

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

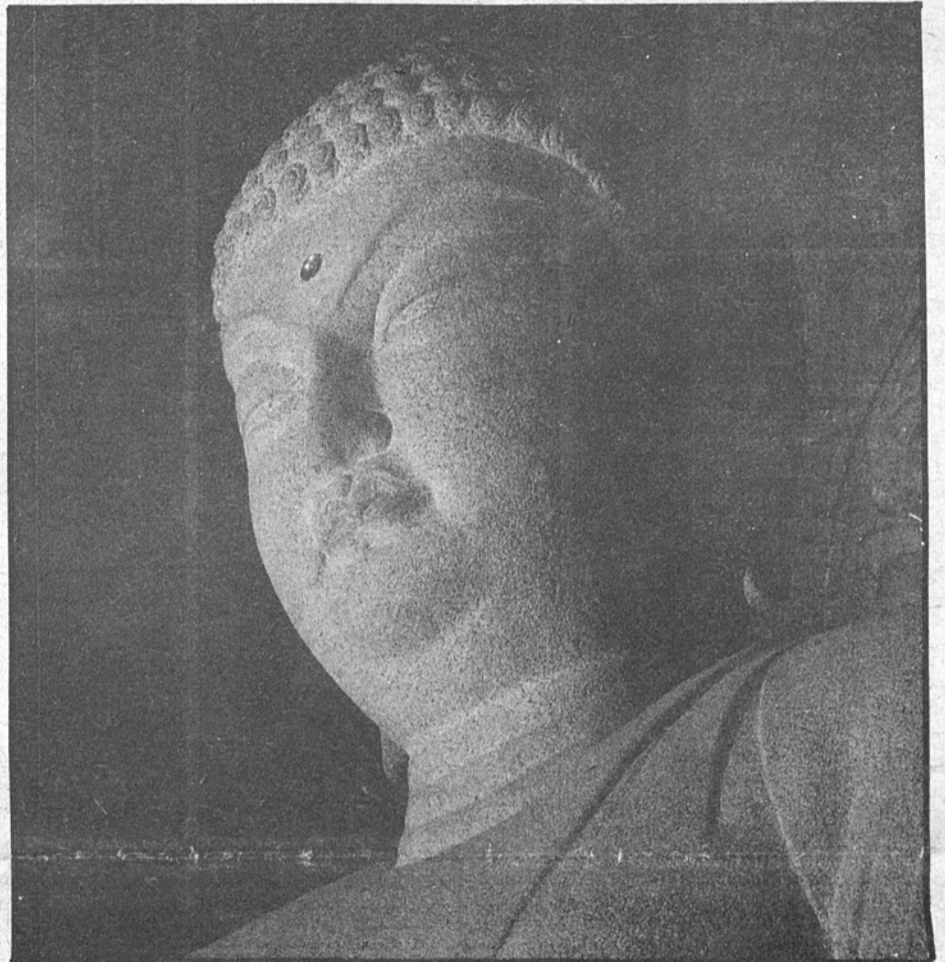
At Soen Sa Nim's direction, the first American monastery in the Korean tradition is now under construction on the property of the Providence Zen Center, in Cumberland, Rhode Island. Its proper name will be Joen Bok Sil Kwan Um Seon Won, and its common name will be Diamond Hill Zen Monastery. Thanks to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

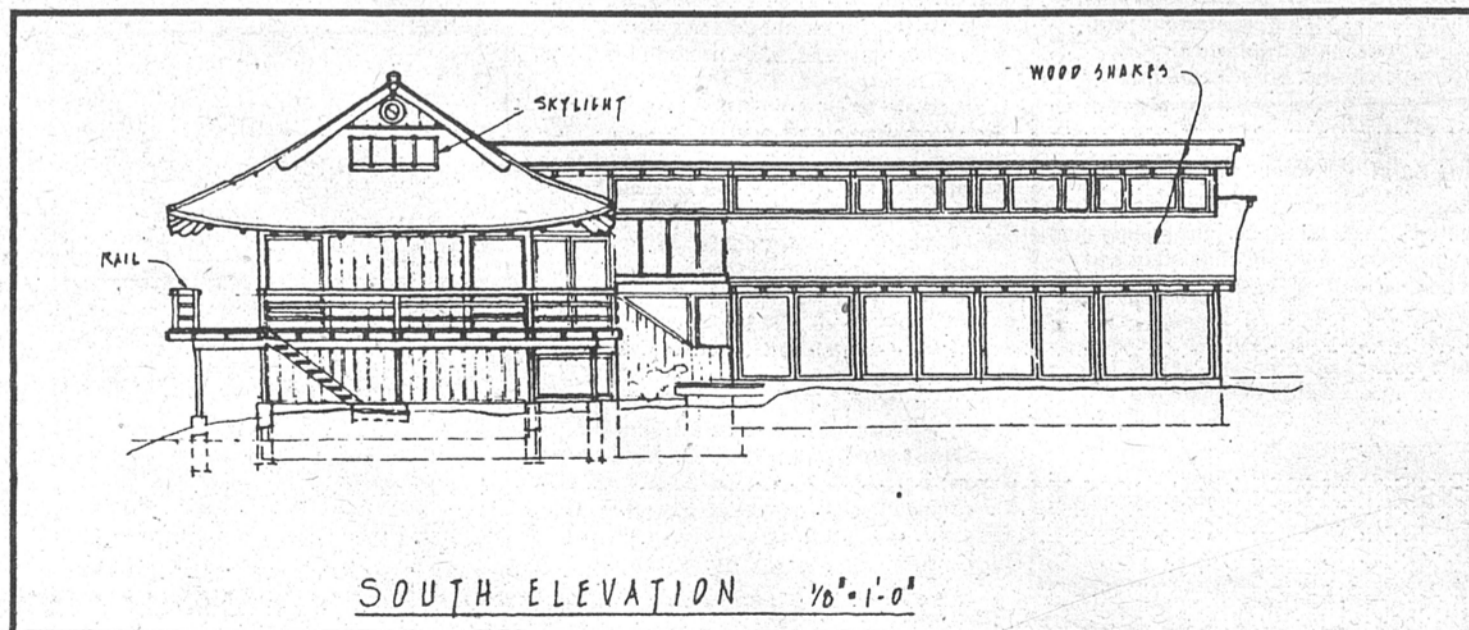
didn't really believe that. He thought there was possibly something else that I could hand him.

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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Bodhisattva

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as separate from anything. Only completely perceive; believe in what you have already. You are already Buddha. Just give yourself to everything.

We make hindrances for ourselves. We also make "The entire universe is suffering." What does it mean to ask, "How can I save all people?" There is a story about one of Buddha's disciples. One day, as he was meditating, this man had an intuition that the Kapila Kingdom would be destroyed by a war in seven days. He wanted desperately to stop that war. He said to Buddha, "Do you know that next week many of your people are going to be killed?"

"Yes."
 "Then why don't you save them?"
 "I can't."
 "But you have magical powers. Why can't you save them?"
 But Buddha said, his mind not moving at all, "You can't make merited karma disappear."
 But Buddha said, his mind not moving at all, "You can't make merited karma disappear."

Then the man did an incredible thing with his wisdom and power. He shrunk the whole kingdom, put them in a small bowl and took them up to a high heaven where it was very safe. After seven days when he thought it was safe, he brought the bowl back to earth. But when he took the cover off and looked inside, he saw that the miniature country had been destroyed by a miniature war.

Buddha's Enlightenment Day—1983

*In deep night—cannot see green tree.
 In deep mountain—cannot hear bird's song.
 In deep mind—only complete stillness.
 Then why does the star sparkle in space?
 Why is the sky blue by day and dark at night?
 Who made that?*

*If you have eyes but no light—cannot see.
 If you have ears but no air—cannot hear.
 If you have nose but no wind—cannot smell.
 You and something make everything.
 Subject plus object equal Enlightenment.
 Not special. Very simple.*

*You plus sky equal what?
 You plus dog equal what?
 You plus sugar equal what?
 You already understand.
 But understanding cannot help you.
 Must become yours!*

*What is Yours?
 Did you get it?
 The stone lion is scornful.
 Heh! Heh! Heh!
 Calendar reads December 8.
 Buddha's Enlightenment for you.*

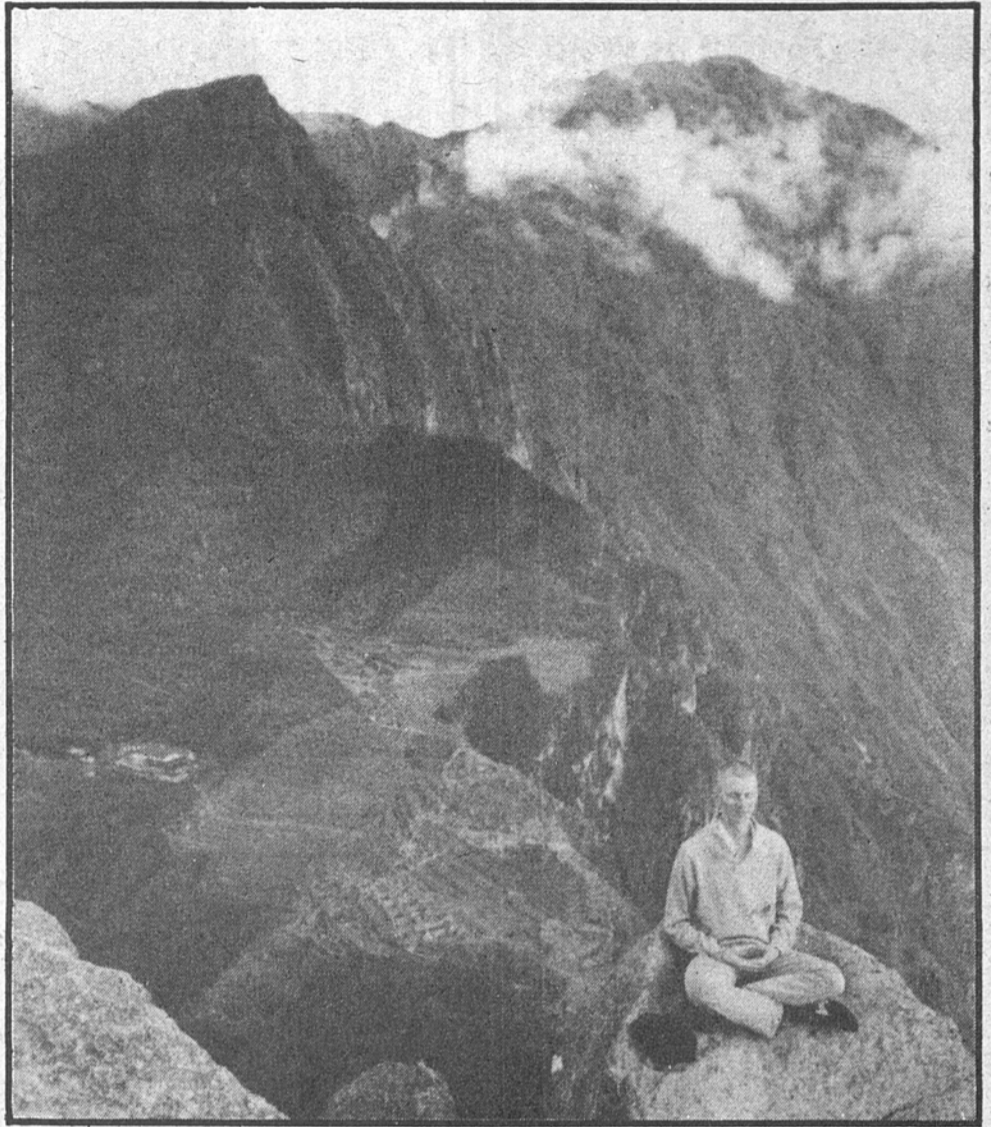
by Zen Master Seung Sahn

understand his life.

This is why the question, "How can I keep this mind that wants to help?" impressed me so much. The student who asked it really wanted to learn. We don't have to worry about losing that mind, because we already have it. Complete sincerity is all that's necessary. As we practice more, we learn to see what helping means. I can see now that there is no way we can intellectually grasp how to save all beings from suffering. It's a waste of time even to try to measure whether it's possible. As Soen Sa Nim says, "I hope you soon get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering." I grab that once in a while, but we don't even have to think about it. We just have to try becoming empty mind and get correct view and correct practice.

At work I am trying to become more of a correct nurse. Last week I saw how I could be doing more, and it's on such a simple scale. I often think of work as being 5 or 6 hours of busy work, and then an hour or so of free time. I've started to see what nonsense that is. I get paid for 8 hours, so why don't I give the nursing home the whole 8 hours? If I don't do that at work, there's no way I'm doing it anywhere else. So last week I started to do that—be more of a correct nurse. That night driving home was a complete experience. I wasn't feeling guilty about anything; I was just driving home. I knew I had done a good job that day. Having that mind, you are ready for the next step. If someone appears in front of your car, you're ready to put on the brakes. You have to give yourself to each situation: correct view, correct practice.

I work with a lot of under-educated people at the nursing home. Some of them steal and cheat and fight each other. It would be ridiculous for me to preach to them. Some of the people know I'm a Zen teacher, but they're too embarrassed to ask about it. A lot of them think it's cultish or that I'm a real goody-goody. So when a girl at work asked me for advice one day, I was excited about it, but I tried not to say too much. She is a hyperactive sort of person and gets things confused, so I told her to try taking just 10 minutes a day to relax and



Diana Clark

SOUTH AMERICAN TEACHING TOUR

In November Soen Sa Nim and his traveling staff visited Mexico City to meet with a number of professional and business people interested in Zen practice. Their host was Michelle Barnett, sister of Robin Selby, one of Soen Sa Nim's New York students. The group visited the famed Pyramid of the Sun in Teotihuacan, among other sightseeing highlights.

Hosts in Rio de Janeiro were Linda and Albano Carvalho, who have started a Zen group, soon to become a Zen Center. Soen Sa Nim gave a public talk in Rio and then flew to Sao Paulo, one of Brazil's largest cities, "a blend of Europe and the Orient" according to trip director Diana Clark, who is staying in Rio to coordinate development of the Brazilian Zen program. Soen Sa Nim was met at the airport by an enthusiastic crowd of Koreans, including the Korean consulate. He visited the only Korean Buddhist temple in Sao Paulo, and gave several well-attended public talks and a retreat at the Tai Chi Academy of Roque Severino. Brazilian Zen students have translated Dropping Ashes on the Buddha into Portuguese and are looking for a publisher.

reflect on her life a little, to see what's happening. She said, "Yeah, that's a good idea." The next day as I walked by her I overheard her complaining to somebody about how she always got confused. I said, "Well, don't you remember what I told you to do?" She had completely forgotten what I had said!

It was good teaching for me. I was really hoping that finally, after working at this place for eight years, somebody was going to ask me for advice and get helped by it. I used to be on the day shift and people still come to me and say, "You were the best nurse we ever had on the day shift. I wish you would come back." Then I realize that my practice has helped people just by making the quality of life a little better.

It's our lazy mind that makes this idea of saving all people something difficult. We don't want to realize that we can do it, and that it's right in front of us. As long as we think it's something far away that only special people can do, we don't take the responsibility for doing it. If you can completely be here right now and give energy to your practice, you can do it any

time. Don't try to measure how long you will live, or how big is the universe. It's completely impossible.

When I was little I used to think there must be a wall somewhere with nothing on the other side. How could life and time be infinite? We don't understand where we're going and where we come from, and we don't need to. We just need (claps her hands) to hear that, then we know. So keep listening. ■

Feminine
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The day ended with a brief practice representing each of the Buddhist schools at the conference: A loving kindness meditation led by Jacqueline Schwartz, the four great vows, chanted by Roshi in Japanese, and the four great vows in English led by Barbara Rhodes as all held hands in a circle. After the conference, many people lingered on the grounds and stayed for dinner. The relaxed feeling from earlier in the day remained. Many people asked that the conference be repeated, perhaps for an entire weekend next time. ■



Mike Olak

I was very relieved when I first heard that story, because it pointed out that even special magical powers can't help people if they aren't ready. This story taught me that we don't need to develop special abilities or perform miracles. Becoming a Billy Graham isn't going to help, either. Even if you have tremendous charisma, the other person has to want to practice. Buddha said, "You can hand somebody medicine but you can't make him take it. Soen Sa Nim has said, "The only way to make karma disappear is for your consciousness to become empty; then there are no miracles, only correct view and correct practice. This is the true miracle."

We often hear: "correct view, correct practice." But until our mind completely digests it and knows there is nothing beyond that, we aren't going to be able to do what we can in this lifetime. There is a story about a man in India who came from a caste that slaughtered cattle. His grandfather did it, his father did it. His job was to hit the cattle over the head with a hammer and kill them. But his mind was very pure. He always asked himself, "What is this? Why am I...?" He hated the job, but he had this question all the time. One day, at the instant he killed a cow, he got enlightenment. From the outside, his life looked miserable; all day long he slaughtered sentient beings. But his outside action wasn't important; it was how he kept his mind. He wanted to help people and



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