

# Primary Point



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# Winter Kyol Che at Musangsa

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Hye Tong Sunim JDPS  
Visiting Teachers from the KUSZ

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The Kwan Um School of Zen supports the worldwide teaching schedule of the Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sas, assists the member Zen centers and groups in their growth, issues publications on contemporary Zen practice, and supports dialogue among religions. If you would like to become a member of the School and receive *Primary Point*, see page 31. The circulation is 2,100 copies.

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Cover: Stone buddha on Lantau Island, Hong Kong. Photo by Francis Lau.

# *I Have a Diamond Sword*

## *Zen Master Dae Bong*

*Dharma speech given at Mu Sang Sa Temple, Korea, February 11, 2017*

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

Beginning is ending, ending is beginning.

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

No beginning, no ending.

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

Beginning is just beginning, ending is just ending.

If you throw away all that thinking, what do you have?

KATZ!

Today is Hae Jae day. Be careful!

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Today is Dae Bo Reum, big first full moon of the new year. Today the New Year really begins. Already washed away the old year. Today is the end of three months of winter Kyol Che, not only in our temple but in the temples all over Korea. Today is also the end of the winter 90-day Kwan Um Kido and the end of the 21-day special Hwa Om Song Jung. We did this 21-day kido to finish off the old year and begin the new year with strong, clear energy.

That's Buddha's army over there (pointing to the altar of the dharma protectors). We have Buddha's army that's supporting and helping the dharma. That means our own dharma power inside. Today also is the end of Ji Mun Sunim's chanting kido for almost 200 days straight. Every day for 200 days, three times a day. Sometimes many people in this Buddha hall chanted together with him, sometimes he chanted alone. His body stayed in this Buddha hall, but his mind? I don't know, maybe fly around many places, but always come back. Only following correct situation, relationship and function. Everybody did lots of practice this winter in the temple or at home. Everybody, did you accomplish what you wanted to during this practicing time? Accomplish or not accomplish, doesn't matter. It's not so important. What are you doing right now?

Last century, there was a very great Korean Zen master named Hae Wol. Everybody has heard of Hae Wol Sunim. He was not an educated person. I heard that he couldn't read or write but he was a great practicing person and a great student of Zen master Gyeong Heo. When he was teaching, he always said, "Everyone has a diamond sword." Sometime he said, "I have a diamond sword."

During the first half of the last century, we all know that the Japanese occupied Korea. At that time many generals in the Japanese army remembered the old times

*(Continued on page 25)*



*Photo: Grzegorz Piaskowski*

# Hyang Eom's "Up a Tree": Four Teachers' Views

## Zen Master Soeng Hyang

It is taught that this kong-an has one only answer that will truly release all the tethers that tie us to our ignorance. Only one response will be universally received as correct: "Aha! That's it, that's how you stay alive!"

What is that answer? How do you stay alive? How can you generously offer your wisdom while tied and bound, dangling above a fatal fall with only the grip of your teeth to save you?

The gift that is offered by this kong-an is total bondage, total physical and intellectual bondage. Only a Zen student would be so foolish as to accept such a gift. Only a Zen student would recognize it as a gift, rather than seeing it as a manipulative mind game that has no answer.

Open the gift. Inside is only don't know. Such an expensive gift, and yet few will accept it. Accepting it means abandoning the familiar, and that can be terrifying. And yet, not knowing is very familiar territory for us all, a place where we can be empowered. Not knowing allows us to let

go of false assumptions. It frees us of preconceptions and attachments. When the mind doesn't know, it is sitting exactly in this moment. When it is in this moment, it is wide open: a perfect receptor, a perfect reflector.

The Temple Rules of the Kwan Um School of Zen say, "In original nature there is no this and that. The Great Round Mirror has no likes or dislikes." No likes or dislikes means letting conditioned, structured mind states dissolve so that our natural wisdom and compassion can manifest themselves. In Zen, this wise and compassionate state is simply called having a clear mind.

The Buddha gave all kinds of teaching, and he

said that he taught that way to save all different kinds of minds. But if there is no mind, then there is nothing to save. So, if you can completely engage in the question—the don't-know that a kong-an offers—where is your mind? Doing meditation and kong-an practice, tapping into the generosity of those techniques, your mind becomes very spacious.

Even while tied and bound, our mind can feel as spacious as the sky. Look up at the sky and think of it as your mind. The sky doesn't have any hindrances. If a cloud appears, the sky doesn't complain. If there is thunder and lightning, or if there's pollution, it remains just as spacious. There is no tightening, no fear. Our practice can help us to open to those qualities, so that we're not hindered by the ropes around our limbs and the fall beneath our feet. Just in that moment—don't know—be in relationship with that situation. How do you stay alive?

Out of this spaciousness comes the ability to realize our wisdom and remember how to be in relationship with the lessons, the opportunities that appear in our life. Few ever say it is easy. A wise teacher will encourage cultivation of patience, forbearance, generosity, precepts, courage.

And then what? We have the sky for inspiration, our teacher's encouragement, total support from the tree's branch. How do we share in the generosity?

KATZ!

The universe awaits your response.

## Zen Master Su Bong

Empty Mirror cannot hold on  
to Blue Sky or Green Pine Trees' Sound  
Mystic Energy without Time and Space  
Has no coming, Has no going.

Before Hyang Eom  
Already clean in front of you.  
Why then did Bodhidharma  
Come to China?  
Open your mouth you're already dead.  
Close your mouth already too late.  
Why?  
Even Yaaaaahaa is not enough.  
?????????  
Ha Ha Ha Ha  
(Ask Man Gong)  
Chicken Crowing at 3 a.m.  
Moon Setting at 7 a.m.



Photo: Nick Gershberg

Wake up! Wake up!  
Spring Sun Shining on Complete World

*Zen Master Dae Bong commented:*

“What is life? What is death? If you attain that, you are alive.”

*Zen Master Bon Shim commented:*

“If you don’t hang on to life and you are not troubled by death; you have no hindrance; without hindrance you can stay alive.”

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## *Zen Master Wu Bong*

*Adapted from comments made following a talk at Providence Zen Center in December, 1989.*

The Hua Yen Sutra, which the last speaker talked about, like other sutras, is a collection of teaching techniques that the Buddha used. When Paul finished his introductory remarks he hit the floor and said, “Wall is white.” Then he said, “That’s my dharma.” This point is really the essence of the Hua Yen Sutra, which means that our practice and all sutras finally come to one thing only . . . what is our correct situation, correct relationship and correct function at this moment, any given moment of our life.

Our correct situation means our work situation, our speech situation, our eye-ear-nose-tongue-body-and-mind situation. Our correct relationship is not only to other people, but also our correct relationship to the air, the water, to the ground. Out of all this our correct function appears, which means that our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind can function without any hindrance. Even though we talk about correct situation, correct relationship and correct function as if they were separate, they are in fact inseparable.

One of the kong-ans that we have in the Mu Mun Kwan is the situation that was set up by Zen Master Hyang Eom: “It is like a man hanging from a tree. He is holding to a branch by his teeth. His hands and his legs are all tied so he cannot grasp another branch, and he cannot grasp the trunk of the tree. Then just at that time somebody comes and asks him ‘Why did Bodhidharma come to China?’ If he does not answer, he is avoiding his duty and will be killed. If he opens his mouth to answer, he will fall from the tree and

also die.” Then if you are in this tree, how do you stay alive? It’s a very difficult situation. This is a very interesting kind of a kong-an because any understanding cannot help. Any understanding that we have will fail. We cannot do anything: cannot move hands, cannot use mouth, but there’s one thing . . . just one thing that’s possible.

Zen means to attain our true self. To attain our true self means that truth can function in our life. To let truth function in our life is not to attach to life or death. Without attaching to life or death, we allow love and compassion to function naturally in our life, which means that our obligation to this world is always very clear. We say “life,” but life is not life. Our body has life and death, but our true life—our true self—has neither life nor death. If we can let truth function in our life, then even this kind of difficult situation is not so difficult. Then even in such a difficult situation our correct situation, correct relationship and correct function appear, which means we attain true life. Holding on to either life or death, we are like walking corpses. Not holding on to life and death, we are truly alive.

The situation that Zen Master Hyang Eom set up as a dharma gate for us may appear somewhat exotic. If we examine our lives, however, we may be able to see this situation all too often. In fact, any time that we create and hold on to some duality, we are like this man in the tree. I remember some foolish arguments I had with my parents, whom I tried to convince of the correctness of my ways. It was only when I gave up such foolish notions and simply did what was necessary that our relationship became very



*Photo: Nick Gershberg*

intimate, very alive. Maybe something like that has happened to some of you, maybe in some different way.

What this kong-an does is challenge us to find the true way by setting up a seemingly impossible situation. Indeed, it challenges us to the utmost, where it is not enough to be clever. How do we work then with a situation like that? The way to work with it is to leave it alone; only keep don't know. If your practice is mantra practice then only try mantra. If you're keeping a big question—"What am I?" or "What is this?"—only keep big question, only keep don't know. Then the kong-an will work by itself. One day the kong-an will appear vivid and completely translucent. The correct response will be there. But it is completely redundant to want something vivid, or something translucent, or something that you do not have in this very moment. To do that is to be lost in the dream world, to lose one's life.

"The man hanging from a branch" kong-an, or any kong-an, is not so important. Most important is to wake up. Be alive! Then, what are you doing right now?

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## *Zen Master Wu Kwang*

*Adapted from a talk given at Chogye International Zen Center of New York on April 1, 1990.*

This kong-an presents a very interesting situation. The rather dramatic image of the man up a tree is a vivid portrayal of two existential situations or issues that we all have

to face. First, what does it really mean to stay alive, or be alive? And the second issue is about responsiveness. Someone under the tree is calling out, "Help me out here. Tell me something. Give me something." This raises questions about relationship and correct situation and responsibility. Responsibility, in this sense, means the ability to respond. How is one to respond in such a situation?

There's a similar Zen story in which a man is being chased by a tiger, and he's running for his life. He gets to the edge of a cliff and can't go any further, but he sees a vine going over the cliff, so he grabs hold of it, swings over, and is hanging there. Down below, he sees another tiger—waiting. The man is hanging there with one tiger above and another below. Then, a field mouse begins to gnaw at

the vine right above him. Just at that moment, this man sees one wild strawberry growing on the vine right near him, and without holding back anything he bites the strawberry. What a taste!

This story is about the first issue of the kong-an only. It's about life and death and what it really means to be alive or dead. But there's no element of relationship in the story. There's no one calling to the person to respond. But both stories portray people pushed to the limit.

We have already seen how Hyang Eom's training and his struggle were very intense. He was pushed to the limit. So the kong-an that he made to test his students is also of a very intense kind. A man is up a tree hanging from a branch by his teeth. And everything is tied. This state of being tied means he can't hold on to any conception anymore. Also, his feet have no resting place: he can't find support in the usual ways that he was used to finding support. At that time, someone calls to him, "Please help me." How does he stay alive?

Jesus addressed the question of being truly alive in his saying, "It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get to heaven." In many spiritual traditions, there is the notion that one only really becomes alive when one strips away everything. This is variously referred to as renunciation; nonattachment; letting go of ideas, conceptions, opinions, frames of reference, and one's orientation toward oneself and the world. If one lets go of it all, one becomes really poor, that is, one has nothing.

There's another story, a favorite of mine, also from the New Testament, that speaks in a different way to this issue of what it really means to stay alive. After the Last Supper, Christ tells his disciples, "You will all fall away because of me this night." And they all say, "No, no, no, no." His main disciple, Peter, whose name means "the rock," says, "Master, I would never deny you." And Jesus says to him, "Peter, before the cock crows this very morning, you will have denied knowing me three times."

Jesus is then arrested and Peter goes and stands outside of where they have taken Jesus into captivity. When he is asked if he is one of Jesus' followers, he says, "No, no, no—I don't know the man." Three times: "No, no, no—I don't know." Now that's a very interesting point. He denies knowing his master, whom he loves dearly, three times. Yet he goes on after Jesus' death to become the organizing force in the Christian movement, the first pope.

That's the bodhisattva way, just try—over and over and over again. We sometimes say, "Try, try, try for ten thousand years nonstop." The story of Peter may seem extreme, but it is instructive nevertheless. As another Zen saying goes, "If you fall down seven times, get up eight times."

Facing our failings and our weaknesses and yet still again rousing that energy of *try* is very much connected to our view of what it really means to be alive, to enliven our environment, to enliven our relationship and to be able to really be responsible and responsive. ♦



## TRANSMISSION CEREMONY FOR

# Zen Master Jok Um (Ken Kessel)

*Transmission ceremony at Providence Zen Center, U.S.A., on April 1, 2017*

### DHARMA COMBAT

**Quinn PSN:** Roses are red. Violets are blue. The Buddha never got it . . .

**Zen Master Jok Um:** How about you?



**Question:** Is there a difference between a person who's crazy and a person who's a liar?

**Zen Master Jok Um:** *[Laughs loudly for a while.]* Was that crazy or a lie?

**Q:** It's crazy, I think.

**ZMJU:** Thank you for telling the truth.



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**Keeler PSN:** For years, you taught the Sunday meditation for beginners at Chogye International Zen Center on Sunday nights. I must have seen it maybe 50 or 75 times, and it was wonderful teaching. You always said the same thing every time. I remember one of the things you used to say was, "Zen comes from a Sanskrit word dhyana, which means absorption." And there were all these other things. But there was one part in there, that even after I heard it 75 or 100 times, I could never figure out exactly what you were saying. So, what is that teaching that I didn't understand?

**Zen Master Jok Um:** That's a very long question.

**Keeler PSN:** Only that?

**ZMJU:** Go drink tea.

### DHARMA SPEECH

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

That was a short story.

How long did it last?

The short story means the wisdom of Buddha or Buddha-Prajna. So where do you find Buddha-Prajna?

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



*Photo: Brenton Sheehan*

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That was a middle length story. That's longer than a short story. A middle length story is the wisdom of dharma. Moment by moment by moment, each particle of dust contains the world. That's longer.

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

That was a very long story. A very long story is Sangha-Prajna. Sentient beings are numberless, so that never ends. If we want to put together a short story, a medium story, and a long story, we have to perceive Sangha-Prajna, Dharma-Prajna, and Buddha-Prajna. So which kind of story is the right kind of story?

KATZ!

*[Someone in audience yells in surprise.]*

Thank you!

Clouds become rain. Rain becomes snow. Snow becomes water. Water becomes us. What kind of story do you have?

Our teaching is transmitted mind to mind, as Zen Master Wu Kwang said, meaning true intimacy face-to-face, moment-to-moment, with each moment that we encoun-



ter. But we don't see that, so we grope around in a blind kind of way, feel lost, make suffering for ourselves and make suffering for others. So Buddha-Prajna means wake up to your original nature. That's not a story. And it's not an idea.

Once a monk came to Zen Master Un Mun and said, "If a blind, deaf and mute person were to come, how would you teach them?" Un Mun said, "Come forward." So the monk came forward, and as he did, Un Mun poked his stick at him, and the monk jumped back. Un Mun said, "You're not blind." Then, Un Mun said, "Bow." The monk bowed. Un Mun said, "You're not deaf." Then he asked, "Do you understand?" The monk said, "I don't, Master." Un Mun said, "You're not mute." And at that, the monk got enlightenment. So what kind of enlightenment is "I don't understand, Master?"

That's interesting. If we're not busy containing things by how we wish to shape them, then maybe we can see that we're neither blind nor deaf nor mute, and then the moment becomes our teacher. We first become students of the moment. "Students of the moment" means always perceive original nature everywhere. That's very easy to say, but as an old eighty-year-old Zen master sitting in a tree once said, "That's easy for a five-year-old to understand, very difficult for an eighty-year-old to practice." There's always an opportunity to become clear. There's always an opportunity to be distracted.

The wisdom of dharma is things unfolding moment to moment before us. That's truth appearing every moment. So saying that the rain becomes the snow, the snow becomes water, the water becomes you, pointing to your immediate experience, this is red, this is orange, that's truth speaking to you moment to moment, also.

A long time ago, when Am Du visited Dok Sahn, he stood in the doorway before him and rather than entering or leaving, he shouted, "Holy or unholy?" And Dok Sahn just shouted, "KATZ!" Am Du bowed and left. This story got around and around and around and around, and finally somebody made a comment, "Only Dok Sahn could have handled Am Du." When that got back to Am Du, he said, "That person doesn't understand. At that moment I was lifting him up with one hand, and putting him down with the other."

Lifting up with one hand and putting down with the other sounds like a compliment and an insult. But if you think of it as a compliment and an insult, then there's something that's not clear about skillful means. Because lifting up and putting down are natural, like breathing in



Photo: Brenton Sheehan

and breathing out, or the heart going *boom-boom boom-boom boom-boom*. I make a sound; you hear a sound. I make a shout; a child goes, "Huh?!" So that kind of lifting up and putting down goes beyond insults and compliments and is the process of the world and us shaping each other together. When Am Du said that, then the person he was speaking with asked, "How did you become such an empty-headed fellow?" That's one of those Chinese Zen compliments. And Am Du said, "I never deceive myself."

That's an interesting thing to say, "I never deceive myself." A bold thing to say. How many of us can actually say that and mean it? "I never deceive myself." *I* and *myself* and *deceive* suggest subject-action-object, but subject-action-object is already deceiving yourself. So maybe another way of saying it is "I always rest with my true nature." That may be something that's more graspable than "I never deceive myself," because if you're busy never deceiving yourself, you spend a lot of time trying not to do something. And it's really hard not to do something. Except when you're sitting and then it's really good not to do very much. Because if you don't do very much when you're sitting, then your original nature shines clearly and brightly, and you can start to perceive it moment to moment to moment.

Am Du's successor, Soeng Am Eon once said, "Never be deceived by others, any day, any time." "I never deceive myself" becomes "Never be deceived by others." This moves

from dharma to sangha. Moving from dharma to sangha means don't just perceive my original nature, because it doesn't belong to me. If you want to truly be a student, we have almost a hundred opportunities here and every place you walk, there's always an opportunity to become a student of what's just before you. Can you perceive mind-light in what's just before you? Because if you do that, then what's before you genuinely becomes your teacher. If you're a student, then you're receptive, and humble and caring and grateful and engaged and responsive. Learning how to be a student isn't that hard, because that's what we're already born with.

We had a baby-naming ceremony earlier today. The older sister and the baby sister were looking intently and wordlessly at each other: "Ahhhh!" What is that? It's a really profound connection, some wordless experience of the meaning of being in each other's presence. This itself lives underneath what we say, what we think we mean, how we think we feel, what we think we intend. There's something alive in the shape of you and who stands before you, and you're standing together, creating a shape together. And if you both stand in that openly, receptively, then that's already a teaching for both of you.

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Then Sangha-Prajna has an interesting aspect to it. I read an interesting translation about the story of Oh Jo's water buffalo. Our translation says, "Master Oh Jo said, 'It's like a water buffalo passing through a window. Its head, horns and four legs have already passed through. Why is it that its tail cannot?'" In a book that I was given to review by Yamada Roshi, he tells the story like this: "It's like a water buffalo leaving his enclosure. The head, horns and legs have already passed through. Why it is that the tail doesn't escape?" That's a slightly different angle on it. Our translation of Mu Mun's comment says, "Passing through, it falls into a ditch. Turning back, it is destroyed. This trivial tail; just this is very weird." But the first two lines of Yamada Roshi's translation are, "If he escapes, he falls to his death. If he turns back, he's slaughtered." So slaughtered and destroyed are a little different, right? If you think of an animal bred to become food, at some point, they're kept in an enclosure. If you stay in the enclosure, eventually you're killed, and you become somebody's food. And maybe if you escape, you fall. But that's our sense of our lives. We're trying to break out of something and become free. That's an interesting thing to try to do, but you can't do it through what you think it's like. Because what you think it's like is what keeps us in prison.

The tail never leaves. What is it that never leaves when



Photo: Brenton Sheehan

you break free? Maybe that's our connection to this world. Not just me breaking free for me, but me breaking free until my eyes see, my ears hear, my nose smells, my skin touches, my tongue tastes, my mind thinks. We say the six gates. Meaning moment by moment by moment, we can live clearly, compassionately, wisely, just in touch with the world. If we hold, if we cling, that's the six poisons, eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind. If we're seduced by our senses, then we want more of something and less of something else, and we never see what's in front of us at all.

So then, those who are close to us are our best teachers. Having some sense of what's closest to us allows us to learn from those who are close to us. So please let's rest our minds on what's close to us and then learn from what's close to us, how to live, how to be really human, how to be generous, compassionate and wise.

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

Rose are red.

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

Violets are blue.

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

Buddha didn't understand.

How about you? ♦

## TRANSMISSION CEREMONY FOR

# Zen Master Gu Ja (Namhee Chon)

*Transmission ceremony at Wu Bong Sa Temple, Poland, on April 8, 2017*

### DHARMA COMBAT

**Question:** I have a problem. I painted a calligraphy for you. *[Holds up a piece of calligraphy.]* The head of a dragon and the tail of a snake. But my purpose was to paint a different one: I wanted to paint the head of a snake and the tail of a dragon. However I had no special fantasy. I don't know what it looks like. Can you show it to me?

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** You already understand!

**Q:** No, I don't understand.

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** Go to the bathroom and look into the mirror! *[Loud laughter and applause from the audience.]*

**Q:** Thank you! *[Gives the calligraphy to Zen Master Gu Ja.]* You deserve it well.



**Q:** Very nice to see you. Some time ago you gave me very good training in Berlin. I am a well-known trouble-maker, but you managed to deal with it very well. At that

time we worked together to move you into a new house. You moved from your rented house to the big house where you are living now. We organized a truck and moved things to the new house. Now you are moving again, from Poep Sa Nim to Soen Sa Nim. But I don't see a truck. So what truck will you use to get from Poep Sa Nim to Soen Sa Nim?

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** You already understand!

**Q:** No, I don't.

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** Please kneel down.

*[He kneels down and Zen Master Gu Ja sits on his back and rides on him. Very loud laughter and applause from the audience.]*



**Zen Master Gu Ja:** Nice to see you again after so long a time!

**Question:** Nice to see you! *[Holds up a book of Zen Master Man Gong's teachings.]* Recently I came back to this little book and I found a question: "Zen Master" is not a conventional title like a doctor or a teacher. But it refers to a person who has mastered the principles of the universe. So how did you master the principles of the universe?

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** You already understand!

**Q:** Please tell me.

**Zen Master Gu Ja:** I like you very much. *[Loud laughter and applause.]*

**Q:** Thank you! *[Hugs Zen Master Gu Ja.]*

### DHARMA SPEECH

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

Paint a tiger, get scared of the tiger and look for an escape.

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

Don't make anything! In infinite time and infinite space there is not even one single thing. Where is a tiger? Where is the one who paints a tiger?



*Photo: Grzegorz Piaskowski*



*Photo: Grzegorz Piaskowski*

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

Become clear. When a tiger appears, ride the tiger and get out of the illusion world! Then, crying and laughing with no hindrance, only for all beings.

Which one of these three do you choose?

KATZ!

Good to see you all here! Thank you, dear sangha, for coming to this ceremony. My invaluable gratitude is for my great teachers Zen Master Seung Sahn and Zen Master Wu Bong. The biggest privilege in my life is that I had the chance to meet these great teachers. When I was still a very young Zen student and practiced for some time in

Korea, Zen Master Seung Sahn told me several times, “Soon a teacher should appear in Germany.” He knew that I was living in Germany, so I felt like he was speaking to me. I asked him each time, “Whom do you have in your mind?” hoping he would have seen some quality in me which I didn’t even know existed. But he just ignored me completely and would not say a word. Sometime later I found out that this was his way to encourage me to keep practicing.

Soon after Zen Master Wu Bong passed away, I had a vivid dream of him one night here in the temple in Falenica. I told him in a dream, “Sunim, I miss you so much. Where are you now?” He spread out his arms and with his typical big smile he said, “The sky is blue and the trees are green.” Then I woke up and was so glad to know with no doubt the place where all the buddhas and great teachers are all together and that we are never separated from them. Today I meet them here in all of your presence.

Most of the retreats I attended in Europe were guided by Zen Master Bon Shim. She was always the source of inspiration and encouragement for me. Thank you Zen Master Bon Shim, for your teaching, trust and unconditional support. And I bow to my family in gratitude. Thank you that I am allowed to be your wife, your mother and most of all to be your friend.

Almost thirty years ago I came for the first time to Falenica and here I first met the teachings of Zen Master Seung Sahn. That one week I stayed here was extremely difficult for me. I suffered from pain in my knees and back. I had to stand up and sit down again and again every ten minutes during the sitting meditation, and I shivered and sweated cold and hot because of the pain. Despite the pain and the struggle there was something that did not allow me to give up. That was my strong wanting mind. I wanted to know what all the great teachers knew that I didn’t. What insight did they have? I thought my life would become different—more meaningful and valuable—as soon as I found this out.

The guiding teacher during that Kyol Che told me during an interview that if I keep strong don’t-know mind, I would see clear, hear clear and everything will become clear. Actually I did not know the true meaning of “don’t know” or “seeing clear.” So every day during a break I went out to the garden and checked whether I could see more clearly. According to my idea at that time I expected to see something beyond what I could perceive

usually, or perhaps things would appear with more sharp outlines. To my disappointment I didn't notice any progress in this concern.

But during the sitting meditation I saw a lot more. My seat was placed right in front of the wooden wall. The small piece of the wall in front of me soon turned out to be filled with constantly changing pictures. I saw pictures of beautiful landscapes, fields, trees, animals, faces of men and women, people dancing, laughing, making love and so on. I was totally fascinated and absorbed while looking at the pictures and forgot everything around me for many days. But one day it happened that suddenly all the pictures disappeared. The wall stayed just as it was with lines, dots, colors and wood grains. Simple and not changing. The view of this simple piece of wood could not be compared with anything else I had seen before. It was so clear and beautiful! This beauty touched me so deeply that I started to cry silently. But it wasn't until some years later that I could realize that what I saw on the wall and how I saw it had to do with my mind only. This small piece of wooden wall revealed obviously how my mind was moving and creating things. When our mind moves and thinking appears, out of the lines, dots and colors a tiger jumps out, demons are threatening, sex and rock 'n' roll emerge. It is the same in our everyday life. Our mind fabricates something, we think it's real and we laugh, cry and crave like mad because of that. We are like a fish fidgeting in the net of our own mind. Only when we realize that the substance of thinking and also the substance of our mind are all empty, we can let go of our attachment to our thinking and get out of the net. Everything then becomes simple and clear as it is. The wall is white and the sky is blue. Whatever we perceive, we are one with it. Only white and only blue.

Enlightenment is simple. Just without attaching to our thinking see clear, hear clear, perceive everything clear. Then what is the job of enlightenment?

Before my mother died, she was seriously sick for many years, so she had to take many strong medicines. As a side effect she had hallucinations from time to time. She saw snakes crawling in her room, pumpkins growing on a tree in wintertime or monkeys jumping around. At the beginning I felt strongly embarrassed. Every time when she clapped her hands and exclaimed, "Look at these big pumpkins! Let's make a pumpkin soup!" or "How cute these monkeys are!" I tried to persuade her that what she thought she was seeing was not there and it wasn't real. But I had no success. I also could not convince her that

there were no snakes in her room. She was terribly scared. There was no doubt about her emotional reaction to what she perceived.

At some point I started to ask myself whether it was possible that we all live in a world of hallucinations. Indeed, many people live in this world under the strong influence of a drug called ego. They see everywhere I, my, me where there are none. What do we see now? If we perceive whatever it is in front of us through the perspective of our opinion, our condition and our situation, we create our own hallucinatory bubble. Buddha bubble, Zen bubble, enlightenment bubble, Zen master bubble. When we are attached to our bubbles, we make good and bad, right and wrong and we are fighting for my religion first, my country first, my family first and I first. We become blind and deaf to suffering and to the cries of this world, and so we create even more suffering.

In this life it is not about our I and it is not about our gain or loss. What is this I? We cannot find it. Only don't know. This very don't know is our original nature! We are this don't know, no matter in what situation and condition we are. So whatever it is, it is OK. Whatever we do, this don't know is doing it. This don't know is manifesting in ten thousand things, and the ten thousand things are manifesting this don't know. So living in this world means living this don't know in each moment. Happiness comes: only happy. Sadness comes: only sad. Paradise is welcome. Hell is welcome too. Then we can use our happiness, our sadness and also the paradise and hell in order to help all beings. That is our job in this life and our direction. Enlightenment means just do it. So let us from moment to moment just do it!

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

Sitting, sleeping always with your eyes open. If you perceive you dreaming, are you in sleep or are you awake?

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

Who perceives whose dream?

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

Wake up! What are you doing now? Just do it!

But how can you do this "just do it"?

KATZ!

My talk is now finished. Thank you for listening. ♦

## INKA CEREMONY FOR

# Matt Keeler

*Inka ceremony at Providence Zen Center, U.S.A., on April 2, 2017*

### DHARMA COMBAT

**Question:** So yesterday you and I were pondering, when we're not playing our instruments, are we still musicians? So my question for you as a Ji Do Poep Sa: Where is your instrument?

**Keeler PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** Please tell me.

**Keeler PSN:** *[Drums on the floor.]*



**Keeler PSN:** Colin *[Colin Beavan aka No Impact Man]*, before you start, I have to say, I haven't seen you in some time, but I always think of you when I sit . . . on the toilet . . . and I take one sheet, or maybe two at the most, but usually it's like one sheet of toilet paper.

**Question:** Thank you for your teaching!

**Keeler PSN:** It's a really good thing, it helps to save paper, and it helps the environment.

**Q:** So, on a different subject. We've been dharma brothers for a long time. Also, a lot of our life paths have paralleled each other. We got married at the same time, we had children at the same time, and we got divorced at the same time.

**Keeler PSN:** And you tried to kill Eli on the sled . . .

**Q:** But I broke my ankle instead. So in a different context sometimes I'm asked to teach, and not in a Zen context. One time somebody said to me, "You're divorced. What right have you got to teach me when you can't even maintain a commitment to your own wife and to your own child?" And of course it hurt, but I had to think about that. I had to answer it for myself. So my question for you is, given all the messes that you have in your life—as I have in my life—what right do you have to teach the rest of us?

**Keeler PSN:** You already understand.

**Q:** But I'm asking you.

**Keeler PSN:** Elizabeth and I co-teach the family program at the Reading Meditation Center.

**Q:** And I'm so proud of you.



**Keeler PSN:** Hello, fellow math teacher.

**Question:** I have a math question.

**Keeler PSN:** Uh oh! I better back up a little bit.

**Q:** What's the radius of a point?

**Keeler PSN:** *[Hits the floor.]*

**Q:** *[Bows.]*

### INKA SPEECH

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

Zen is everyday life, and everyday life is Zen.

Can you just do the laundry, and then fold the clothes?

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

But the Heart Sutra says no attainment with nothing to attain.

So, there's no Zen and no everyday life.

There's only— *[Listens to the silent room.]*

But if you attach to this nothing, how can you make a sandwich for somebody? How can you call your congressman?

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

Zen is Zen. And everyday life is everyday life.

So this before-thinking mind is already clear.

But why is there so much suffering in this world?

KATZ!

Outside the sun is shining. Thank you for coming today.

The first dharma talk I ever saw was at the Cambridge Zen Center, many years ago, and it was billed as a dharma talk by Zen Master Seung Sahn. And, as befitting our tradition, as soon as you walk in the door, you get hit, because

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*Photo: Brenton Sheehan*

you don't get what you came for since Zen Master Seung Sahn doesn't actually give the talk. A student gives the talk, then Zen Master Seung Sahn would answer questions. So, right away, it's a little bit of a hit. The student giving the talk looked to me like someone who had some experience but was pretty new. (I had been sitting for a little bit.) But although he was new he was a very good public speaker. My main impression of the talk that the student gave was this: Although I felt connected with Zen practice and I liked it a lot, my reaction to the talk was that it was too bad that I wouldn't be able to continue practicing there. If it was expected that new students had to give a dharma talk, there was no way in hell I was ever going to get up on stage and talk about Zen meditation in my pajamas.

Zen Master Seung Sahn said some interesting things. They were very simple but there was something about them that kind of caught your attention. They were things that were true. He said, "the wall is white," and he said, "when red comes, red." Red! "When people are hungry, give them some food." So those words point at this truth-mind, and it's not readily apparent when you first hear them, but over time some wider meaning starts to sink in.

As Zen Master Wu Kwang said previously, I lived at the Chogye International Zen Center for a few years, and I'd like to thank Zen Master Wu Kwang, my guiding teacher, for all the support and practice. And also I'd like to thank all the teachers up here. I've sat with everybody here at some point, and we're very fortunate to have so many dedicated practitioners. You know, when I look out into the audience, I see all these people I've sat with before, a number of them at Kyol Che. Thank you Carlos for the hits at Kyol Che. I was there for a week this winter and it was very helpful and I encourage everybody to try to go sit Kyol Che if you can. We have a situation now where Kwan Haeng Sunim and Kwan Jin Sunim really run a great ship up there, a really tight ship, but not too tight. It's a very good situation to practice in. Teachers come and go but those guys are doing a great job setting up a situation where you can go and practice for a week and you can really engage with your practice.

As Zen Master Wu Kwang was talking about before, I've spent a lot of time at Kyol Che, and it's one of the things that our school offers. To have this three-month retreat is something that I've found extremely valuable. It's life-changing to go, whether it's in the summer for three days or a week in the winter or whatever you can do. I encourage people to go if you can. So for as long as I lived at the Zen center, Zen Master Wu Kwang's retreat flyers had this phrase on them: "Zen is everyday life, and everyday life is Zen." So I was always a pretty good sitter, from being a musician, it was just like adding another thing, a regular thing to practice during the day, so it was never a problem for me to practice by myself or with a group of people. But the whole everyday life thing was a

little bit harder for me. It was harder to integrate the practice with everyday life. So the teaching that "Zen is your everyday life," it's a great starting point, it's something you can really hang your hat on. Then, over the years, it really starts to sink in that this is it. Things are already complete as they are, just doing the laundry is a complete experience. Just doing the dishes. Already, one by one, everything is complete.

So JoJu asked Nam Cheon, "What is the true way?" Nam Cheon said, "Everyday mind is the true way." JoJu said, "Should I keep it or not?" And Nam Cheon said, "If you try to keep it, you're already mistaken." JoJu said, "But if I don't try, how can I understand the true way?" Nam Cheon said, "The true way is not dependent on understanding or not understanding. Understanding is illusion. Not understanding is blankness. If you completely attain the true way of not thinking, it's like space, clear and void. So why do you make right and wrong?" With those words, JoJu had some kind of deep experience.

A story Zen Master Wu Kwang used to tell in one of his books was about a Japanese Zen master who used to go to a park with a student or two, and he'd practice his English by asking them, "What is this called?" So one day they were in the park, and the master said, "What do you call that black bird over there?" The student said, "Blackbird." The master says, "I can see it's a black bird, but what's the name of it?" The student said, "Blackbird." The master continued, "Yeah I can see it's a black bird, but what are you going to call it?" And the student says, "Blackbird, Roshi." "Oh! Blackbird!" "Yeah . . ."

So in the Zen tradition you have these phrases, and you have these kong-ans that mean something at one point, and then something turns around, something flips sometimes. You can have this kind of experience while you're washing the dishes; you can have this kind of experience while you're walking down the street. It is washing the dishes. It is walking down the street.

Zen Master Wu Kwang and I share some musical karma, and as I said before, I understood how to work at a craft, how to practice something and be able to improve the craft. So I was a little taken aback when Zen Master Wu Kwang would talk about what it means to have a practice. He would say, "Well, it's not like practicing a musical instrument. It's more like having a law practice or medical practice. It's a direction."

So whether you have that much work or not, it's your everyday life. You go to your office and you practice law or medicine. Some weeks you might not have as much work, but it's a long-term thing. We're playing the long game. If you slept in this morning, and you didn't practice, that's OK. Just own your posture, take a deep breath and bring



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A wooden Buddha statue is the central focus, shown from the chest up in a meditative posture. The statue has a serene expression with closed eyes and a slight smile. To the right, a cluster of bright orange and yellow tulips adds a touch of color. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The entire image is framed by a solid red border.

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up this inquiry again: “What is this?” Maybe you didn’t practice yesterday either. That’s not good or bad. Maybe you didn’t practice last week; maybe you’ve been too busy and all last year something happened or maybe ten years went by. That happens. Somewhere, Zen Master Seung Sahn just started his practice again. Zen Master Su Bong, Zen Master Wu Bong, they all just started again and brought up this inquiry. Who is doing this?

Zen Master Wu Kwang told the story of Hui Neng yesterday, and I thought I would talk about the first part of the story. The second part, that he talked about, was very dramatic with the transmission, but his story is very interesting, and the whole idea of sudden enlightenment in the Zen school in large part hangs on this story. So Hui Neng lived in Beijing, China. Beijing is roughly 500–600 miles west of North Korea as the crow flies, in the northern part of China. Hui Neng’s father was a government official, and he lost his job and the family was banished to the south, to what is sometimes called Canton (Guangzhou), a little bit outside of Hong Kong, which is maybe 400–500 miles west of Taiwan. When I think of this story and I try to relate it to my life, I think, “Well, it’s kind of like if I lost my job and then I moved to the panhandle of Florida and joined a country band.” Maybe it’s not exactly analogous to that, but—actually it’s not that analogous to it in that there was a dramatic change in his life when his family is banished to the south. So then his dad dies and Hui Neng is left to take care of his mother by himself. The only thing he can do is chop wood and take it to sell in the marketplace. So one day Hui Neng has delivered his wood and he walks out of the shop and he hears a monk chanting the Diamond Sutra. When he hears the line, “Not attached to anything, thinking arises,” all of a sudden something flipped for him. When we talk about what it means to practice, we wouldn’t say that Hui Neng actually had a conscious Zen practice. But all day long, he was just involved in doing some action, really doing it, with this attitude of trying to help his mother, with this bodhisattva-action attitude. So your true self isn’t dependent on robes or a title or anything else. You already have it. Everybody already has it.

There’s another story I like to tell. It’s about the ugly duckling. The ugly duckling was a different color than the other ducks. The ugly duckling had a funny bill. He was bigger and kind of gangly. He moved funny. He just couldn’t make that quacking sound correctly, and he was teased by all the other ducks. But his mother did the right thing, she loved him and she just tried to take care of him as best she could. But eventually the ugly duckling was miserable and his mother was kind of getting sick and tired of him, too. The wolf had something to say, she had some helpful words. She said, “Well, why don’t you just get another community? Get another pack, maybe that will help you.” The owl said,

“You know what? Things will pass, it will be OK. Maybe if you just try to concentrate on your school studies a little bit more, you’ll be OK.” And then the rabbits had something to say, too. They said, “It’s probably your sex life.” Then one day, the ugly duckling is looking at the pond, just looking in this mirror and he sees himself reflected back and also, there is another ugly duckling next to him that is also reflected back. At that moment, something flips, and he realizes, “Oh. I’m not a duck. I’m actually a swan.” So he already has his perfect before-thinking self-nature. He already has it. But he didn’t realize it. Then, he looks inside, and something flips, and there it is. He already has it.

Keeping with the water fowl theme here, I’ve got one more thing to say. So there’s this duck that goes into a convenience store and he goes up to the cashier and the cashier says, “Hey, how’s it going, pal?” The duck says, “Oh, very good.” The cashier says, “What would you like?” The duck says, “I’d like a box of raisins.” The cashier says, “Sorry, we don’t have any raisins. Sorry, can’t sell them to you.” The duck says, “Thank you very much.” A few days later, the duck comes in, walks around a little bit, goes up to the front. The cashier says, “What’ll it be today, pal?” The duck says, “Well, you know, I’d really like some raisins.” The cashier says, “You know, you came in here the other day, I told you we don’t have any, I can’t sell them to you.” The duck says, “Thank you very much,” and walks out. He comes back a few days later, walks up to the cashier. The cashier goes, “What’ll it be today, pal?” The duck goes, “Well, you know, I’d really like some raisins.” The cashier says, “If you walk in here one more time and ask for a box of raisins, I’m going to nail your beak to the floor!” The ducks says, “Thank you very much,” and he walks out. A few days later, he comes back and he goes up to the cashier. The cashier says, “Yeah?” The duck goes, “Got any nails?” The cashier says, “No.” The duck says, “Well, I’d like a box of raisins.”

So I hope everybody can keep this inquiring mind, whatever your question is. Whether it’s “What am I?” or “What is God?” or whether you have a traditional kong-an that’s kind of taken you by the throat. I hope we can really keep this inquiry and everybody wake up together.

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

Thanks for listening. ♦

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Matt has been practicing Zen for 29 years and lived at Cho-gye International Zen Center in New York City for 7 years. He received inka at Providence Zen Center on April 2, 2017 from Zen Master Wu Kwang. In addition to being the director of the family program at Redding Meditation Center in Redding, CT, Matt also teaches high school math. Previously he was a professional musician. Matt lives in Ridgefield, CT, where he is a single father with a 13-year-old son.

# When Did I Ever Betray Your Expectations?

Zen Master Wu Kwang (Richard Shrobe)

Dharma speech given at Florida Sangha Weekend on March 3, 2017

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

Are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha the same or different? If you say the same, why do we have three different names? If you say different, how is the Zen view nondual?

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

No Buddha, Dharma or Sangha!

The Sixth Patriarch said “originally nothing” so where are we to find Buddha, Dharma and Sangha?

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

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha: Are they three or one?

KATZ!

Three gold Buddhas on the altar; in front many Sangha members who have come from far and near. Welcome!

Before we chanted Kwan Seum Bosal, we recited the threefold refuge in English and Korean. The threefold refuge says: We take refuge in the Buddha, refuge in the Dharma and refuge in the Sangha. The Sanskrit word *namah*, which we pronounce “namu,” following the Korean style, is sometimes translated as “we pay homage” or “we take refuge.”

My first teacher, Swami Satchidanada, would translate *namu* as “salutations.” In Asian countries, when you greet someone, you join your palms together in front of your heart and bow. Zen Master Seung Sahn translated this *namu* as “become one,” so to truly greet another or pay homage or take refuge is to become one with. Many newer Zen students are comfortable with taking refuge in the Buddha and the Dharma. After all, the Buddha is the ideal meditator who attains supreme enlightenment, the awake principle that we all possess, and the Dharma is the teaching. But to take refuge in the Sangha, the community, that idea is not so comfortable for many. The Buddha on the altar never moves, but the community is always changing, and relationships can present many challenges.

In Zen Master Seung Sahn’s book *The Compass of Zen*, he equates Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with three realms of human experience—emotional, intellectual and ethical. When we come into a Buddhist

temple and see the gold Buddha, if we are drawn to such things we might feel a sense of awe, and of course the gold Buddha symbolizes our radiant, luminous original mind energy. Or if we appreciate something in nature as an expression of Buddha nature, we feel something, *abb!*

Dharma is the teaching, which we might relate to through our intellect, such as studying the sutras, commentaries and Zen writings. But Dharma also means each phenomenon or mind moment. In the four great vows we recite, “The teachings are infinite, I vow to learn them all.” That means that if we are open, each and every event can serve as a teaching.

Sangha originally meant the community of monastics



Photo: Eduardo del Valle Pérez

who were the Buddha's disciples. But Buddha also had lay disciples, so they were also Sangha. Later Sangha came to mean the vast community of sentient and insentient beings and things that make up the interconnected universe that we inhabit. This is the Maha Sangha, the Great Sangha. Zen Master Seung Sahn connects Sangha with the ethical realm. At first this was a bit puzzling to me.

Once, years ago, my dharma brother Su Bong Sunim and a group of Western monks went to meet with Zen Master Seung Sahn in his room at Providence Zen Center. After they were seated, Su Bong Sunim asked Zen Master Seung Sahn, "Zen Master, could you tell us what is a monk?" Zen Master Seung Sahn told them, "You look at him and you look at him. That is a monk!" We could say the same. If you want to understand Sangha, look at each other.

Sangha is the field where ethics are applied. Abstract principles like compassion, truth, justice and precepts are actualized within community and relationships. Sangha is the field of purification where we wake each other up and develop together action.

The two teachers I studied with both had examples of this using food as a metaphor. Swami Satchidananda said community is something like making fritters. First you chop up some vegetables and mix them with batter. Then you spoon small amounts of this into a pot of hot oil. At first, as the moisture comes out of the fritters, they make a lot of noise: *ZZaaaa*. But as they get cooked, they rise to the top and float easily on the oil. Dae Soen Sa Nim said that in Korea, if you want to clean a lot of potatoes you put them in a barrel filled with water and stir up the water with a churn or stick. As the water gets agitated, the potatoes hit against one another and the dirt gets dislodged. Then you take them out. Relationships are like that: There's a lot of bumping up against each other as small "I" gets challenged.

Here is a story of a Sangha of two with some supporting characters. Zen Master Chia Shan had a student who had been with him for a long time but felt that he wasn't progressing. The student decided that he would leave and go traveling to call on other masters. Wherever he went, he was not particularly impressed with the teaching, but when asked who his teacher was, they would always respond, "Oh! Chia Shan is a great and subtle teacher." Finally the student decided

to return to Chia Shan. When he got there, he said to Chia Shan, "Wherever I went, they would say 'Chia Shan is a great and subtle teacher.' Why did you not pass this on to me?" Chia Shan said; "What do you mean? When you cooked the rice, didn't I light the flame? And when you walked with the rice bucket, didn't I hold out my bowl? When did I ever betray your expectations?" Suddenly the student had a realization.

This is about giving and receiving, and actively and receptively opening to what is given. "Didn't I light the fire for you to cook the rice, and didn't I hold out my bowl to receive it?" This is the practice of refuge in the Sangha. Also he alludes to expectations. What kind of expectations do we hold that cloud the water? You could say that unrealistic or idealized expectations need to be disappointed for the real relationship to begin. Sangha is the hard-work miracle or the "ordinary miracle" where transformation occurs. This is where we find the best teacher and teaching.

Here is one more story alluding to the benefit of Sangha. A monk was going to do a ten-year solo retreat in a cave high up in the mountains. As he passed through the plain and foothills below the mountain he met a farmer who asked him where he was going. The monk told the farmer; the farmer wished him well in his pursuit, and the monk continued up to the mountain. Ten years passed. The monk finished his retreat, and as he came down, he met the same farmer. The farmer said, "I remember you, you went to practice alone in a cave for ten years. Let me ask you what did you attain?" The monk said, "I completely conquered anger." "Really!" said the farmer with a slight tone of disbelief. "Are you really sure you completely mastered anger?" "Oh yes," said the monk. After three or four times of the farmer questioning him with mounting disbelief, the monk shouted, "Listen, I completely mastered anger!"

It is not so difficult to master anger in a cave all alone in the mountains. Who or what is there to get angry with there? But in community, in relationship, that is where you develop tolerance, patience and so on.

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

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha come from here, but where does this come from?

It is midmorning in South Florida. The sky is blue and the sun is shining. ♦



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# Everything We Do in Practice Is More or Less Normal: The Practice of Mala

Garret Condon

Dharma talk given at New Haven Zen Center on April 23, 2017

I'm not here as often as I should be. I work in our Hartford "office," as many of you know. We do a practice group at Trinity College and this is year 20 we're starting. And I used to have jet-black hair. So, a lot of things happen with students at Trinity College, as you can well imagine. Two weeks ago, we were going over practice forms, and one of our participants asked about malas. And I said, "Oh, malas, right malas." We have this big, plastic steamer trunk that has all of our Zen stuff in it—not the cushions—but all of the altarware. We call it "zendo in a box." Dharma Teacher John Elias is the co-coordinator of our group. He and I went through the box and found no malas. At home I have a bowl of malas and I said I'd bring the student a mala the following week.

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One of the things that happens when students ask you questions is that it makes you rethink or reframe the way you're thinking about things, and I hate that [laughter]. But, sometimes you have to do it. So, I went back and did some research on malas. And I learned a couple of fun facts. Now first of all, I grew up in what I would call an orthodox Roman Catholic home. One of the things that was more or less ubiquitous when I was growing up was rosary beads. Does everyone know what rosary beads are? We would say the rosary from time to time at some agreed-upon frequency, I can't remember—maybe monthly. And also, I went to Catholic schools for 16 years. All of my teachers had rosary beads—so beads were everywhere. Now, I remember when I took up Zen and started describing what goes on at the New Haven Zen Center 25 years ago or so, and someone said, "Isn't it kind of weird that all of your teachers walk around in robes?" And I said, "Only kind of teachers I've ever had."

I never actually knew what the word *rosary* meant. *Rosarium* is a Latin word that means "rose garden." It's interesting to me, because the Sanskrit word "mala" means "garland." It's like when we use the mala, we kind of travel, walking through the rose garden, or following this garland. The reason all of this was ironic to me is that I don't usually use a mala in meditation. I'll explain more about that in a minute. I think the reason is that I had a lot of beads before. So, I brought some malas in and I gave him a couple of malas, and we talked about this technique of using it for meditation.

In our school, we also use it to count bows. And some people use it in meditation. Now, I was not a student of Zen Master Seung Sahn. I heard him speak; he gave me my first precepts, and that sort of thing. But I never sat a retreat with him and he never taught me one-on-one. But one hears his original students use the phrase "Dae Soen Sa Nim used to say . . ." And, in this case, more than one person said to me, "Dae Soen Sa Nim used to say that using a mala is particularly effective or helpful because it's nonverbal." A mala is like a nonverbal mantra. And a lot of what we do when we sit is we run a lot of words through our heads—a lot of thinking goes on. And, no matter what the technique, we are trying to see our thoughts for what they are. If you start with something that's completely tactile, then you're not engaging with thought; it's completely tactile, so it's kind of "below your mind," as you might say. It can be helpful in that way, but it's not different from our other practices.

Sometimes, when I describe retreats to people—in just a general way—I'll say, "Well, we get up and we sit around and eat breakfast, do some work, sit around some more, go to the bathroom, do some more work." And most people say, "Well, that's what I'm going to do on Saturday anyway." The reason it's called "practice" is that everything we do as practice is more or less normal. So, using a mala to meditate is not different from sitting meditation; it's not different from walking meditation. When you go through a mala—108 beads—where do you get? Back to the beginning. Nowhere. Then you start again. When you circumambulate the dharma room for 10 minutes, you're moving, but where are you going? Nowhere. Back to the beginning. There's this tension in practice between going somewhere and going nowhere. Even in the four-bowl meal style, there is repetition. Suzuki Roshi famously said that if you lose the spirit of repetition, your practice will become very hard. We have these three poisons out there: anger, ignorance and desire. And there is a subset of desire that I think is kind of modern, and that's novelty. "What's the next thing?" "What's the next thing?" The interesting thing about mala practice is that it teaches you that the next thing is a lot like the last thing. It screws with your mind a bit if you sit with it. You're moving, but you're ending up in the same place. And that's the paradox of

practice. That's why I think the mala can be useful, and it's also practice for life, which brings me to how I use malas.

I have a little wrist mala that I use when I'm not in any kind of formal practice. I use it at work, and I use it when I'm driving. And I sometimes give them to people who are in stressful periods of their lives—not with a lot of meditation teaching. They say “How do I use this?” And I say, “One bead, one breath.” And, they get it. Later on, people will say, “That was helpful. I went 27 beads and I felt more calm.” It's not an orthodox Buddhist practice, but it's helpful. And that's what I use it for, just to come back to now. The other great paradox we deal with in practice is that there is a space between “me” and “my thoughts.” And if we're constantly engaging and attaching to our thoughts, that's one of our unhappiness machines. When you practice you're able to come back to this moment of reality, which is just this bead and everything that is happening around that bead: your breath, the sensation, who's touching the bead? Everything. Then you can get some space between you and your thoughts.

You know, sometimes Trinity students will say, “Well, is it bad to think?” And since they all got to Trinity by thinking, the answer is no. But, when we talk about a mind that's clear like space, we're talking about a mind that doesn't attach to everything that pops up. It's that backseat-driver mind that Zen Master Seung Sahn used to talk about all the time: can you just quiet it down so that you don't attach to everything that pops up? A mala can be helpful for that—and in any setting. You can get them anywhere. Sometimes they're called “power beads,” like when my daughter—she's 28 now—when she was 14 or something that was a thing, “power beads” in various colors. But I noticed when I was up in a Tibetan store in Northampton, they had a bowl of “power beads.” Anything to market them! Then we had a big discussion about their various uses.

You can't just have a mala; you have to be receptive to the mala. You have to receive on that wavelength. Part of what we do in practice is fine-tune our tuning, if that makes sense, so that we can be receptive. There are countless stories. John Elias reminded me of the story of a ninth-century Zen master named Xiangyan (Hyang Eom in Korean), who was a bit of a wisacre. He was a very talented Zen student, like all of you. And he had been given all of the teachings and he was kind of fed up with all the teachings. He went to his Zen master and said, “What's the deal?” And his Zen master said, essentially, “Yeah, that's not how it works.” Xiangyan said, “You told me this, you told me that, I attained this, I attained that, but I don't really get it. What's the deal?” So Xiangyan left the temple and he started doing odd jobs and travel-



Photo: Sven Mahr

ing around—you know, the traveling monk thing. There are all of these “traveling monk” stories. One day, he was sweeping a walk with a broom and little rock hit a piece of bamboo—smack!—and he woke up. He had this incredible experience of understanding everything he had been demanding to understand before. And so, pebble-against-bamboo was his mala.

The lesson is that anything can be your mala, if you're ready to hear it. There are countless stories like that. You guys probably know a dozen more like that, where the Zen master holds up a broom. Boom. Broom as mala. So, all kinds of things in the world are like that. I was driving down here this morning and there was this beautiful hawk up in the sky and that was my mala for the morning. If your mind is ready—that's why we call it “practice”—anything can be your mala.

I do think that there is a Big Mala. And I think there is a First Mala. Would anyone suggest what might be the first mala in Buddhism? I'm going to go with Earth. There is the story of Buddha's enlightenment experience. What does he do at that moment of enlightenment? What mala does he touch? He touches the ground. He says, “Earth is my witness.”

Now, we have this massive mala. When at Trinity I brought the student his mala, it still had a price tag on it, which was a little tacky. John, fortunately, has a tiny box cutter on his keychain, and I borrowed it and started cutting off the price tag, but I nearly sliced the mala itself, and there would have been beads all over the floor. And I was thinking of that because yesterday was Earth Day. I was thinking about how we're taking care of our primary mala—our primary source of enlightenment, our reminder of what's on the ground, what's real—this place where we live. It plays into this

whole idea of ignorance. We say we shouldn't destroy the earth. Well, we can't destroy the earth. The earth will outlive us, undoubtedly. But we can destroy the earth as a place for us to live. So, we are actually destroying ourselves. Talk about anger, ignorance and desire. We're destroying ourselves, but we think we're just squirting something into a river somewhere. So, we have to take care of our mala. Look at your basic mala: The beads are earth elements. Sandalwood, stone—they all come from the ground. Every time you touch a mala bead, you're touching the earth. And, helpfully, each bead is shaped like our planet! Each bead is a little earth. To talk about "engaged Buddhism" is another whole academic conference somewhere. I'm not going to get into it today. I'm just going to say that I was rereading *The Compass of Zen* recently and I came across some of Zen Master Seung Sahn's thoughts. When he talks about enlightened people—and he has various phrases for people who have attained something—he writes that it's not that the desires vanish, but that we get a handle on them. Going forward, what's important is: Are you using those desires for all beings? So, if you have a desire or anger around what's being done to your primary mala bead, it can help as long as it's for all beings. Does it help you fulfill your vows? Or is it just "I, me, mine?"

So, taking care of the mala, we come to understand that we need to be ready—ready for that touch, ready for whatever it might be. A mala could be a sound. It could

even be a "serene sound." A mala could be a sensation, a word, anything. Thich Nhat Hanh has this whole thing about making things into mala. If you're at the office and the phone rings, you take a breath. If you're at a stop-light, you take a breath. If you start thinking about all of these opportunities, it's clear that the universe wants you to wake up; it's waiting for you to wake up. It's tapping you on the shoulder. It's ready. It's reminding you; it's touching you.

When I shared a boiled-down version of this with the student I mentioned earlier at Trinity College, like you he was not too impressed. He said an interesting thing, of course. He asked, "Could you become attached to your mala?" I said, "Sure, you can become attached to anything. Trungpa Rinpoche wrote a whole book about being attached to various spiritual things, so yeah. That's why the technique with your mala should be your technique for life: Hold it lightly. Hold everything lightly. Firmly, but not too firmly. Hold it lightly. Just because something is ultimately empty, that doesn't mean you don't need it. That's a famous Alan Watts quote along the lines of "Just because it's illusion doesn't mean you don't need it." That's very true. We need all of the elements of our relative existence.

Be ready, hold it lightly, understand that everything can be a mala—and build that into your whole life. Everything we do here is practice, so that we can go to the marketplace with helping hands, to use that image from the ox-herding pictures. It's not for us. It's for all beings. ♦

## *I Had a Dream . . .*

Yesterday I had a dream . . .  
 Master! Master! Where have you gone?  
 I woke up and felt relieved when . . .  
 Your laugh I found in the children's laugh  
 Your wide mind in the vast blue sky  
 Your determination in the thunder fall  
 Your meticulous action in the spider weaving its web  
 Your compassion in a flower offering its pollen to a bee  
 Your wisdom in the baby trying to walk, falling and  
 standing up countless times  
 I remember . . . You and me  
 Sitting together in front of a font near Majorca Cathedral  
 How much I enjoyed being with you!  
 Just in silence listening the water fall . . .  
 I find this silence still present  
 In the fall of a single leaf from the plane-tree

—Eduardo del Valle Pérez  
*In memory of Zen Master Seung Sahn, April 24, 2017*

## *I hope tomorrow*

I hope tomorrow  
 And tomorrow  
 And the day after  
 I'll do things right  
 So that Liam  
 Will smile often  
 Commentary:  
 Does the tree worry, "Will my offspring be happy?  
 Am I blowing in the wind correctly?"  
 Happiness or smiles.  
 Sadness or frowns.  
 Behind it all,  
 Liam's luminous mind  
 Will always remain eternally pure.  
 But does he know that?

—Jerome Moore



## I HAVE A DIAMOND SWORD

(Continued from page 4)

in Japan when the samurai were great. These days in America, the American president says, "America used to be great. We'll make it great again." So at that time also, many Japanese soldiers thought "We were samurai." Some officers even carried around swords. There was one general who was very proud of this tradition and carried a sword. He was stationed in Korea. He met many sunims, and he didn't like Buddhist sunims. He especially didn't like practicing sunims. Then one day he heard that there was a monk in Korea who said he has a diamond sword. Then the general thought, "That's crazy, impossible. A sword made from diamond? My sword is an excellent sword, a hundred years old, made from famous, old special steel. How could some monk say he has a sword made from diamond? That's crazy." He started searching around Korea for this monk, Hae Wol Sunim.

Finally, he found the temple where Hae Wol Sunim lived and went there. At that moment Hae Wol Sunim was in the Buddha Hall. The general came walking in without taking off his shoes. He just walked right in. "Are you Hae Wol Sunim?" "Yes." "I heard you say you have a diamond sword." "Yes." Then the general took out his sword and said, "Show me your diamond sword, or I'll kill you right here." Then without flinching at all, Hae Wol Sunim said, "Oh, my diamond sword is hanging behind you." This general turned quickly around to look for this diamond sword. At that moment, Hae Wol Sunim stepped forward and slammed his fist into the back of the general's neck and said, "This

is my diamond sword and you're dead." The general was so shocked. He fell down on the floor of the Buddha hall and he realized how incredibly brave Hae Wol Sunim was. The general turned around and bowed to him. After that, he never touched Korean sunims again and he always respected them.

Every one of us has a diamond sword in our mind. During this winter practicing time, whether you were in the temple or at home, did you find your diamond sword? Even if you found it, how will you use it? Zen Master Seung Sahn used to say, "Everyone has a diamond sword in their mind." Then he said, "If you take your sword out, don't just wave it around. You must use it and kill." This sword sometimes is cold and sharp and kills. Sometimes this sword is soft and gentle like a baby and gives life. So everyone, if you haven't found your mind sword, your diamond sword, you must find it. We must find our mind sword, and then use it to save all beings. This is our job as students of Buddha. This is our job as human beings. I want to finish with a poem from the Chinese Zen Master Mu Mun:

*Eye is a shooting star.  
Spirit is like lightning.  
Death sword,  
life sword.*

Today is Hae Je day. What will you do this Hae Je? A light snow is covering the ground. A big storm may be coming. When you go outside, be careful! ♦

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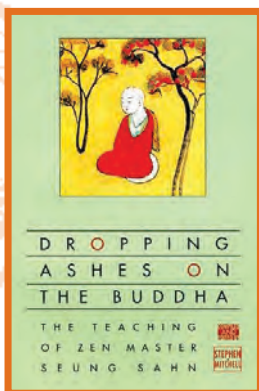
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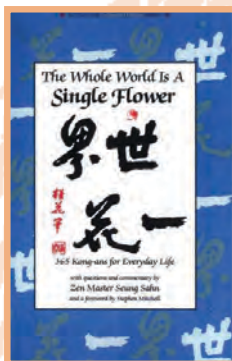
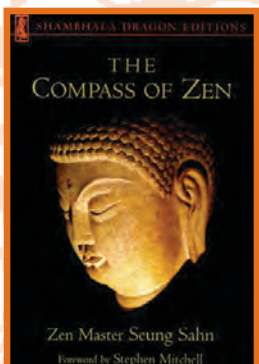
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