that you do something. Life and death are always pointing at our need to practice. The Buddha practiced; we have to practice—that's our human situation.

Any other questions?

Q: How do we free ourselves from illusions?

A: Human beings have many misunderstandings about themselves. For one, they think that they are born to satisfy their likes and dislikes, when actually, the Buddha taught that we are here for something else. That something else is love and compassion. Love and compassion for our families, our friends, the ones we work with, and, in the end, everyone. The Buddha taught that anybody who lives in a like and dislike dream is bound to suffer.

LIKE AND DISLIKE DREAM

There are many different like and dislike dreams: there is a mainland-Chinese dream and a Taiwan-Chinese dream, an United States dream and an Iran dream. There's a Singaporean dream and a Malaysian dream. In my country, there is a white people dream and a black people dream. And not only that, there is a husband dream and a wife dream. Sometimes there are children's dreams and adults' dreams. The "I should do this, I should do that" dream. All these dreams are based on like and dislike. The way to wake up from your dream is to let go of it.

THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO PRACTICE

Zen Master Seung Sahn taught that world peace is very simple. If we could let go of our dream, all of us would be at peace. He always taught us to "put it all down." That means let go of all your opinions. Unfortunately, the only way you can do that is to practice. You can't think your way out of the dream. So Buddhism has very good teaching. Unless you do something, it is not going to be very helpful.

It's like I said before about going to a doctor. The doctor gives you some medicine but you don't take it. Maybe it's like Chinese medicine and doesn't taste so good. The bad taste in meditation is that it is really boring. Chinese medicine doesn't taste so good, and meditation, also, doesn't taste so good. But you have to take the medicine before it's possible to get well. If you don't take the medicine you'll get sicker and sicker. You may think you're okay, but you'll get sicker and sicker. So, very important is to take the medicine, whether you like it or not.

Buddha gave us very good medicine, but who actually takes it? Sometimes we think we have to do something special. I have to cut my hair; I have to go to the mountains; I have to leave my family. None of that is true. Actually, anybody can practice at any moment. All you have to do is to let go of your thinking. It doesn't require a special situation. If you think you need a special situation, it's actually part of the illusion. That's why I say Buddha and you are the same, just the situation is different. Try it.

Any other questions?

Q: How is it possible to have a more consistent practice? My practice has not been consistent. When I hear your dharma talk, I would like to try the way you teach. But after this event, I may still follow my former way. Can you give us some tips on how we can have a more consistent practice?

A: The Buddha was a bit unusual because he had a very good situation, but his mind was not lazy. For most human beings, when they have a good situation, even if they are monks and nuns, they stop practice. They think, "Tomorrow I'll start, or maybe next week when I'm not so busy. Or maybe next year when business is better, then I'll do something. Zen Master Seung Sahn always said, a good situation is a bad situation.

You asked what you should do after this event. So you've come to something like this where you become very charged up, but then tomorrow you sleep late and don't practice. Human being's mind is like that. Your mind is also like that. My mind is like that. That means: a good situation is a bad situation.

But Zen Master Seung Sahn also said, a bad situation is a good situation, but nobody thinks that way. Every human

being wants a good situation. Even the Buddha had desires. But inside, some native wisdom told him this was not the true way. You can see that sometimes, too. Usually, when human beings want to do something, they make up a situation for themselves. So the Buddha decided to make a bad situation for himself. He decided to do that—that was his intention. What separates a human being from an animal is intention. We call that vow or direction.

MAKE A BAD SITUATION FOR YOURSELF

I said earlier that suffering is the mother of Buddha. Suffering means a bad situation. This bad situation gives birth to Buddha. Buddha's father represents a good situation. Buddha's father did everything he could to create a good situation for his son. He even dyed his hair so that his son would not see grey hair. But Buddha was able to see through this situation to the suffering ahead. If you look around, if you look close, you, too, can still see many bad situations.

So what did Buddha do? He left home and made a bad situation for himself, but you don't have to be that extreme. A meditation retreat is a kind of bad situation that we create for ourselves. You can even do it at home. You can take a few minutes out of your day to practice. It's something you can do if your intention is clear.


It's kind of like going to the dentist. Nobody would say: okay, let's have some fun, let's go to the dentist. Right? Not so much fun. Also, going to a Zen meditation retreat is not so much fun. It's a kind of bad situation. You can't watch TV. You can't use your cellular phone. You can't drink alcohol. But, it's just like going to the dentist—you know it's not such a good situation, but then down the road you're going to have a beneficial result.

Everybody has that kind of wisdom inside. If I don't go to this bad situation, it will be even worse further down the road. A meditation retreat is like that. Perhaps it's not so much fun now, but further down the road, it will have a big result. In the end, everybody has to look inside and find that intention for themselves.

PRACTICE NOW

We are lazy. We are self-indulgent. We are stupid. Everybody has these sometime in their life. But then something else has to take over. It's just like going to the dentist. Maybe I'll go to the dentist next year. But the more you wait, the more likely it is that something bad will happen. So the best way is to go to the dentist today. That means you should start practicing today. You ask: What do I want for myself, my family, my friends, people I work with? When the Buddha saw people suffering, he did something. You see suffering but you keep silent. You have to do something.

The monk who advised Zen Master Seung Sahn to do a retreat told him, "Three things can happen to you on one hundred day retreat: one, you can die; two, you can go crazy; three, you can get enlightenment." But the two bad things are true of everyday life, no matter what you do. People die and people go crazy all the time. That will happen anyway, even if you don't practice. In the United States, many people go crazy because they cannot handle the pressure of the society.

So a meditation retreat is actually a win-win situation in that you can only win. It's possible to wake up. That helps you and everybody around you. You may end up in the other two situations anyway. So why not practice? Why not now? 

Zen and psychotherapy

Zen Master Dae Bong
Zen and Psychotherapy Conference in Korea—May, 2006

Sunims, professors, doctors, and guests, thank you very much for inviting me here today. I have been asked to speak on the experience of teaching Zen.

Zen actually has no teaching. The student determines the teaching. The Great Chinese Zen Master Im Je said, “Our school has no doctrine. I simply produce medicine for the disease which appears.”

The Great Chinese Zen Master Tae Hye said, “In Zen there is nothing to cultivate. Just rid yourself of all your opinions.” People do not have faith in the clarity and wisdom of their own original mind, so myriad problems and sufferings appear.

Practicing Zen is realizing suffering, the cause of suffering, and the end of suffering. Realizing this, naturally you want to help others.

Since all names and forms are impermanent, including religious forms, teachings, and ideas, a Zen practitioner uses whatever is at hand to help others. Yesterday I met a Korean man below our temple. He said he wanted to become a monk. I asked, “Why?” He said, “I want to get enlightenment.” I asked him, “What will you do after you get enlightenment?” “I don’t know.” That is a problem. I asked him if he was married. He said “yes, with two children.” I told him he must ask his wife’s permission. He said she would say no. She is Christian and gets very angry when he talks about wanting to be a monk. I said, “Then why become a monk? Buddhism means only help others. This world is originally empty, so you are also empty, so only help others. When you are with your wife, 100% keep husband’s mind. When you are with your children, 100% keep parent’s mind. When you are with your friends, 100% keep friend’s mind. When you are working, 100% working mind. When you are driving, 100% driver’s mind. That is practicing Buddhism. You can practice Buddhism in your everyday life just as it is. That is Zen.”

This man said that he is very nervous. “Who is nervous?” “I am.” “Who are you?” After some time he said, “I don’t know.” “Only keep this don’t know mind—in your lower belly.” Then I taught him *tanjeon ho-heup*, a breathing exercise.

“If you keep energy in your head, then you will have much thinking, much desire, and much suffering. If you keep energy in your chest, you will have too much emotion. Then I like this. I don’t like that. This person is good. That person is bad. This kind of thinking will appear. If you slowly breathe in and slowly breathe out, and return your attention and energy to your *tanjeon*, then your thinking and emotions will calm down. Slowly your mind will become clear and bright. You can then perceive this world and perceive your job moment-to-moment and do it. Try that every day.”

When I first met my teacher, Korean Zen Master Seung Sahn, in 1977, he was giving a dharma talk at Yale University in the United States. That night, a psychology professor asked him, “What is crazy and what is not crazy?” Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “If you are very attached to something, you are very crazy. If you are a little attached to something, you are a little crazy. If you are not attached to anything, that is not crazy.” I thought, “This answer is better than my ten years of studying and working in psychology.” Then Zen Master Seung Sahn continued, “So, in this world everyone is crazy, because everyone is attached to ‘I’. But this ‘I’ does not really exist. It is only made by our thinking. If you want to find your true self and not attach to your thinking ‘I,’ you must practice Zen.”

I thought, “This is my teacher.”

Human suffering comes from attachment to our thinking, to “I, my, me.” Practicing Zen means looking deeply into “I.” What am I? If you ask this question consistently and sincerely, finally you don’t know. This don’t know is very important. Keeping don’t know mind is practicing Zen. Giving others don’t know mind is teaching Zen.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said, “Don’t teach your understanding. Only teach don’t know.”

When I was a university student, I worked as an aide in a mental hospital at night. One night I came on duty at 11 pm. I could not find any of the staff, so I walked around the unit. Finally, I found the doctor and nurses in one patient’s room trying to get her to take her sleep medication. This woman was refusing to take her medicine and kept saying she needed to take a bus. Rita, the night nurse, came on duty and also could not find us. Finally she found us in the woman’s room. Rita watched the scene for a few moments and walked over to the bed (the only furniture in the room.) She pulled the mattress off of the bed, and as she rolled the bed frame out of the room, she pointed to the mattress and said to the woman, “There’s your bus. Get on it and take a ride.” The woman was shocked and stopped arguing. We all went out of the room, locked the door, and she slept the rest of the night.

When this happened, I thought to myself, “I want to get that kind of mind. I do not think I can get that from academic study.”

In Zen we say, any religion is like a finger pointing to the moon. If you attach to the finger, you will not get the moon. So in America we have Christian-Buddhist retreats, led by a Catholic priest or Protestant minister and a Buddhist monk. Christians and Buddhists practice Zen meditation together. I have a Catholic priest friend named Father Hunt who likes to say, “When you are doing sitting meditation and your leg has pain, is that Christian pain or Buddhist pain?” That is a very important point.

Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, “If you practice Zen, then if you are Christian, you can be 100% correct Christian. If you are Muslim, you can be 100% correct Muslim. If you are Buddhist, you can be 100% correct Buddhist.”

Zen meditation means when you are doing something, just do it! When you are sitting meditation, just sit. When you are chanting, just chant. When you are bowing, just bow. When you are driving, just drive. When you are washing dishes, just wash dishes. When you are with your family, 100% family. When you are doing something, just do it! At that time, there is no “I, my, me.” Where is “I, my, me” then ?

That sounds easy. It is not, and it is. If you try, try, try, slowly your body, mind, and situation moment-to-moment become one. Your complicated mind becomes simple. Then your simple mind can become empty and clear. One day you will realize your true nature, universal substance, is before-thinking, empty, void, pure, clear, and miraculously functioning. You will realize what the Sixth Patriarch called “the essence of mind.”

If you correctly attain that, your mind will be clear like space, clear like a mirror. Everything will reflect in your mind. Red comes, red. White comes, white. You see clearly, hear clearly, smell, taste, touch, and think clearly. The sky is blue. The tree is green. The dog barks, “Woof! Woof!” Sugar is sweet. Everything just the way it is is truth. You attain truth.

Then one more step is necessary. How does truth correctly function and make a correct human life? You must keep the correct situation, correct function, and correct relationship moment-to-moment. When you are hungry, eat. When you are tired, sleep. When someone is hungry, give them food. When someone is thirsty, give them a drink. When someone is suffering, help them. The name for that is Great Love, Great Compassion, and the Great Bodhisattva Way. But it is not special. It is simply correct human life. It is Zen.

Zen practice means substance, truth, and function become clear moment-to-moment. Teaching means that your mind and the student’s mind become one and give direction. You can perceive where the person is stuck and show them correct direction.

Practicing and teaching Zen are not two separate activities. If your practice is clear, your teaching will be clear. If your practice is not clear, your teaching will be not clear. Teaching, for me, is an experience of moment-to-moment learning—about you, about me, about this world. I always felt my teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, was a great teacher because he had a great vow and was a great learner. He knew how to learn from every moment. Every moment was fresh and new.

Zen Master Seung Sahn once said to me, “Before, students learned from teachers. Now, teachers learn from students.” This has helped me tremendously. I never felt I had anything to teach. Now I realize that teaching is not teaching. It is learning: Who is in front of me? Where are we stuck? How can I help?

A few years ago, a Korean woman approached me in the subway in Seoul. She pulled my robe and said, “I hate these clothes.” I said, “These are Korean clothes. Why don’t you like Korean things?” Pulling the robe again, she said, “I hate these clothes.” I said, “OK. You and I are about the same height. How about you give me your clothes and I give you mine.” Then she looked at me, smiled a little, and said, “You are a strange man. What is your name?” I said, “My name is Dae Bong.” “No. Tell me your real name.” “My name is Dae Bong.” “No. I want your real name.” “I forgot. You better ask my mother.”

“No. No. I want your real name.” “Why do you want my name?” “I want to pray for you.” “That is OK. You can pray for me without my name. God knows who I am.”

“No. I want your name.” I said, “OK. You get a paper and pen and I will tell you my name.” So she got out a paper and pen. Then I slowly said, “My name is I...love...you.”

She laughed, slapped me on the arm, and said, “You are a funny man,” and walked away.

Korean people eat with chopsticks and spoon. Japanese people eat with chopsticks. Western people eat with a knife and fork. Indian people eat with just their hands. The techniques are all different, but the direction is the same: food into my stomach. The direction is more important than the technique.

The most important thing in teaching Zen is helping the student find the correct direction of practice and of human life. Only go straight—don’t know. Why? To help all beings. When a person finds the correct direction, everything moment-to-moment becomes a useful technique. You can use every circumstance to teach a person. You can show a person how to use every circumstance to move forward, to help themselves and others.

When I asked Korean young people ten years ago what they thought about Buddhism, they said, “Buddhism is a grandmother’s religion.” The Korean young people I met did not see it as relevant to their life. Similarly, Zen practice essentially disappeared in China in the 1500s and 1600s because it had become a practice of the intellectual elite. It no longer connected with people’s everyday life.

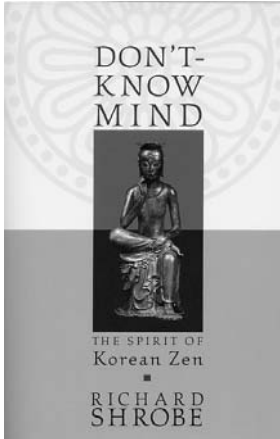
But society is changing, and now I think that more and more people find Buddhism, and especially Zen, interesting. Especially in the West, Buddhist practice is rapidly growing. It is growing in the West because correct Buddhism is not based on belief but on practice. It is a practice of becoming clear, of seeing one’s essential nature, that one’s true self is identical to the entire universe, of seeing the self-cause of suffering, and the way to overcome or end suffering. The ideal in Mahayana Buddhism is to help all beings, not only oneself, and not only human beings, not later but now, this moment. This resonates strongly with the concerns of many people in the world today.

Nowadays, all societies have lost their direction. People only want money and comfort in this life and the next. People kill others and themselves to get their dream. Everyone holds their opinion, and their opinions are different, so they fight. This is true between religions, countries, political parties, husband and wife, parents and children. Even inside us, our mouth and our stomach fight. My mouth says “I want more food and drink,” but my stomach says “No! No!” So we cannot make harmony within ourselves, with each other, with animals, with the air, water, and earth. If we continue this way, then soon much, much suffering will appear and many, many people will die—from war, disease, starvation, too little water, too much water, bad air, and natural disasters. We human beings are making the world like this! It is not coming from outside. Cause and effect are clear.

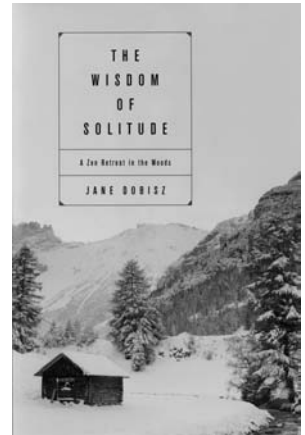
If we want to change this, then we must wake up! We must find our true nature, return to correct human beings’ mind, help each other, help nature, and help all beings. This is our human beings’ original job.

If you want to do that, then I ask you: What are you? If your answer is clear, then your life is clear. If you don’t know, then I hope you only go straight, don’t know, which is clear like space, try, try, try, for ten thousand years, non-stop, attain your true self, truth, and correct function, and save all beings from suffering. ☸

A fresh approach to Zen



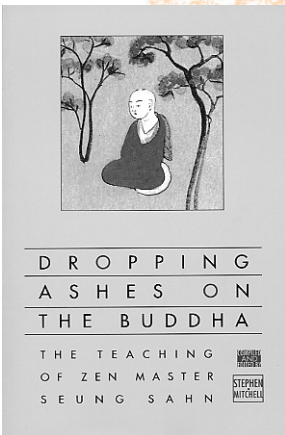
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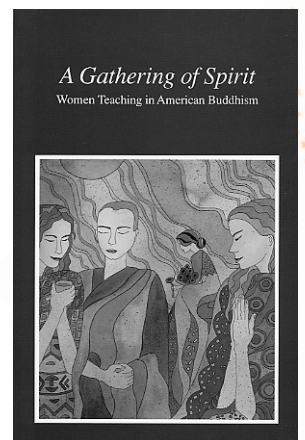
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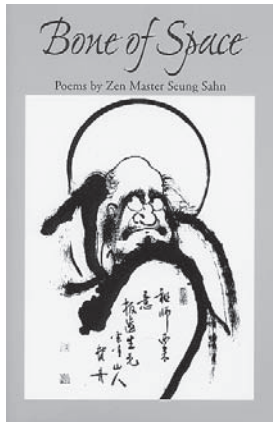


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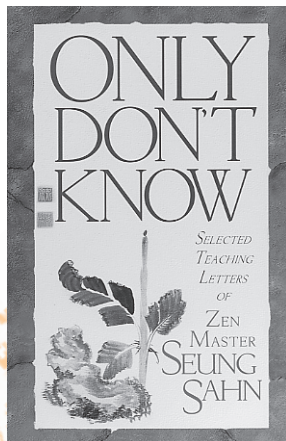
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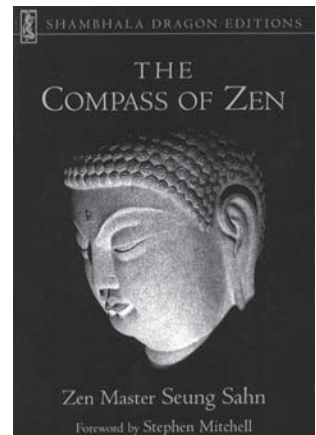
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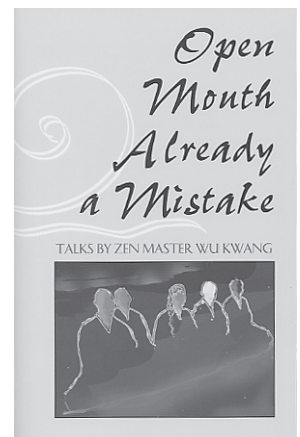
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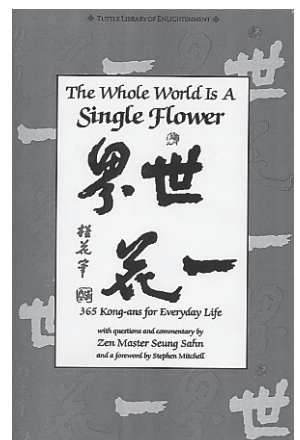


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My introduction to the dharma began, as it has for many, with a search for a way to relieve the suffering in my life. I had been experiencing a growing sense of hopelessness and frustration over what seemed the pointlessness of this life. The big question of “What am I?” was very strong in my mind, although I was not conscious of the question as such. But, there was definitely a strong feeling of “What is this life for? What is the way to live it best?” I lacked clear direction. My only sense of how to relieve the psychological discomfort I was feeling was to try to get more “things.” Money, material goods, relationships, experiences... whatever I thought at the moment would fill the space inside. I had not grown up in a spiritual tradition, and felt from an early age that organized religion was based on false assumptions and fear, and was rife with hypocrisy and elitism. I wanted no part of it. I looked to philosophy and literature, seeking thinkers who were logical, rational, and who espoused self-reliance and stoicism in the face of adversity. Still, however much I reflected on the words I read, there was no release from suffering. Often anger, cynicism, and resignation were what I read in these philosophers’ writings, and what I felt inside. However much I tried to fortify my mind and body against the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that were causing so much suffering, I only succeeded in closing myself off more. I became increasingly isolated, and began eroding relationships with those who cared about me. Part of my attempts to become a “strong” person included a long time spent practicing various martial arts. This physical practice was, as I see it now, another attempt to make myself invulnerable to the cruel world around me.

I carried on this way through five years or so as a college student, becoming more and more isolated and depressed. Then, within a period of two months, two separate experiences occurred which brought me to the lowest point of my life. The first was an extremely painful injury to the vertebrae of my lower back. This was an injury which causes physical discomfort to this day, and which at the time brought my martial arts progress to an abrupt stop. Years of dedication to the pursuit of one of the only goals that had meaning to me, only to have it suddenly taken away, to feel physically weak and vulnerable, brought about an intense depression.

Shortly afterwards, as a result of being the angry, selfish, and withdrawn person I had become, my girlfriend of five years ended the relationship we had had for so long. I now felt like a person completely adrift, with the things that had come to define my life suddenly pulled away.


Having read a number of books on martial arts philosophy, I had heard references to Zen many times; although, curiously, no writer ever seemed to explain this word very well. I only sensed that it had something to do with the highest levels of martial arts achievement. One day, shortly after these experiences, I was poking through a box of used books in this local store that sold incense, punk rock t-shirts, and assorted junk. A book caught my eye when I saw the word “Zen” on the cover. Because I had seen the word in my martial arts books, I bought the book on a whim. The book was *The Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac. I took the book home and read it that night. Then I re-read it. Then I read it again. I sensed that there was something important there. Something I hadn’t quite seen before. I could relate to the Smith character’s introverted personality and search

for meaning through living a simple life. But what fascinated me, like Smith, was the character Japhy. He seemed to embody the traits that I felt were most important: simplicity, self-reliance, intelligence, detachment from the pursuits of mainstream society. Yet while having these qualities, he showed no evidence of anger, bitterness, arrogance, or depression. He seemed a man at peace with himself and with life, a man who truly enjoyed his life and drew others to him with his openness, rather than pushing them away. I had an immediate sense that this was an example of the kind of person I wanted to be.

I then began reading sutras and books about Buddhism. Immediately, I encountered the teaching of the four noble truths and my mind was struck. Suddenly, the pattern of my life became clear. I felt the truth of these teachings in a way that I had not experienced before. I knew deep down, and with a sense of relief, that a path lay before me, a path that had been traveled by others before, which I could follow to become the person I wanted to be. Finally, after encountering the dharma, for the first time I felt I had found a direction which I could truly believe in.

This “entering the stream” experience for me was some fourteen years or so ago. Since then, life has taken many twists and turns. But always behind each experience, pleasant or unpleasant, has been this direction. A great faith and a great question, and the direction they point to, has shaped who I am and how I’ve lived my life since those days. It has been a slow, gradual unfolding for me. There have been periods of intense, overzealous practice, and periods of loose wandering in samsara. The poet William Blake once wrote that “the truth cannot be told, so as to be understood, and not be believed.” This belief in the truth of Buddhist teachings has not wavered, no matter how strong or weak my practice resolve has been. I continue to seek a balance, a simplicity, a life which effortlessly embodies the dharma.

The eightfold path as taught by the Buddha led me to ask how I could practice right livelihood. I gave this question a great deal of consideration, and it led me to a career as a public school teacher. The job of any teacher is to use skillful means to impart wisdom and understanding to his students, and to give students the tools to continue their progress independently. The Zen teachers I have encountered in the Kwan Um School have selflessly done this for me. I feel that the seeds of their teachings have grown to the point where I can begin to teach this path to others.

The person I am today bears so little resemblance to the one of fourteen years ago that it almost seems unreal, a dream. Although we always speak of how there is nothing to attain in Zen practice, every moment of practice is still a drop of transformation. The seed that these drops have been watering is a flower of compassion. It’s not at all what I started out seeking. I began along the path of the dharma asking “how can I use this wisdom to ease my suffering?” But with each step, each glimpse of clear mind, the direction increasingly points to “how can I use this wisdom to help others and ease the suffering of this world?” Experiencing great suffering, and subsequently having my mind struck by the teachings of the Buddha, have been and continue to be my primary motivations for Zen practice. Over the years, added to these motivations, is the wish to share what I have learned in order to ease the suffering of others. 

Motivations for Practice

Kenneth Henderson

My motivations for practice have changed, and have stayed the same. Practice has always seemed to put me in touch with a deeper layer of reality than what was apparent; in this reality, I become more focused, more centered, less buffeted by emotions and circumstances, more able to respond to immediate situations clearly, with less cognitive equivocation. Reality seems more simple and more clear, and I am able to respond in a simpler, clearer way.

My own practice began under Christian auspices. I had a Christian conversion in a Pentecostal context. In Christian terms, I accepted Jesus and was “baptized in the spirit.” When this occurred, I felt a very deep sense of peace, as if a deep river of peace was flowing into me, forming a huge, ever-growing lake of peace which immediately dispelled the cognitive and emotional chaos in my life at the time. Others, who had not known what had happened, remarked that my whole appearance had changed, and it had indeed changed. I experienced this peace in long intervals for a couple of years, and I spent long hours in prayer and meditation. Eventually, however, this sense of peace began to change, to fade, to be replaced by other emotions. There is much more that I could say about this period, though it is of a very personal nature, and it culminated in a directed Jesuit Ignatian retreat which put this period of my life in a different context.

For many years, I searched for a more constant sense of peace to replicate my earlier experiences, always continuing with prayer and meditation to varying degrees. Eventually I was led to Zen, and began to do Zen meditation and Zen practice. Zen has changed my perspective. Its difficult for me to imagine my life without daily practice, and meditation/practice itself begins my day in a way which focuses and centers me and enables me to respond to immediate situations in a more direct, clear way. I guess I expect this to happen, and I’m aware that buddhamind is always present. But, I no longer chase after peace or after experience in the way I once did. Emotions change, and I’m aware that no matter how I feel, I’ll probably feel differently soon. Emotions no longer buffet me as they once did. My job is simply to do what is in front of me. If I’m typing, as I’m doing now, my job is just to type. If I’m working at my job, my job is just to work. I work part-time as a personal trainer, and if I’m training, I train, no more, no less. If I work in my yard, I work in my yard. If a friend needs to talk, I listen, and I talk. *Buddha lifts up a flower, I lift up a flower*, no more, no less.

In the years since I’ve practiced Zen meditation, my motivations for practice have changed, and have stayed the same. I’ve always been aware that practice, and meditation, centered me, made me more focused, helped me to respond to situations in a more immediate, clear way. When I began to practice Zen, I at times felt desperate to change the way I felt. Now, I simply begin my day with practice as a matter of course, and then let the rest of the day take care of itself. Also, I wanted enlightenment, and I guess I thought enlightenment would cure me of all my problems. It was large want-enlightenment sickness. Now, I practice, and let enlightenment take care of itself. Also, I’ve had the motivation to lessen suffering and to change karma, and practice does indeed lessen suffering and change karma. But, to lessen suffering is just to do what I’m doing now; changing karma is just to do what I’m doing, and help others.

One of my clients once asked me why I go on retreats, and I said “to attain clear direction.” Retreats, and practice in general, help me to attain clear direction. This is much better than wanting enlightenment. In an earlier time, I would have probably given her a long, involved answer about enlightenment, a long discourse on Buddhism and Zen, but my answer was certainly the result of my practice. Clear direction is doing what I’m doing right now, responding to my client’s question, typing this small discourse, eating when hungry, sleeping when tired. It’s very simple. “Try, try, try for ten thousand years, and save all sentient beings.” Saving all sentient beings is training my client, doing my job, answering my client’s question. Then, all things are OK. My motivations for practice have stayed the same by putting me more in touch with a simple, clear reality, what I now see as having a clear mind, and about dropping my small “I” expectations. My motivations have changed by not being so grandiose, and by not needing to change how I feel or to change my circumstances, but just doing what is in front of me. When I have a correct motivation, then when I meditate, I meditate; when I chant, I chant; when I work, I work; when I type, I type; when others ask me for help, I help, no more, no less. Then, no matter how I feel, everything is OK. Feelings change, and circumstances change, but when I focus just on what is in front of me, then everything is alright. This is what Zen has taught me, and what the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn through the Kwan Um School have taught me, and I’m grateful for this simple, clear teaching. ☸

No Problem

Jess Row

Just before Zen Master Seung Sahn died, his last words were, “Everything no problem.” What does this mean?

In English the expression *no problem* is of fairly recent origin. We associate it with an attitude of relaxation, open-mindedness, and what we might call the spirit of the Sixties: “live and let live.” Or, a more recent variation: “It’s all good.” Of course, in daily speech we use it for all kinds of situations with no deep implications (or so we think): if, say, a deliveryman calls me and says, “Can I bring the table to your place at five instead of three?” I might say, “No problem.” Or, if someone bumps into me on the subway and apologizes, I might say, “No problem,” or, “Don’t worry about it,” or, “It’s OK.”

In English, there’s a certain kind of power associated with saying “no problem.” My mother once received a plaque in connection with her work from the Optimists Club, which had their credo stamped on it, and the first sentence was, “Let us be strong enough that no mundane worries can trouble us.” Of course, the Optimists Club in that town was mostly made up of wealthy businessmen who, relatively speaking, had little to worry about, so that was easy for them to say. I can afford to have good car insurance, so if someone bangs into my car in a parking lot and accidentally damages the bumper, I can say, “no problem,” knowing that my insurance will pay for it. The spirit of “no problem” is sometimes—perhaps often—something we have to *work* for, at least in an American context.

One of the problems in translating one language to another is that every language has idioms whose meaning is not inherent in the words themselves. *No problem* is definitely one of those. When I lived in Hong Kong after graduating from college, I developed a bad habit of using a literal Cantonese translation of “no problem,” *mou mantaih*, instead of the more appropriate Chinese expression, *m’ganyiu*. The Chinese idiom literally means “no connection” (in Mandarin, *mei guanxi*) or “no relationship,” in the sense of, “It doesn’t matter, it doesn’t relate to anything more important.” Even that doesn’t really convey its meaning, but it will have to do. Another, even more untranslatable Chinese equivalent is *mou souwaih* (*wu suowei*), meaning, roughly, “It has nothing to do with it.”

I may be overstating things, but my feeling has always been that these Chinese expressions are slightly more humble and more conciliatory than “no problem.” They are also, perhaps, slightly less optimistic.

I have no way of saying what expression Zen Master Seung Sahn was mentally translating when he used the words “no problem,” or whether he, in fact, used the English expression without thinking of any equivalent. But of course the Buddhist interpretation of the world indicates a different meaning for these words than the normative English one. In Zen, any use of words is a problem: “Open mouth already a mistake!” Words lead to conceptual thinking and discrimination, to disagreement and confusion. Of course, on the other hand, we have no choice but to use words. Words are part of the big mistake of human life, from the moment we are born to the moment we die. In the largest way of thinking, “problem” and “no problem” are neither different nor not-different; they are interdependent categories. To say “no problem” is not to exclude or militate against “problems,” but to welcome them in.

In the world of samsara we live in, there are real problems everywhere. Yesterday, in the newspaper, I read about a woman in Darfur, in Sudan, who spent three months gathering firewood to take to market to sell for the equivalent of \$40. On her way home she was attacked by militiamen who stole her money and raped her. How must it feel to be that woman? How is it possible for such cruelty to exist among human beings? To read such a story and then say of the world, “everything no problem,” would be an outrage.

Yet Zen Master Seung Sahn was not wrong. In the clarity of the Buddha Way, we forget about problems and no problems and simply go straight to what needs to be done. We pick up the phone and call our representatives in Washington, or send an email to our friends, or donate some money, or perhaps even change our life direction to be of more service to this suffering world. We use every means to relieve pain and give hope. This includes using words when they serve some real purpose. At the moment Zen Master Seung Sahn was speaking, he was surrounded by his students, who were, perhaps, consumed with fear over what was happening. It was necessary to reassure them. Thus: “Everything no problem.”

In the right hands, in the right situation, the expression does more than simply shrug off or dismiss an unpleasant situation: it creates a space of harmony and calm in the midst of worry or anxiety or anger. It’s a way of saying, “yes, there is a problem, but even a problem like this is no problem.” Or, as Zen Master Seung Sahn often said, a bad situation is a good situation.

A story from my own life illustrates this point. When I was twelve years old, my family moved from the East Coast to Phoenix, Arizona, in August, the hottest month of the year. We were driving around in the blazing midday sun looking for a house to rent, and we stopped at a Circle-K store to get something to drink. I bought an enormous soda full of ice, carried it to the counter, and promptly dropped it and spilled it everywhere. There was sticky Cherry Coke and ice all over the floor, the counter, my clothes—a colossal mess. My father turned to me and said something terrible—so much so that my mind has blotted it out. And the next person in line, a middle-aged man, said to me, “It’s OK, it could have happened to anyone. Everybody makes mistakes.”

I burst out crying at that moment. In my shame and humiliation, it was exactly what I needed to hear. For that second, that man was transformed into Kwan Seum bodhisattva, “she who hears the cries of the universe.” I’ve often wondered who he was. Which is another way of saying that I wonder whether *I*, on that same hot day, with cold soda spilled all over my shoes, would be capable of turning to the clumsy, pimply, greasy-haired kid in front of me, and saying—fully meaning it!—“It’s OK. It’s no problem.”



Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices
by Martine Batchelor, Son'gyong Sunim
Syracuse University Press, 2006

Reviewed by Judy Roitman, JDPSN

book reviews

The title is daunting: academic, sociological. The book is not. Written in two parts by Martine Batchelor, it begins with a memoir of her years as a nun in Korea, followed by a brief “as told to” autobiography of one of her teachers, the nun Son'gyong Sunim. It is a rare combination: both utterly charming and highly informative.

Around the same time that Zen Master Seung Sahn started teaching Westerners in the West, the Korean Zen master Kusan Sunim opened Songgwangsa to Westerners and was teaching them in Korea. Batchelor found herself practicing with him almost by chance—she had wanted to go to Japan but somehow the travel arrangements got fouled up and she found herself in Seoul. It was a serendipitous foul-up and she quickly became a student of Kusan Sunim, and almost as quickly decided to be a nun. She practiced as a nun in Korea for a decade until, sometime after Kusan Sunim died, she went back into lay life. She now lives in France with her husband, Stephen Batchelor (the author of *Buddhism Without Beliefs*), himself a former monk under Kusan Sunim; they lead meditation retreats world-wide.

Her short memoir covers a lot of ground in 74 pages. We get a brief history of Korean Buddhism, especially of the nuns' order; we meet a lot of important teachers, both male and female; we get personal matter-of-fact descriptions of hwadu practice as Batchelor's practice deepens and changes. We learn about monastic etiquette; such daily details as how one is supposed to wash (both self and clothes); four bowl style the Korean way (slightly different from ours); the yearly schedule with its alternating schedule of intense kyol che's and relaxed (by monastic standards only) hae jae's. There are translations of chants (some the same as ours, some different) and the special rules for nuns. And there are examples of Kusan Sunim's answers to the questions that Westerners would put to him. All of this is through recounting Batchelor's experience, so it is never dry and always alive. She reports on the rigors of her training in a completely un-self-centered way.

Quite striking is the enormous freedom she had as a nun. A typical sentence at the beginning of a chapter is, “During my third summer I decided to stay at Songgwangsa for the forthcoming retreat.” It is this freedom, and her use of it to travel and learn from many teachers, that enables her memoir to be such a valuable record of so many practice places and so many teachers and practitioners. While her status as a Western nun at times made her experience somewhat different from Korean nuns, this use of the rhythms of kyol che and hae jae to move back and forth is not that unusual.

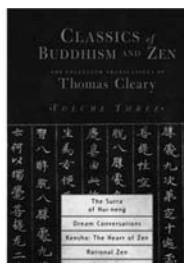
One of the teachers that Batchelor practiced with was the eminent nun Son'gyong Sunim. Batchelor felt a strong connection with her and conducted a series of interviews over several years with the explicit goal of chronicling her life.

She chose an excellent subject, whose life story parallels a shift within Korean society. Son'gyong Sunim, born to a peasant family, became a nun when she was eighteen—it was that or suicide. It was 1921, and she soon found herself an attendant to an old nun who did not particularly value meditation or sutra study, the preceptor of her preceptor, her dharma grandmother. So Son'gyong Sunim stayed illiterate, taking care of the elder nun for 15 years—not an unusual life for a nun of that time. Then, having heard of Man Gong's teachings, she begged to go to a women's temple near him; finally the elder agreed, and a year later, when Son'gyong Sunim refused to go back, the old nun changed her vision of what it meant to be a nun, joined her student, and began meditation practice. This part of Son'gyong Sunim's biography parallels a change in Korean attitudes towards women—while there had always been women of accomplishment, many women, especially women of peasant origin, had not had many opportunities, even within monastic orders, and were not necessarily encouraged in sutra study or in meditation. (The situation now is radically different.)

At this point, she gained the kind of freedom that Batchelor had, traveling from one place to another, one teacher to another. She studied with both male and female Zen masters, and gives accounts of both public and private (interview) encounters with them, as well as brief biographies. Her own description of her practice is both modest and startling in the unassuming way she describes practice of extreme intensity. Much of the time, despite the monastic setting, she is struggling on her own; private interviews with teachers are rare, and her teachers speak their words to her quite sparingly. She gets crucial encouragement from supernatural events: waking visions and dreams of bodhisattvas and other beings. The matter-of-fact way that she and others describe these—oh, that must have been Manjusri, yes he appears here sometimes—is one of the more striking aspects of this book. This portion of the book ends with a number of poems written by Son'gyong Sunim. To quote one in its entirety:

*Clear water flows on white rock.
The autumn moon shines bright,
So clear is the original face.
Who dares say it is or is not?*

In summary, this book is a fine introduction to many aspects of Korean Buddhist practice, written so gracefully that it can be enjoyed by anyone, even if they know nothing of Buddhism. And the dedicated practice of these women is inspiring to our own. ☸

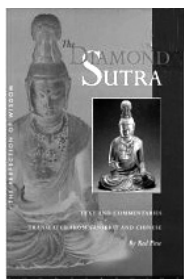


The Sutra of Hui-Neng
in *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*
Volume 3: *The Collected Translations of Thomas Cleary*
(*Classics of Buddhism and Zen*)
Thomas Cleary,
Shambala, 2005



Hui-Neng's Commentary on the Heart Sutra
in *Classics of Buddhism and Zen*
Volume 3: *The Collected Translations of Thomas Cleary*
(*Classics of Buddhism and Zen*)
Thomas Cleary
Shambala, 2005

The Heart Sutra,
Red Pine
Shoemaker and Hoard, 2004



The Diamond Sutra
Red Pine
Counterpoint, 2001

Reviewed by Judy Roitman, JDPSN

Thomas Cleary is a lucid (and prolific) translator of Chinese and Japanese texts, as well as Arabic (a *Qur'an* among other texts), Pali (he has a *Dhammapada*) and Gaelic. Red Pine (a.k.a. Bill Porter) is a lucid translator of ancient Chinese texts. These four translations are excellent for both the person just beginning to read classic Buddhist texts and those who are familiar with them.

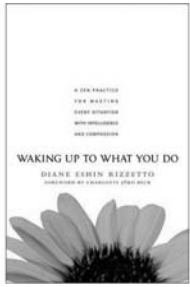
Cleary uses the standard translator's format of a lengthy introduction followed by the text followed by notes. His introductions and notes are informative and reliable, and his translations of Hui-Neng's texts avoid obfuscations and excessive pedantry, being remarkably clear and readable. A good rule of thumb for any classic Buddhist text is: if a Cleary translation exists (either Thomas or his brother J.C.), read it.

Red Pine uses an unusual strategy of presenting the text first, followed by careful explication of the text, sometimes paragraph-by-paragraph, sometimes line-by-line, followed by notes. This allows him to take interesting detours which include information that ordinarily wouldn't make it into a translator's introduction. His explication is not limited to his own ideas, and he includes quotes from a wide range of commentators, from ancient times to modern. He is at times idiosyncratic—he emphasizes the narrative arc of Subhuti's spiritual progress in his commentary on *The Diamond Sutra* (a narrative arc completely absent from Hui-Neng and many other commentators), and he identifies Avalokitesvara with the Buddha's mother Queen Maya in his commentary on *The Heart Sutra*. But his generosity in presenting other points of view gives the reader far more intellectual freedom than most commentators allow, and his careful discussion of phrases that are problematic from the translator's point of view provide deep insights into the possible meanings of these ambiguous texts.

Unfortunately, Red Pine's *Diamond Sutra* is currently out of print, but it is not difficult to find online or at good used bookstore chains such as Half-Price Books. The latter deserves some mention for its excellent selection of Buddhist books, better than most standard "literary" bookstores. And of course, there's always the library. ☸

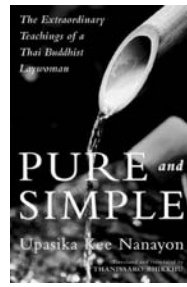
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*Waking Up to What You Do:
A Zen Practice for Meeting Every Situation
with Intelligence and Compassion*
Diane Eshin Rizzetto
Shambala, 2005

Reviewed by Judy Roitman, JDPSN



Pure and Simple
Upasika Kee Nanayon
tr. Thanissaro Bhikkhu
Wisdom, 2005

Reviewed by Judy Roitman, JDPSN

Zen in America encompasses a wide variety of practices, largely differing in their emphases on the two aspects of being which are traditionally called the relative and the absolute. In particular, Joko Beck teaches a way of practicing that focuses on physical and emotional sensations, and on labeling ideas as they arise, in a way that seems to me reminiscent of Vipassana meditation (but having done neither practice, what do I know?). Diane Rizzetto is her student and dharma heir, and this investigation of the precepts extends her teacher's approach.

Rizzetto examines eight of the ten precepts, using them as focuses of practice and as ways of transforming our lives. The statement of these precepts is somewhat different from the ways in which usually stated. For example, "I vow to abstain from taking life" becomes "I take up the way of supporting life." Thus promises of negative behavior ("I vow to abstain") become statements of current direction ("I take up the way").

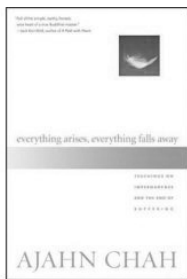
The first few chapters are an introduction to Rizzetto's general approach, including a chapter on what she calls "the dead spot" (a phrase used by trapeze artists), which closely resembles our notion of "don't know." The next eight chapters discuss each precept one at a time, beginning with a general discussion, moving to practice that focuses on the precept (practice that goes on both on and off the cushion, observing your actions as they happen), and ending with questions and answers between her students and herself. It ends with a brief concluding chapter, and a guide to basic awareness practice. ☸

Kee Nanayon (1901—1978) was one of the most famous Buddhist teachers in Thailand, a remarkable achievement given that she was a laywoman with little formal dhamma training. Beginning serious practice in adolescence, in early middle age she left her small business and moved with an aunt and uncle to a modest home in the country; it grew to become a large meditation center which is still thriving decades after the death of its founder.

This book consists of clear instructions on Theravada practice: concrete, simple, down-to-earth. It is deeply rooted in classic Theravada concepts, but remarkably free of technical terminology; when terminology is necessary, it is explained concisely and clearly. She forcefully and insistently points us past our distractions. For example, in a chapter addressed to people who are ill, she writes, "whatever disease you have, it's not important. What's important is the disease in the mind." In a chapter on attachment she writes, "The bombs they drop on people to wipe them out aren't really all that dangerous, for you can die only once per lifetime. But the three bombs of passion, aversion, and delusion keep exploding the heart and mind countless times." Strong teaching pervades nearly every paragraph, leaving no room for the usual excuses.

Fundamentally rooted in Nanayon's own deep practice, this is one of those rare books that transcend schools and ideology. Nanayon speaks in the language of purity and impurity, of defilement and craving on the one hand and nirvana on the other, but what she is pointing to is deeply human and completely universal. ☸





everything arises, everything falls away:
Teachings on Impermanence
and the End of Suffering
Ajahn Chah
Shambhala, 2005

Reviewed by Ken Kessel, JDPSN

Like a Cow Not Satisfied With Its Own Tail

Coming, no hindrance, going, no hindrance
Like a cloud in the breeze
Then what is the root of suffering?
Being born is already dying
What can you do?

Throughout *everything arises, everything falls away*, Ajahn Chah repeats the phrase, “Being born is already dying.” This struck me as a poignantly-worded teaching point, and I incorporated it as a recurring couplet in poems I wrote for a recent retreat. However, when I went to the text to find the citations for this review, I could no longer find it. Where did it go?

Ajahn Chah was a Thai forest monk, who was born in 1918 and died in 1992. He practiced and studied with the outstanding teachers of his and the previous generation, and in 1954, he established a monastery, Wat Pah Pong, which eventually drew students from around the world, including many of the now-senior teachers in the Western Theravadan lineage. But at that time, the countryside was poor, and he and his disciples had to endure extremely harsh conditions.

In 1979, he came to teach in America. When he was in New York, our Chogye International Zen Center had a large space on East 31st Street, and we were able to offer it to him for a public talk. We had built a podium for formal Korean dharma talks, but Ajahn Chah had the chance to inaugurate it. The dharma room was packed to capacity and into the hallway. I wish I could remember what he said. At that time, I was new enough to practice to be happy hearing him, but at the same time I was glad that it was Zen that I was practicing. But now, I think that if I had happened to hear him before I had encountered Zen, I would have ended up studying with him.

It's not that the teaching is better or worse, either way. It's that Ajahn Chah's teaching rings profoundly true. He is direct, unassuming, and colloquial, eminently accessible. He speaks in everyday life terms of the link between impermanence, attachment, suffering and liberation, always pointing at how to look at practice, how to look at life. He sheds light on these points through stories about his own experience, stories about his students, and stories about the Buddha. The book breathes.

everything arises, everything falls away (the title is all lower-case) is a compilation of Ajahn Chah's teachings, taken from memory (in the preface) and tapes in the Thai and Lao languages (in the body of the book), translated by Paul Breiter. Breiter was a monk in the Thai Forest tradition from 1970 to 1977. He studied with Ajahn Chah and served as his translator for much of this time. Breiter provides a preface that lovingly mirrors his teacher's clarity and simplicity. It serves as a capable introduction to Buddhism and the Theravadan tradition. Old black-and-white photos of Ajahn Chah grace the book at the front and between sections, and add to the feeling of presence in this volume.

In his picture on the frontispiece, he sits upright in a chair, leaning forward, arms crossed, hands clasped at his waist on the left. His smile is broad, his eyes engaging, and with his black horn-rimmed glasses, he bears a striking resemblance both physically and in manner to Zen Master Seung Sahn. Other pictures of him preface sections of the book, and at different times, these call to mind Suzuki Roshi, Sasaki Roshi and Maha Ghosananda. And while he clearly speaks from the Theravadan tradition, what he says transcends sectarian distinctions. One could find something on any page that opens into the path of the dharma. I offer here a few selections that shed light on Ajahn Chah's personality and idiosyncrasies, which make the journey more human:

I would think about the lives of beings in the world. It all seemed very heartrending and pitiful. (I felt) pity toward rich and poor alike, toward the wise and the foolish—everyone living in this world was in the same boat.... I felt I was different from others. When I saw others with their worldly involvements, I thought that was truly regrettable. I came to have real faith and trust in the path of practice... and (it) has supported me right up to the present.

If you tell (people) about not-self... they immediately want to argue the point. Even the Buddha, after he attained awakening, felt weary at heart when he considered this.... But then he realized that such an attitude was mistaken. If we don't teach such people, who will we teach? This is my question, which I used to ask myself at those times I got fed up and didn't want to teach anymore: who should we teach, if we don't teach the deluded? There's really nowhere else to go. When we get fed up and want to run away from others, we are deluded.

If we *are* the dharma, then we just see heaps of earth, water, fire and air. Well, we're pretty far from

this, aren't we? This is not just joking around. I'm saying these things for those of you who want to get the essence of the dharma. The point isn't merely having a comfortable life as your reward for good works.... Today I'm speaking bluntly and directly. Anyone who doesn't have the right outlook will feel like his neck is being broken. This is the Dharma for grownups.

There was once a donkey who used to listen to crickets sing. The donkey thought, "How wonderful to be able to sing like that!" He asked the other animals what the crickets' secret was, and they told him that the crickets drink dew. So every morning he went around licking the dew on the grass, and finally one day he opened his mouth to sing. But he still brayed like a donkey.

In response to a student who was complaining about another teacher being lazy:

"Right.... Just like me. I've got a lot of defilements. I like to fool around." Although I realized he was putting me on, I was startled to hear such talk and didn't know what to say. Ajahn Chah went on bending his head toward me, lowering his voice, and speaking in mock confidentiality. "Listen: I'm planning to disrobe, and I want you to help me find a nice woman."

To a hog farmer, complaining about the rising cost of feed and the falling cost of pork:

Don't feel too sorry for yourself, sir. If you were a pig, then you'd have good reason to feel sorry for yourself. When the price of pork is high, the pigs are slaughtered. When the price of pork is low, the pigs are still slaughtered. The pigs really have something to complain about. Think about this seriously, please.... The pigs have a lot more to worry about, but we don't consider that. We're not being killed, so we can still try to find a way to get by.


Finally, on relating to phenomena:

Our emotions of love and hate never bring us satisfaction. We never feel we have enough, but are always somehow obstructed. Simply speaking, as we say in our local idiom, we are people who don't know enough.... So our minds waver endlessly, always changing into good and bad states with the different

phenomena we encounter, like a cow not satisfied with its own tail.... This world of beings has nothing of its own. Nothing belongs to anyone. Seeing this with correct view, we will release our grip, just letting things be. Coming into this world and realizing its limitations, we do our business.

An attraction of many Asian teachers of the previous generation, who helped bring Buddhism to the West, is that while speaking fully in and from their tradition, their teaching went beyond this tradition, beyond Buddhism, to the heart of the dharma. Experienced practitioners will find much to cherish, much to smile about, much to reflect on. Those new to Buddhism will feel simultaneously welcomed and challenged by a gently inspiring yet fiercely uncompromising teacher. ☸

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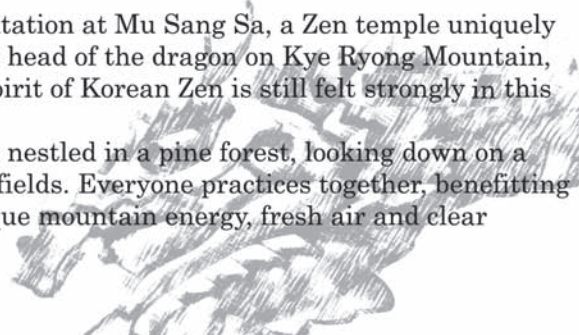
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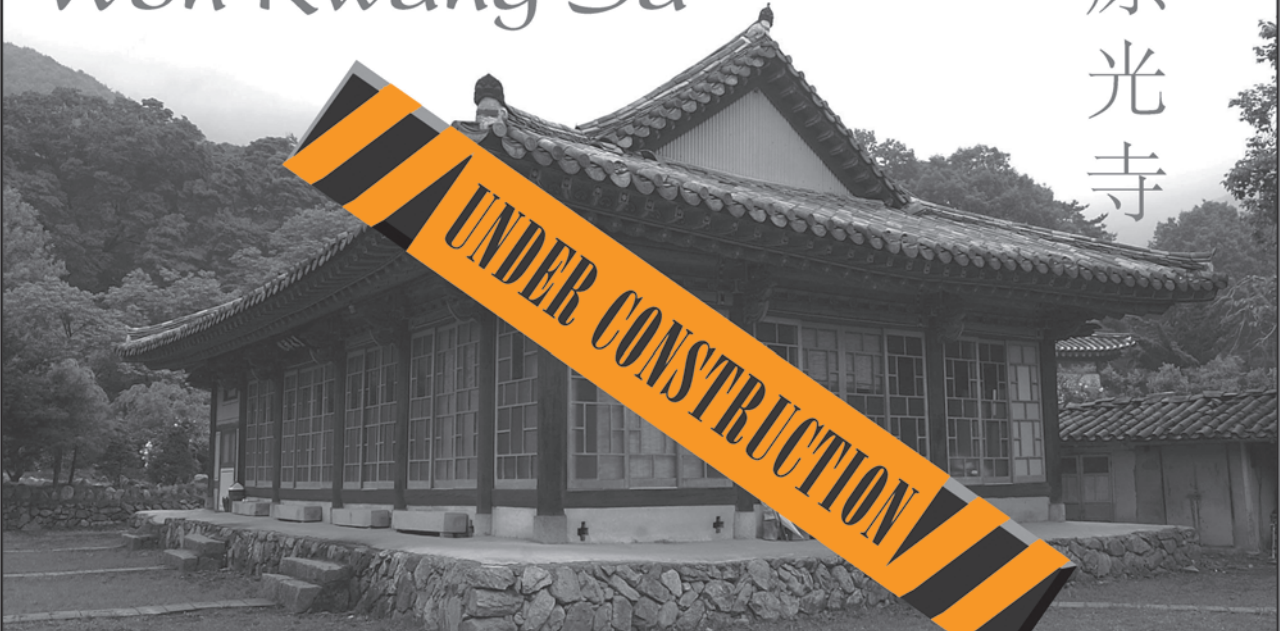
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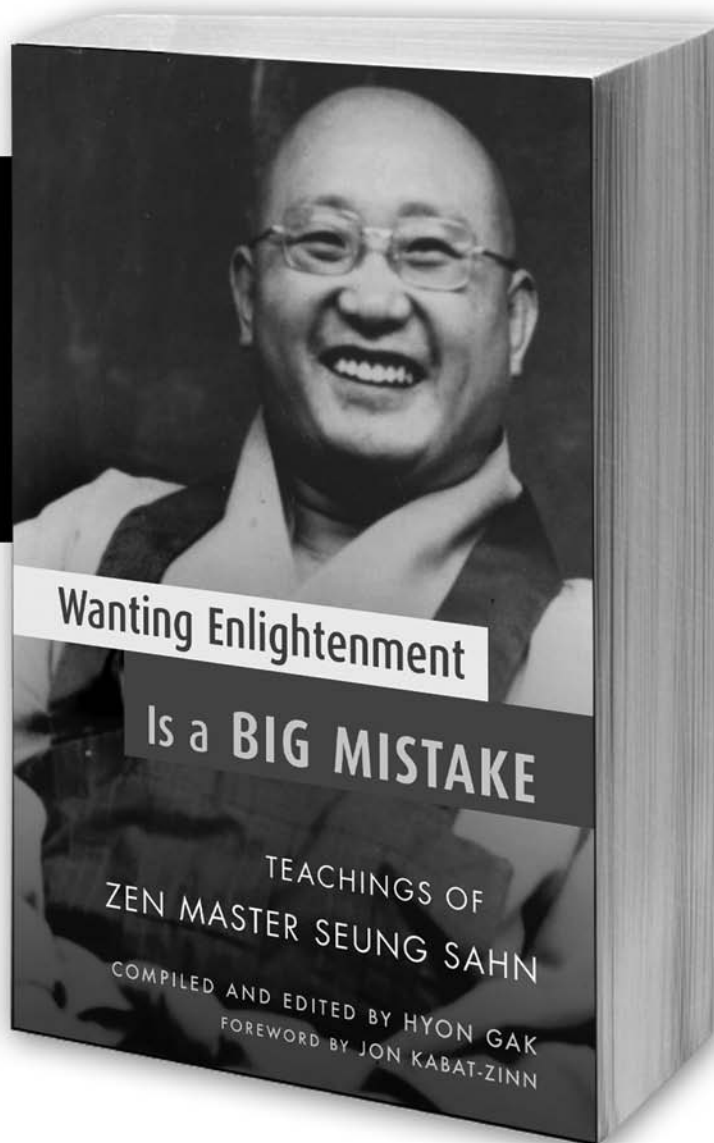
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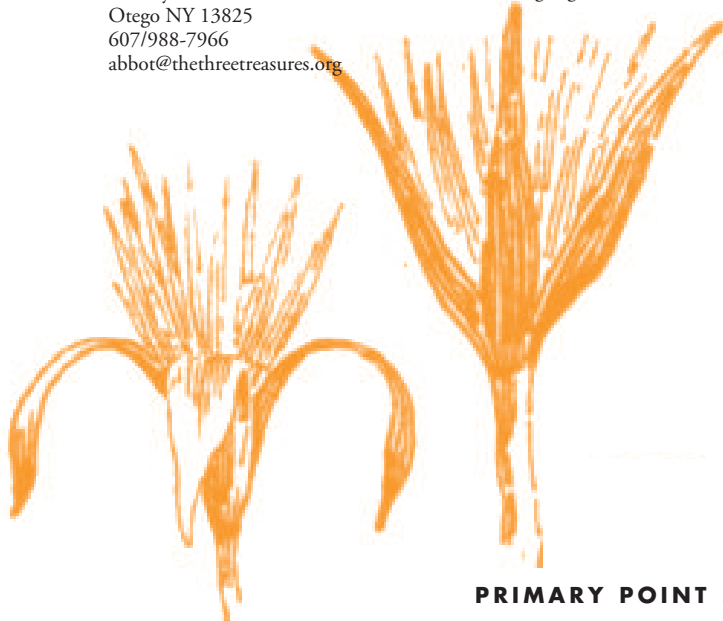
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