

THE EAGLE PHOENIX PAPER

(The following translation of a calligraphy by the great Korean Zen Master Hyo Bong was sent to us by Ham Wol Sunim, a monk who recently returned to Song Gwang Sa, a famous Korean temple, from New Zealand. He is working on a book about Korean Buddhism for Australian and New Zealand readers.)

by Hyo Bong Dae Soen Sa, Zen Master, Sunlit Peak, 1888-1966.

Our ancestor, Bodhidharma, came to East Asia from Persia and India and showed people how to practice the Tao. A phoenix and an eagle, (1) he grasped the Hwadu substance, that which is beyond words and the origin of thought. Those who took the precepts and studied without quitting won his esteem. To begin study and keep studying forgetful of the trials is to be an eagle-phoenix, a Bodhidharma: such students can taste the Hwadu.

Settling into study unlimited by common thought, gives muscles the strength of a lion and mind the power of a bull elephant. Since slicing blockages and reveries in two makes the body-mind brave and sharp. Take up the great question "What (is my nucleus which sees as well as hears?)," directly probing for the Buddha nature, and do not be a namby-pamby. Push aside the trite, the posy, the superficial, and sense the noble spirit that fills the universe.

Without the will to overtake all the Sages of the Past, and without shining as brightly as they did—if not more so—the actions of Compassionate Ones cannot spring forth.

Exhausted salmon under waterfalls and hawks tumbled into reeds do not catch up with those ahead. (2) What is the use of mimicking a feeble horse roped to a post or a blind donkey set to watch a stick? (3)

To wind beyond these stages drop needless thoughts and probe the vital phrase or question. Seeing through the question in a flash gives constant alertness and true ease. Manufacturing idle concepts has never liberated anyone.

In order to be able to help others as a Buddha or Bodhisattva, keenly inquire into the Hwadu question.

This is the best thing to do.
1946.10.15

(1) The mythological phoenix dies in, and is reborn from, a fireball. Eagles will spend as long as three days incubating, and later carefully teach their young.

(2) Swamped in discursive ideas, people cannot attain Buddhahood.

(3) Sit in meditation without counting the hours so spent; mindfulness, not drowsiness precedes Awakening.

(footnotes by Ham Wol Sunim)



"In seven days, will I understand who I am?"

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yourself 100%. But 100% means, moment to moment changes, depending on no thing, idea, or belief, but on something which for lack of a word we may call "don't know."

I gave lectures at different places to an audience of wide backgrounds. People would ask questions, and after a while I began to understand that they didn't care so much about my answers; they were concerned about my sincerity. Not how strong I was, or how much I believed in what I thought I knew, but how sincere I was. It was a really strange experience. Not "What

experience; where is it coming from? Even with that "no idea," just how sincere are you, buddy?

Then I realized (speaking for myself) how in America we can get very lazy. We have a good situation, we have freedom to do almost anything. We practice in a beautiful Dharma room, and our lives are fairly stable.

Though we once had a big question, after we practice for a while we find that the edge of our search, our big confusion, is gone. Not that we've found anything, but the

harsh edge is gone and we are content with that and think we have found the way. We know we can practice again if things get rough, and again just dull the edge, but we never really get to the bottom of it. In Poland the edge is always there. They have no choice. The razor's edge is always there, so they are sincere, and they can sense that in others.

One young man came for an interview and asked with everything he had, "In

can you teach me?" or "How strong is your practice?" or "How well do you answer questions?" but, "Where is it coming from?"

They could not believe in ideas, because in their country everything is changing all the time. They are looking for something that remains stable, not dependent on name and form. They don't believe speech or philosophy or beautiful stories. They are looking for something else. They believe in their

THE POLISH SANGHA

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.

seven days, will I understand who I am?" I had not experienced that in a long time. He was 100% sincere. He ended up staying for 21 days and just tried. He didn't know. He didn't care about the idea of enlightenment or easing his suffering or attaining Nirvana or kensho. He had no idea that perhaps if he found out who he was he would be happy and peaceful; that didn't matter. He didn't know what to expect. All that mattered was "What am I?" That's all he cared about.

Three students who sat for three days and wanted to start a group in a small seaside

town invited me to give a talk there. It wasn't scheduled but we made time and went anyway. One of them had told her mom all about sitting and what a wonderful experience she had. Her mother came to the public talk to see for herself. After the talk a group of us went out to dinner.

We were sitting there eating and she started to season my food and make sure I had enough Coca-Cola to drink. As she was doing that I said, "You are a good mother!" And right away she said, "Only my children can say that!" Bang! she had hit me! Simple and quick—"Only my children can say that." She had perceived it as a compliment and small talk and not really my truth, so her words came out. She had no intention of hitting me, just that keen simple observation and wisdom. That's the kind of sincerity they were demanding.

"We must learn not to fool ourselves. It is easy to fool ourselves if we desire something."

Mu Deung Sunim

The people I met practiced very hard. They gave me inspiration and showed me that this mind—thinking and checking and wanting to be clever—cannot really help. It would soon be exposed. They really confirmed that thinking, no matter how much you know, even if your answers are seemingly correct, may not be 100% complete. If it still holds even a hair it is only words or being clever or repeating what someone has taught you, but it means nothing, has no substance. It is only understanding.

All of us have already experienced that. Although understanding can sometimes help it is not the bottom line. Zen Master Nam Cheon already pointed out, "Understanding is illusion, not understanding is blankness."

We must learn not to fool ourselves. It is easy to fool ourselves if we desire something. During interviews people would come, present correct answers in speech or action but even though aware it was basically correct they understood something was missing and would blurt out immediately "Not enough!" They already understood. They didn't need someone else to tell them, so they were not so afraid of being right or wrong, just "how is it just now" completely. It was an amazing experience for me.

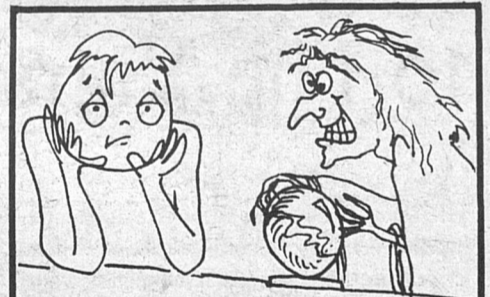
Many people I met, including myself, have sometimes made answering kong-ans their priority. They check themselves on that basis. If they've answered 20 kong-ans, that's how much they've gotten closer to enlightenment or to getting something or attaining wisdom. Their primary concern is how many kong-ans they can check off as correctly answered. But what is correct, anyway? If we make anything, already we are dead.

An older man whom I met when I was there a few years ago was really quick.

friends, themselves, everybody and everything.

I hope we can find that, but I don't think we can find that. You can't look for sincerity and get it. You can't make it. I don't know how to get it, but I hope you get it. I think practicing don't know does it. We've all heard that don't-know cuts off all thinking. That's our usual style of Dharma talk: "If you don't understand, only go straight don't-know, then your mind becomes clear."

Maybe there is something in don't know. I hope we all return to that sincerity we had when we first started practicing. I hope we get back that big question, that big doubt, and that don't-know that we had when we first came and asked, "Help me understand...What is this?" □



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