

What Have We Got to Hold Onto in this Life?

(A Question and Answer talk given by Master Dharma Teacher Mu Deung Su Nim during a Yong Maeng Jong Jin at Providence Zen Center October 1, 1983.)

Adeline: I have a friend named Terry who is missing. She was in a small plane that crashed in the sea. So everyone assumes she died. But if she is dead, where is she?

MSDN: What are you doing now?

Adeline: Sitting here talking to you.

MDSN: So you know where your friend went.

Adeline: I don't understand.

MDSN: So where did Terry go? Where did my father go? Don't-know. Before this, Adeline talked about having some idea about our life that makes our life seem substantial. It gives us some reason for living, some direction. What am I doing here? Why am I a monk? Don't-know. But when you have no idea, only one question appears: What is this? Why do I spend my time working? Right now it's the job that has to be done. But as for some deeper meaning than that? I only have an idea. Maybe her friend Terry went to heaven. Maybe she went to hell. Does it really matter what my idea is? If I hit you, what do you say?

Adeline: Ow! Do you hear something if I say "Ouch?"

MDSN: Say "Ouch."

Adeline: Ouch. Did you hear that?

MDSN: I don't know 'anything.' Today my speech comes from where? It comes from my heart, ok? It has no Dharma, it has nothing at all. It cannot answer any question, or do anything. It has no idea. It cannot see, hear, think, taste, touch. But I am only sitting here talking to you. About what? Who knows? I have no Dharma. I have nothing at all. I can't figure out what I'm doing here. Can you? If you can, please tell me!

Q: But there is taste and touch and hearing, even if you say "I don't taste or touch or hear."

MDSN: That's only naming, made by you, by me, by all of us. That's only an idea. I say I see you: you must attain that. That has no name or form. That's not dependent on hearing, on like or dislike, correct or incorrect, good or bad. It's not dependent on anything at all. "The wall is white" is not dependent on any philosophy. My eyes seeing you is not dependent on anything. Seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, thinking, feeling, moving—are not dependent on anything. We make it dependent on something. You go to a movie and it's a bad one. Your eyes don't like it. But your eyes didn't *not* like that movie, either. Your eyes have no opinion. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind—are not dependent on anything. You make it dependent on something; so it is dependent on something. If it depends on anything, then you have suffering.

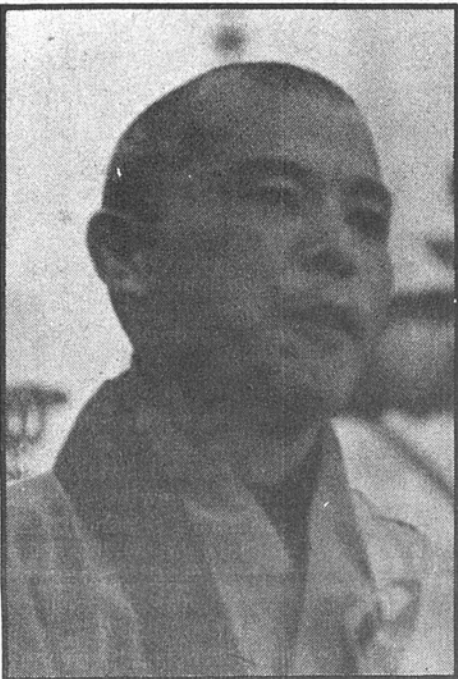
Q: Recently a lot of us have been learning about the medical consequences of a nuclear war. My question is, if you have a

friend who is drowning or if you're aware that a nuclear bomb can wipe out all your friends, what is the correct thing to do?

MSDN: You must practice very hard.

Q: But if you are sitting on the shore, practicing very hard, then your friend will drown.

MDSN: If you are practicing very hard, then you will be able to jump into the ocean and save your friend—no problem. This life is very funny. What do we want? We say we want to attain our true self. We say we want to attain freedom from life and death, to save all sentient beings. That's what we say we want as Zen students. Not only Zen students, but other people say this. But if you want to do that, then you must *really* do that.



Mike Olak

In China there was a government official who later became a Zen Master, during the Tung dynasty. His name was Chi Su. He was in charge of handling all the money that came into the Emperor's treasury. He was very smart, and everyone liked and trusted him. People valued his opinion. Then one day he took a huge amount of money out of the treasury and just gave it away to a lot of people. It was a great crime.

The other men in his department said, "We like Chi Su and trust him, but this is crazy! As honest men, what can we do?" So they told the Emperor what Chi Su had done. The Emperor said, "There must be some ulterior motive for this action. But it's our law that there are certain ways of appropriating money. This was a big mistake on his part. Take him to court."

Chi Su was tried and sentenced to execution. Nobody wanted to do it; but they had decided on their law, and he had broken it. The day of the execution came. The Emperor called the executioner, a great swordsman, a man who could cut off your head so cleanly and quickly that there was no suffering. The Emperor said to him, "When you raise your sword and are ready to cut off his head, first look at his face. If his face shows any signs of regret or remorse or puzzlement, cut off his head quickly. If not, don't cut."

On the appointed day, Chi Su put his head on the block. The swordsman lifted his sword, ready to cut off his head. He looked down and saw Chi Su smiling. Smiling! Chi Su, seeing the bewilderment on the swordsman's face, looked up at him and said, "I dedicate this next birth to all sentient beings"

So of course he didn't have his head cut off. A messenger ran and told the Emperor, who was very proud of Chi Su. He knew there had been some ulterior motive for Chi Su's action. So he called for Chi Su and said, "I am very happy. But we in the government want to understand why you gave all that money away."

Chi Su said, "For a long time now I've been thinking about quitting my government post, giving alms to the people, and only practicing Buddhism. So I decided that in my next life, if you killed me now, I would be reborn as a Zen student and only practice Buddhism."

At that time it was very difficult to get out of a government post, especially a high-ranking one. You couldn't just quit your job. It had to be approved by the Emperor, and Chi Su didn't think that would happen. He did this action without any concern about whether he would get a reprieve or not.

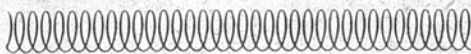
The Emperor said, "I will give you a new name, Yen Shu, which means 'prolonged life.' Yen Shu became a Zen student, and a short time later, maybe five years, became a Zen Master.

Chi Su said, "I dedicate this next birth to all sentient beings." Because he had enough faith, he gave himself up. Because of his determination, he had faith that he would be born as a Zen student and not as a government official. He was willing to risk his life to find out: What is this? Just once you must want to give up your life: Whether you do it or not doesn't matter.

Dogen Zenji says that if in this lifetime we have not once gotten that taste, we cannot enter Buddhism completely. Just one taste. But we all hold our opinions and say we want that taste, but how much are we really willing to let go? How many of us are really willing to try for 10,000 years? So you see, it doesn't matter where Adeline's friend went. It doesn't matter what I'm doing now. All that matters is that we try completely.

At the top of a 100 foot pole Dogen Zenji says that you must even forget about saving all beings. You must walk past the place

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What is one thing?

Zen Master Ku Sahn (1910-1983)

The Ven. Ku Sahn Su Nim, Zen Master of one of Korea's most famous temples, Song Gwang Sa, died on December 16, at the age of 73.

A few days before he died, he recited the following:

"Samsara and Nirvana are originally not two;
As the sun rises in the sky
It illuminates the three thousand worlds."

Under Ku Sahn Su Nim's leadership, Song Gwang Sa (also known as Vast Pines Monastery) attracted monks and nuns from many Western countries, including America. Ku Sahn Su Nim was noted for his efforts in revitalizing Korean Buddhism; he often traveled around Korea speaking to lay Buddhist groups. He established two temples in America: in 1972, the Korean Buddhist Sambosa (Temple of the Three Treasures) in Carmel Valley, CA; and in 1980, Korea Sa, a branch temple of Song Gwang Sa, in Los Angeles. He is also the author of *Nine Mountains*, a collection of his Dharma talks.

Ku Sahn Su Nim was born in 1910 and worked as a barber until age 28, when he became a monk under Zen Master Hyo Bong, one of the celebrated Zen Masters of his era. After seven years of hard practice, Ku Sahn Su Nim was certified by Zen Master Hyo Bong, who transmitted the Dharma to him four years later. Ku Sahn Su Nim worked at National Sangha Headquarters in Seoul, and then returned to his hermitage for another three years of hard training.

On behalf of the whole sangha of the Kwan Um Zen School, Zen Master Seung Sahn offers profound condolences on the occasion of Ku Sahn Su Nim's death. He prays that the Zen Master will keep the Great Vow, return to this world again, attain the great work, and save all beings from suffering. Zen Master Seung Sahn wrote the following poem to mark Ku Sahn Su Nim's death.



Where does the great Zen Master Ku Sahn stay now?

Do you understand that?

Aigo Aigo! Aigo!

Chogy Mountain is always blue.

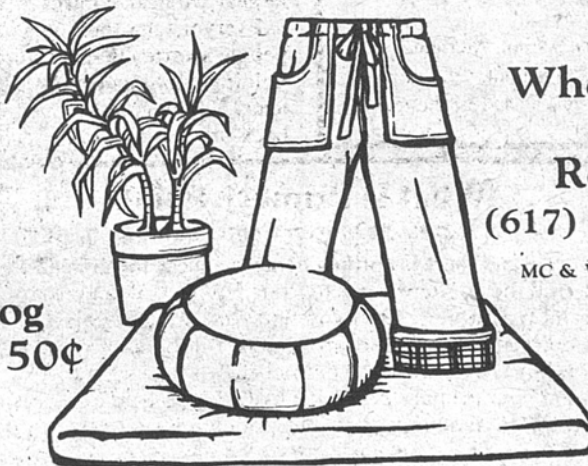
Chogy Stream never stops flowing.



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