

PRIMARY POINT

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Strong Taste of Nothing

(The following talk was given by Zen Master Seung Sahn at the close of the first School Congress July 31, 1983 at Providence Zen Center, celebrating the founding of the Kwan Um Zen School.)

Thank you very much, everyone for coming here to do this special training, and to help us with the birth of the new School. We have been meeting here for three days and the new School has appeared. What is the correct function of this School? To help other people.

This world is always changing, but the process is sometimes slow, sometimes fast. Old people experience this sense of slow or fast time, but young people never do. They don't understand what time and space are and that's their right. Old people have a right to the past.

When you climb a mountain, you walk up the side for a long time, then you arrive at the top. Going up, we don't understand what is happening. What are human beings? What is the world? But when you get to the top, you can see everywhere. You can understand what human beings are, as well as time, space and this world. But understanding and attaining are different.

Several years ago, I became very sick. Bobby (Master Dharma Teacher Barbara Rhodes) checked my heart and said, "Soen Sa Nim, you have an irregular heartbeat. If you don't go to the hospital, you might die soon." So I went to the hospital. The doctor told me I must meditate. "Yes sir! What kind of meditation?" He didn't know I was a Zen Master, so he said "You are moving around too much, so you have this heart problem. Don't move at all. Correct meditation is necessary." "Yes sir!" So I did correct meditation, only one mind, lying in my bed, not moving.

(Bobby: Except that he did 108 bows every morning!)

That's right. (laughter) They checked me. They put a monitor on my chest so that my heartbeat appeared on their office television. So I stayed in bed, but I did

bows. I could see my heart action on the TV and when I would turn this way and that way, my heartbeat wasn't so good. But when I did bows, my heartbeat was very good. I checked this by watching the TV signal. The doctor didn't like this, but I did "correct meditation" for 10 days.

Then I was almost well. The doctor was very surprised. "You are a good meditator! Most of the people with this ailment stay in a hospital for 3 or 4 months. You are almost well after only 10 days." It was only after this that he discovered I was a Zen Master. Then he asked, "What is Zen meditation?" So I lectured in the hospital.

When I was in the hospital I experienced strong questions: What is death? What is life? What is this body? I understood these things before, but I had not experienced them. I never used to think about my body, I just pushed it very hard, not checking it. As long as my body was ok, there wasn't a problem. Dying was ok, too. But then my heart developed a problem. I wasn't caring for my body correctly, pushing it too fast, not getting proper food or enough sleep. You must make everything correct, moment to moment. If you don't consider your body, then your body will tell you, "You're not taking care of me. Sometime soon you and I will be separated!" (laughter) So I said, "Yes, I'm a little late. We have a job to do together and it's not finished, ok?"

In the hospital, there was a very old man in the next bed to me. He was wealthy, successful, and he was an intellectual. He had studied philosophy, so he had some understanding. Sometimes his wife, who was also very old, came to visit him. He didn't know when he would die, perhaps soon, but he

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New Monastery

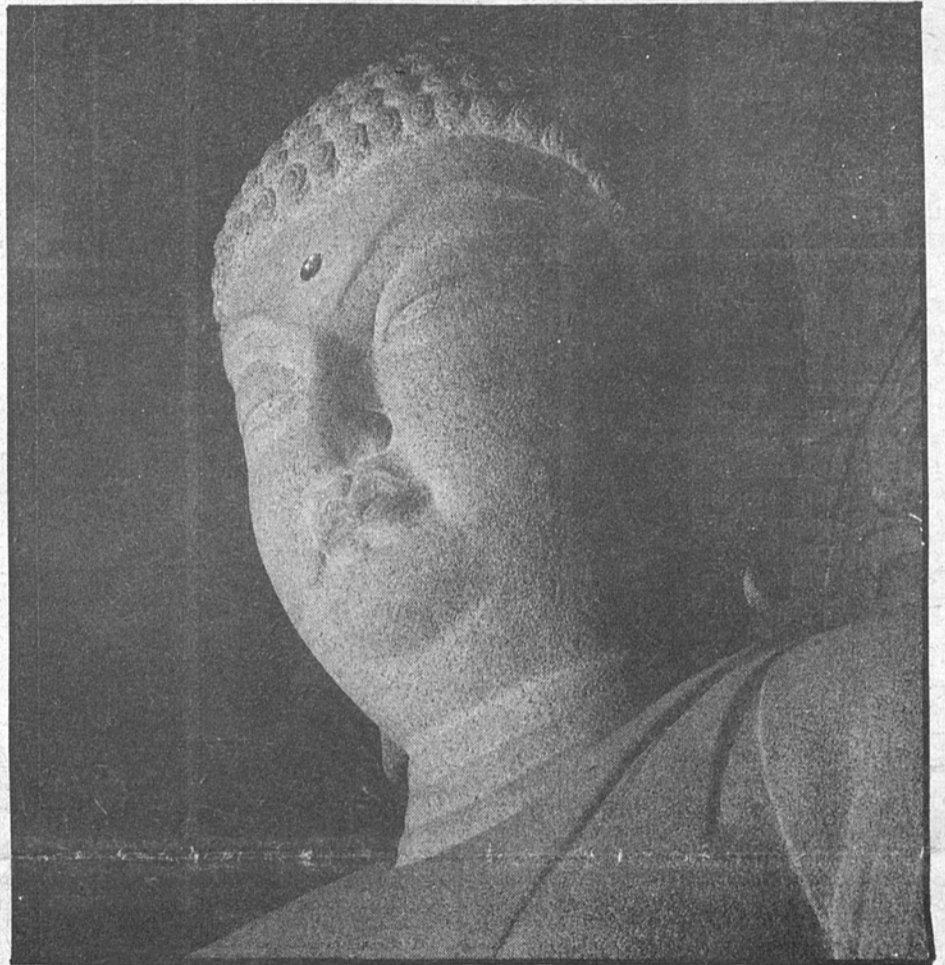
At Soen Sa Nim's direction, the first American monastery in the Korean tradition is now under construction on the property of the Providence Zen Center, in Cumberland, Rhode Island. Its proper name will be Joen Bok Sil Kwan Um Seon Won, and its common name will be Diamond Hill Zen Monastery. Thanks to a generous contribution by Mrs. Joen Bok

Sil, a student of Soen Sa Nim's from Kyoto, Japan, construction began in July, 1983, and is scheduled to be completed by August 1984. Soen Sa Nim has appointed Providence Zen Center Abbot Lincoln Rhodes to supervise the design and construction of the building. The design will be a blend of traditional Korean temple style with American construction techniques.

The new monastery will join the handful of Buddhist monasteries in North America,

most of which have appeared in the last ten years, such as Dai Bosatsu Zendo in the Catskill Mountains of New York; The City of 10,000 Buddhas near San Francisco; and Gampo Abbey, the new Tibetan monastery to be built in Nova Scotia. These are distinct from most of the other residential Buddhist centers in America, which primarily support lay practice. Unlike Zen Centers where single and married people

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The Bodhisattva Ideal

A talk given by Master Dharma Teacher Barbara Rhodes during the winter 1982 Kyol Che intensive meditation retreat at Providence Zen Center.

People often ask me what does the Bodhisattva vow—to save all people from suffering—really mean? A student said to me last week, "I really want to practice and help people. How can I keep this mind?" "What you have right now is wonderful," I told him. "All you have to do is try to keep it; just try. There's no formula." But he

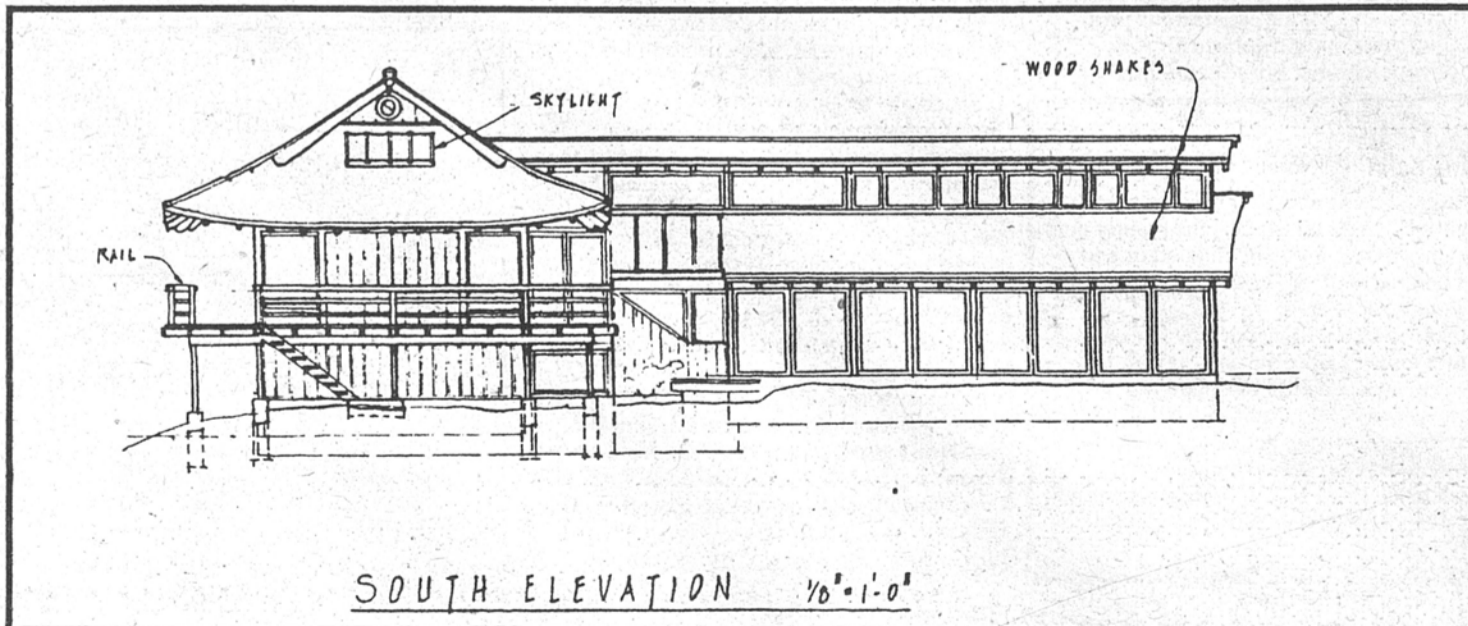
didn't really believe that. He thought there was possibly something else that I could hand him.

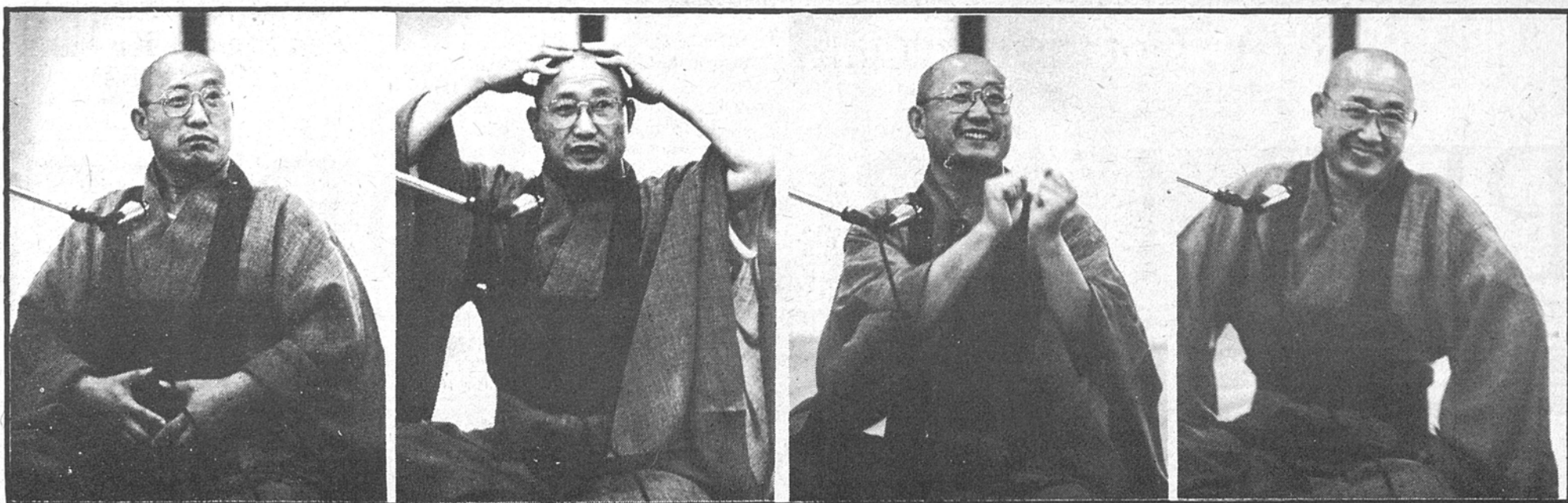
I often feel frustrated with my own practice, questioning how much I'm able to affect other people's lives, or the quality of my own. That's what Soen Sa Nim calls "checking." You start to look at what is happening with your practice, your friends, family, or your Zen Center: but the Buddha said, "I have every kind of medicine to help people no matter what their problem is, but I can't make them take it." We are Buddha, we have Buddha's mind, so we have every remedy for every kind of suffering. We are Bodhisattvas and all we have to do is accept our "Bodhisattvaness" and it will seep out. Any thought of how long it will take or how much we can do—any single thought—is not practicing.

In an old story, Zen Master Huang Po was walking with a man. When they reached a river, the man walked right across the water without breaking stride. Huang Po said, "If I had known he was that kind of man, I would have broken his legs before he reached the water." He meant that this act was completely unnecessary. You have a physical body and sometimes an obstacle like a river appears and slows you down. Then you have to either get wet, or build a bridge. In itself, that's not good or bad, that is just water, slowing you down.

Huang Po said, "Your practice is like being an insect with very sensitive antennae." Your mind, your consciousness, your perceptions are like antennae. If your checking mind moves those antennae feelers even the smallest amount, then you've lost your way. Huang Po was saying, don't check. Don't think in terms of opposites, or of yourself

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David Nichol

Taste of Nothing

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had a very clear mind. I asked him, "When you were young, you were very strong, you made a lot of money and studied a great deal. You have a clever mind. Now your body is very sick. Maybe you will die tomorrow or the day after."

"Yes, I don't know when."

"So in your whole life, what did you get?"

"Nothing!"

"That's primary point," I told him.

"You found it. You studied philosophy but you couldn't attain this nothing. Just now, you attained nothing. But if you hold nothing, then you will have a problem."

"What do you mean by 'holding nothing'?"

"It's very sad if you are holding nothing. All your lingering attachments will press on you. If you are not attached to nothing, you will attain nothing and there is no life or death. If you are nothing, then life and death are nothing. You are already beyond them."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" he said. "I didn't understand that until now."

It was an interesting conversation. He was old, rich and very well-known, but he said he had gotten nothing. As you get old, this nothing gets bigger. Before you come

into this world, there is nothing. When you are young you don't understand "nothing," just the words. But by the time you are 40 or 50 and a good friend has died, or your mother and father have died, then you have experienced nothing. You have tasted nothing. If you practice hard, the taste is very strong, and you are free to help other people. But if you are holding something in your mind, you can't taste "nothing." If you want freedom, you must taste nothing very intensely. What is the taste of nothing?

A long time ago in China many great scholars used a special meditation which a great Zen Master developed, called "corpse practice." Turn your self into a corpse: "I am a corpse." Try doing that. "What do you want, corpse?" "Cemetery!" "When? Right now!" If you are not a corpse, you have problems, but if you turn your self into a corpse, all problems disappear. You can help other-people without difficulty. Complete Bodhisattva action is possible.

If you can become like a corpse, you can take away all your desires, even your deep lingering attachments. Sometimes a condition will appear, and bang!—out of the blue—you can't understand what's happening. You can't control yourself. Where did this come from? This is a lingering attachment. Some of them come from a previous life. You can continue for many years, even many lives, holding something. We also call it "deep karma." Most people don't understand it. A good Zen student may do hard practice and everyone thinks, "Wonderful!" Then one day a condition appears, and bang! The good student falls apart.

You must find your lingering attachments and remove them. But if your attitude is that "everything's no problem," then your lingering attachments are hidden. You won't see them, even if you do hard training. It's fine to do daily Zen practice and work, but you also need special practice: perhaps bowing 500, 700 or 1000 times every day, or sitting two extra hours each day, or doing a special mantra practice, maybe 3,000 or 10,000 Kwansum Bosals. Every day, do regular practice with everyone together, and special practice. It's very important. If you try this, you will see your lingering attachments. If you do special practice every day, your center will get stronger and when lingering attachments appear, you can control them.

Everyone has their own karma. Some people's karma is anger, or checking, or holding. Holding karma causes body problems. You might have trouble with your back or your legs, but it's your holding

mind that is the problem. Desire is ok; anger is ok. Let them be. But also make an effort to do this special practice. It will not help you to only perceive desire, anger and ignorance. Make your practice stronger every day, then these things will become weaker and you can control them. When desire appears, you can say, "Maybe tomorrow," and tomorrow doesn't have to appear. That's what we call "Dharma energy."

We have almost finished this School Congress. I hope we will make a strong organization. We have made the outside Kwan Um Zen School appear, but everyone already had the inside Kwan Um Zen School a long time ago, even before Shakyamuni Buddha appeared. How can we connect these two, the inside and outside School? If you practice in your usual way, plus special practice, then it's possible to connect the two. The outside School then will bring everyone into harmony. In

died; only his body had died. Everything is by natural process. You will also die someday. That's no problem. If you love your son, you must just chant Ji Jang Bosal for him so he will get a good place in the next life. If you try that you will soon stop crying. That is mind light. Any place you go there will be no problem.

A long time ago, somebody wanting to kill the Sixth Patriarch came up behind him with a knife. The Sixth Patriarch saw the intruder without looking and grabbed him. That is mind light. Another Zen Master once was sleeping when someone came in the night to kill him, but he woke up and stopped him. His body was asleep, but not his mind. Anytime someone appeared with energy, it woke up the Zen Master.

You decide you want to wake up at 4 o'clock, then you go to sleep. Somebody bangs on the door. "Wake up!" You sit up. No one is there, but it's 4 AM. That's mind

"If you want freedom, you must taste nothing very strongly."

Buddhism we call that "amita," meaning infinite time, infinite space ocean. This world is a suffering ocean. It must change into a Dharma ocean.

If you put on a light, it's bright and you can see sick people, happy people, everything. Without light you can't see anything. The world is the same either way, it's only whether we have light or not that makes a difference. If it's dark, everyone is fighting each other and suffering. Everyone cries, "Where is the door? I want to go outside!" But with the light on, why would people fight? "Oh, there's door here, a road there; one person can go here, another person can go out there."

How do we get out of this suffering ocean? With mind light. When it appears, you can go out the door and down the road. Mind light changes the suffering ocean into the Dharma ocean. Everyone becomes harmonious, like happy children. Everyone gets true, unchanging happiness. Some people call this "pure light" or "Nirvana." If you attach to Nirvana, you will have a problem. But if you attain the correct function of Nirvana, you can save all beings in this suffering ocean.

So it's very important that this new School has appeared. Each person's light by itself is very small. The stronger your practice, the brighter your light becomes. Putting everyone's light together means there will never be any hindrance. Together we multiply our light, and this Dharma light is better than the sun. If a cloud appears, the sun cannot shine through it. Mind light has no such hindrance. If you see smoke, you know there's fire. If you see horns beyond the stone wall, you know there's an ox. That means your mind light can already see without hindrance.

Suppose somebody telephones you and their voice is sad. You will quickly understand the sadness. If they call you from Japan, you can hear them and understand their mind. The sun cannot do that; the sun isn't shining there. Suppose your son has died and you are very sad. But he has not

light waking you up. I often experience that. Sometimes I am up late, after midnight, but even though I am tired, I still wake up at 3 AM and bow every morning. At 3 o'clock somebody hits me or bangs on the door. That's mind light.

Mind light is your original light. It is also try-mind. It's not special, everybody has it, but many people don't want it. Everyone wants something outside. If you go inside, deeply inside, then you will lose everything. If you go outside you only get things: this cup, this money. Someday the cup and the money will disappear. What can you do? Nothing. So go inside, to primary point. Then the whole universe is yours. Your inside school will then connect with the new outside School, and saving all people is possible. Thank you. ■

*The Great Way is not difficult
Only do not make distinctions
Take away likes and dislikes
Then everything is perfectly clear*

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What Is Primary Point?

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

When you have a scale and there is nothing being weighed, the indicator points to zero. You put something on it, and the pointer swings to "one pound." You take it off, the pointer goes back to zero. This is primary point. After you find your primary point, when good or bad feelings come, your pointer swings in one direction or another, but this doesn't matter. Don't check it. When the feeling is over with, the pointer swings back to zero.

If you haven't found your primary point, it's like taking a heavy object off the scale and having the pointer stay at "ten pounds." Or, the pointer moves back only part way, it doesn't go completely back to zero. Then your scale does not weigh correctly. If you put a heavy object on it, it may completely break.

So first you must find your primary point, and keep it very strongly. A taxi has weak shock absorbers, so it's very steady. If you keep your primary point, your mind will become stronger. When you meet a big problem, your mind will move less and less, and soon return to primary point. Finally, your mind will be very strong, able to carry any load. Then saving all-people is possible.

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