

PRIMARY POINT

PUBLISHED BY THE KWAN UM ZEN SCHOOL

VOLUME FOUR, NUMBER THREE

528 POUND ROAD, CUMBERLAND, RI (401) 769-6476

OCTOBER 1987



"THE WHOLE WORLD IS A SINGLE FLOWER"-In late August 80 students from the U.S. and Europe gathered in Korea to celebrate Zen Master Seung Sahn's 60th birthday, an important milestone in Korean culture. The gathering included a two-day event at Su Dok Sa Temple, talks by visiting dignitaries Ven. Mahaghosananda, Maezumi Roshi, Jakusho Kwong Roshi, and Ji Kwang Poep Sa Nim, and a kido in a building under construction for future international Kyol Che s (meditation retreats). Several days later over 2000 laypeople, monks and nuns gathered at the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Seoul to meet at the International Young Buddhists Symposium. As flags of many countries decorated the stage, people

representing these countries came up to express their understanding of the phrase, "The Whole World Is A Single Flower". In the evening there was a celebration of the publication in Korean of a major biography of Zen Master Seung Sahn, some 700 pages long and containing many photographs. The Kwan Um Zen School presented gifts, a hand-sewn quilt and a carved plaque. Following the ceremonies, about 70 people went on a week-long tour of major Korean Buddhist temples, a trip made special by their extraordinary warmth and hospitality. The February 1988 issue of PRIMARY POINT will include a full report and photographs of these events.

Photo by Paul Best

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YOU ARE ALREADY HOME

By Master Dharma Teacher Robert Moore

In December 1986 in a ceremony at the Providence Zen Center, Robert Moore was recognized by Zen Master Seung Sahn as a Master Dharma Teacher in the Kwan Um Zen School. Bob is the seventh American Zen student to be named as an MDT, which is equivalent to "sensei" in the Japanese tradition. Following the Certification Assembly, it is traditional for the new teacher to give a formal Dharma speech.

Bob, a Texas-born composer and martial arts teacher, has been a student of Soen Sa Nim's for 12 years. Married and the father of three children, he teaches music at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and is a Tai Chi instructor at the Aikido Ai Dojo in Whittier, where he leads a Zen group. He is also the resident teacher at Dharma Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles. A former music professor at Yale and Oberlin, he was a co-founder of the New Haven Zen Center.

(Bob holds the ceremonial Zen stick above his head, and then brings it down for a hard hit on the altar table in front of him)

About one thousand years ago a monk came to Tung Sahn Shou-Ch'u Zen Master and asked, what is Buddha? Tung Sahn replied, three pounds of flax. (Bob hits the table a second time)

A few decades earlier a monk approached Yun Men Zen Master, who was Tung Sahn's teacher, and asked, what is Buddha? Yun Men replied, dry shit on a stick. (Bob hits the table a third time)

Tung Sahn Zen Master said, three pounds of flax. Yun Men Zen Master said, dry shit on a stick. So I ask you, what is the real Buddha?

(loud shout) Hoh!

I see before me many smiling faces.

Twelve and a half years ago three of us made a trip here to Providence from New Haven to talk with a monk who wished to

introduce us to Soen Sa Nim. We invited Soen Sa Nim to give a talk at Yale University that fall. After becoming acquainted with Soen Sa Nim, through shenanigans of one sort or another which I never totally understood, we then decided to take the Five Precepts. [first five lay precepts of Buddhism] It was exactly 12 years ago tonight that the five original New Haven students came here. We drew straws to see who would give the Dharma talk from our group (in those days there were only about four Zen Centers), and I got the short straw.

I'm used to lecturing, so I worked very hard and had a 30-minute talk all prepared, with a long story to tell. In those days Soen Sa Nim used a moktak [wooden clapper] for signaling the end of your talk time. I got up to give my talk, started in and got about two minutes into it when—tok! So I

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DYING AND WORLD PEACE

The Conference on "Conscious Living, Conscious Dying"

By Sid Kemp

Stephen Levine (SL): A fellow has a heart attack, a heart fibrillation. His friends reach out to him in fear. Touching his moment in conflict, they say urgently, "What should we do, what should we do?"

He answers, "No problem. My heart is only singing." This is a diseased heart. But this is a healed heart, if ever I've seen one. No conflict. Having a heart attack, I stop the war.

Soen Sa Nim (SSN): When your mind is like clear water, that's Zen mind. Good thinking, then good mind. Suffering, then plain mind. Thinking appears, then your mind is changing. No thinking, then no mind. Then your mind, my mind, Buddha mind, Christ mind are all the same clear Zen mind.

A thousand years ago, there was a famous Zen temple on Diamond Mountain, in Korea. On a nearby mountain there was a sutra temple called Mu Jeung-Sa. Five

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CONSCIOUS LIVING, CONSCIOUS DYING

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hundred monks lived at the Zen temple. Between the two, there was a wonderful hot spring with hot tubs. All Korea was Buddhist then, so Zen monks and sutra monks could all come for free. So the monks were very happy.

One day, the most famous sutra monk in Korea came from Mu Jeung-Sa to the baths. This monk already had a problem: "I am a sutra monk. I have authentic Buddha-speech and Buddha-action." One day, he comes down to take a hot bath. It was a very good feeling, very clear. So, when he is ready to leave, he goes to the woman who runs the baths, and says, "Oh, thank you very much. Your hot tub is very wonderful, the best in the world."

The owner said, "Thank you very much."

"Nowadays, do many monks come in here?"

"Yes, both Zen monks and sutra monks come here. Do you meditate?"

"Yes, we meditate at the sutra temple. We also study sutras and have dharma combat."

Then the woman said, "Master, I have question."

"What kind of question do you have?"

"I want to understand the dharma."

"Okay. Any kind of question, ask me." (I am a sutra master.)

"Okay, my question is: You just took a hot bath, so your body is very clean. You clean your body in the hot tub. Where do you clean your mind?"

That's the point. Your body is cleaned in the hot tub. Where do you clean your mind? If you clean your mind, then no problem. Every day you use your mind, thinking: "I like that. I don't like that. Here is good. Here is bad. I go over there. Oh wonderful. I'm not so good." You use your mind, and your mind becomes dirty. So, my question is: You all clean your bodies in the shower every day. How do you clean your mind every day?

Don't know?

If you don't have a mind, cleaning it is not necessary. But if you have a mind, you must clean it! How do you clean your mind?

If you are always checking, checking, checking, you have a problem. Don't check, just do it. If you just do it, then there is no subject, no object; no appearance or disappearance; no good or bad; no high or low; no inside, no outside. Outside and inside become one.

A long time ago, when someone asked Joju Zen Master a question, he would always answer, "Go drink tea." They asked many kinds of questions: "What is Buddha?" "What is the True Way?" "What is Correct Life?" Joju would only reply, "Go drink tea." Go drink tea is correct action, it is everything: Correct Way, Correct Truth, Correct Life. Go drink tea is "Just do it." Don't check. Don't make your mind. Don't make I/my/me. Don't make life and death. Don't make anything. Just do it. Just drink tea. That is the Zen way.

What is Zen? What is Buddhism? What is the correct way, truth, and correct life? There are many words, many speeches about these things. Sometimes speech is important, but sometimes it is a big mistake. So if you are attached to speech, you always have a problem. If your speech has correct function, then there's no problem. Correct speech is very important and will help you, your parents, your country, and all beings. So speech is very important.

Open your mouth, already a mistake. If you close your mouth, then when you see, when you hear, when you smell, everything is truth. Then everything is the correct way and correct life. So, silence is better than holiness. If you have silence, then you attain everything.

What is silence, what is emptiness? Just understanding cannot help you. You must attain silence, stillness, nothingness. Then you will attain everything.

So everyone, only "What am I? Don't know." If you keep this don't-know mind 100%, then already thinking is cut off, there is no thinking. No thinking means empty mind. Empty mind is before think-

Conference with Zen Master Seung Sahn and Stephen Levine

In late June 1987, some 130 people gathered at the Providence Zen Center for a conference entitled "Conscious Living, Conscious Dying" led by Zen Master Seung Sahn and Stephen Levine, nationally known author of "Who Dies?" The two teachers had never met before, but were quickly as affectionate towards each other as two brothers. Together they wove a tapestry that helped the participants explore their beliefs and attitudes about dying. They also introduced forms of meditation and relaxation that are oriented towards helping us release tension and simply be present, moment to moment. Stephen Levine was particularly helpful in introducing Zen Master Seung Sahn and the meaning of his practice and teaching to those who had not met him before. Some of the participants had recent experiences or jobs which brought the issue of death to the foreground of their lives, but the conference went far beyond those particulars to look at not only how we die and face death, but also how we live and how we can be more aware in the world.

Zen Master Seung Sahn is the 78th Patriarch of the Korean Chogye Order and first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. Since coming to the United States in 1972, he has founded the Providence Zen Center and over 50 affiliated groups and centers in the U.S., Canada, Brazil, Europe and Korea, which comprise the Kwan Um Zen School. He travels worldwide teaching Zen, and bringing people together for international peace work.

Stephen Levine is a father, poet, and teacher nationally known for his work with the terminally ill. He has worked extensively with Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and Ram Dass. With his wife, Ondrea, he leads retreats and consults with a number of hospital, hospice and meditation groups in the U.S. and Canada.

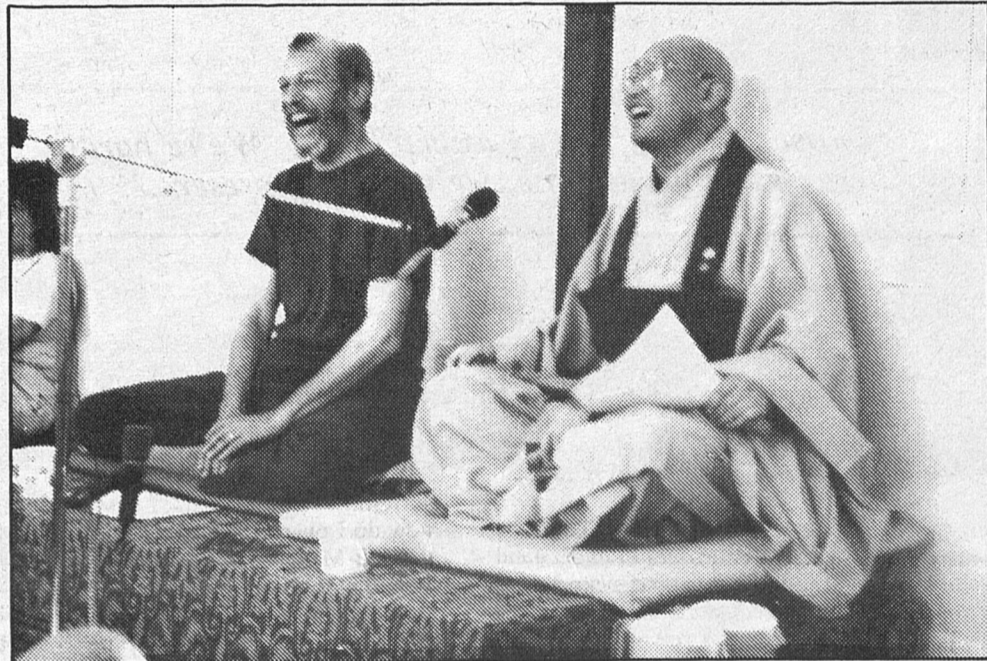


Photo by Do Haeng Sunin

ing. No thinking is clear like space. That is substance: clear like space means clear like a mirror. Red comes, red. White comes, white. The sky is blue, the trees are green. A dog barking, woof, woof. Sugar is sweet. All, just like this, is the truth. This becomes yours. If you only understand "sky is blue," you have a problem. "Sky is blue" must become yours. "Tree is green" must become yours. "Dog barking" must become yours. At that time, you will get enlightenment and understanding of the correct way, truth, correct life.

weren't drinking the tea in our minds before it was ready? Where we weren't impatiently doing five things at the same time? Conflict is generated in the mind. Waiting, imagining, you drink that cup of tea ten times in the mind before it ever touches the tip of your tongue. That is conflict, that is war. You are not in the moment; you are elsewhere. In the mind. In suffering. If you are in the mind, you are in war. If you are in the mind, you are only partially born.

Imagine just making a cup of tea. It's almost too much to imagine. Imagine just no-

"My" sadness is only my opinion making me sad. But when someone sees suffering and says, "That's very sad," then that is Bodhisattva sadness.

SL: When there was war in Soen Sa Nim's homeland of Korea, thirty some-odd years ago, Paul Reps (author of ZEN FLESH, ZEN BONES), wanted to do some intensive meditation practice in Japan. But at the time, Japan was being used as a staging ground for the war in Korea, and the Japanese government wouldn't let non-military personnel come in. Paul Reps was in Australia (I think), and he wanted to go to Kyoto to sit Zen. The Japanese immigration officer in Australia, where Reps was asking for the visa, said, "I'm sorry, you can't come into Japan. There's a war on." Reps turned over the questionnaire for the visa, and on the back of it he wrote, "Making a cup of green tea, I stop the war."

The immigration officer looked at that poem, and read it once or twice, and then he turned over the paper and signed the visa application. He said, "We need more people like you in our country."

It sounds great: "Making a cup of green tea, I stop the war." It would make a great bumper sticker. But what does it mean to make a cup of green tea that stops the war?

I mean, have we ever made a cup of green tea that didn't continue the war? Where we

ting desire in the mind: "Ah, I'd like a cup of tea." Just noticing the vision. Already that cup of tea is steaming in the mind, before you even touch the cold water faucet.

Not forcing it, just doing it, just making a cup of tea. Just walking over and selecting a tea. Just turning on the water faucet. Feeling the cold of the water faucet. Maybe there's condensation on it. Feeling that. Just being there. Just this millisecond, completely real. Everything else is a dream. Everything else is war. Everything else is conflict. Everything else is not now, not here. Not where truth is to be found; not where healing is received.

Imagine feeling the pot slowly filling with water. Notice the feeling of the muscles in the arm as it has to tighten, ever so slightly to increase its support as the pot gets heavier.

Reaching up, feeling the muscles. Feeling the hand extend to turn off the water faucet. Feeling it come back, just this much. Walking across the floor, sensations are generated in the feet. Expectation maybe, is in the mind. Over to the stove. You hear the pop of the gas, perhaps, as it ignites. You

may even notice the curl of the heat around the kettle that touches the hand. You may notice as millisecond of that fear of being burned. But it's all in a flow, one thing after another. That is "Just doing it."

To "just do it" is to do that thing only, to live completely a breath at a time, to be wholly present in the present.

The hand retracts from the pot. Feel the muscles as they contract and expand. Feeling the sensation of this moment, in this body, making a cup of tea. Not waiting for the tea to boil; just making a cup of tea. Sitting down, feeling your buttocks on the chair, your feet on the floor, your arm on the table. Just sitting. Not someone in a room, in a male or female body, waiting for a cup of camomile or jasmine. Just being experienced, unfolding from moment to moment. You can hear the bubbles starting to form in the kettle. Maybe you can smell the water as it just begins to boil. All there is, all there ever will be, is here, moment to moment. No conflict, no waiting, just being. You hear the tea. Ah, a moment of satisfaction.

Standing, noticing before you stand, the intention to stand. What a miracle! Not drawn, not driven, not automatic, not compulsive, not mechanical. Noticing that the mind produces intention before every action. What an exquisite opportunity to unlock the ancient compulsivity, to take conscious birth, at last; instead of compulsively falling through our lives. Hand touches the kettle. Ah, the heat. The feeling of weight. Feeling it. Feeling it. The muscles doing their job. A miracle of body, of mind, of heart. Walking back to the table, hearing sound of your feet on the floor, feeling life, feet on the floor. The pot in hand. Water pouring. The fragrance, that first millisecond of the fragrance of the tea as it touches your nostril. And the rush of conditioning that meets it, liking, disliking, expectation, happiness, unhappiness. Your whole life is in that millisecond. Just do it. Each moment. One thing at a time.

Whisk in the cup. That whisk—whip, whip, whip, whip—against the side of the cup. Not listening to the radio. Not dreaming of television; not five years old in your backyard. Just—whip, whip, whip, whip, whip, whip. Sitting down. Drinking that cup of tea. Feeling the heat on your fingers as you pick it up. The first moment, even before it touches your lips, when you can feel the warmth, when the fragrance is there. Notice how the mind reaches out through the nose and tongue to drink that cup of tea before it can even touch it.

Just a cup of tea. No war, no conflict, no struggle, no intensifying suffering. Just presence receiving tea.

We were sharing this image at a conference similar to this one, and, during a break as I was walking up an aisle toward the back of the room, a fellow with a walker to support weak legs came laboriously towards me. He had a very frail body. He weighed perhaps ninety pounds. He was obviously quite ill. As we came face to face, he looked up at me, and said, "Dying of cancer, I stop the war."

Just dying. No conflict in him. No problem. Just doing it, no problem. It wasn't that he hadn't had problems. It wasn't that he wasn't frightened when he was told he had cancer. It wasn't that there had not been resistance meeting his pain, but that there was such a willingness to be present, such a willingness to be alive, such a willingness to let go of his suffering.

Letting go of our suffering is the hardest work we will ever do. The work of at least a lifetime.

This fellow was so willing not to suffer that he met each moment like that cup of tea. Moment to moment, process. Not lost in conflict. He was like space. He was translucent. "Dying of cancer, I stop the war." There was no conflict in him. There was no problem for him. When he died, his last breath just left. He didn't grasp for the next breath. It went out, and he went with it.

No problem. No conflict. No one dying.

FIRST QUESTIONER: I have difficulty connecting the inner work toward becoming peaceful as an individual and the work on the larger level, for world peace. I don't quite see the connection or the movement from one to the other.

SL: It isn't the people that make war, it's the state of mind. It's greed, it's fear, it's anger, it's distrust. How can we end the war when these are still within us? Internal work may seem like it's not enough. But that's the "not enough" mind speaking, just do it, and then see what happens. See how much more intuitive you are. See how much more present you are. What ends war? Going beyond the conflicted mind and opening into your heart. Compassion ends war. Caring ends war.

People marched with peace signs in the sixties. "Stop burning the children in the jungles of Vietnam." That was a good intention, wanting the end of suffering. But did they stop the war in the name of peace?

Fifty-three thousand American men and women were killed in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. A few hundred thousand men and women returned. Many were met by people with peace signs who spit on them, who called them baby killers, who reviled them. These people held signs saying, "Make Peace, Not War," but they burned the hearts of those men and women coming back from Hell.

Fifty-three thousand were killed on the battlefields of Vietnam, but if the figures I have seen are accurate, more than seventy-five thousand veterans have committed suicide in America. Seventy-five thousand killed themselves. Were they met by peace? The word "peace" is nothing if there is anger in the mind.

I don't know how we can make peace until we can just make a cup of tea, and meet the conflict and the confusion within ourselves with mercy. Without the heart-centered peace, without the lack of conflict within, it is impossible to stop the war. The



By Ellen Anthony

The weekend of "Conscious Living/Conscious Dying" with Stephen Levine and Soen Sa Nim (Zen Master Seung Sahn) was very special. I am not used to sitting still on a cushion and just listening for two days, but one hundred and thirty of us did just that.

"Pain is not suffering. Resistance to pain is suffering. In these next days maybe we can open to our own pain...touch with mercy and kindness that which has been touched with fear," Stephen said.

"Some day we are all dying...Nobody guarantees your life. So moment to moment you die," said Soen Sa Nim.

Much of the time, Stephen and Soen Sa Nim were in dialogue with each other and with us, back and forth, telling stories, joking listening to our stories, sharing their spirit in the large meditation hall.

When Soen Sa Nim introduced Stephen as the more famous one, Stephen laughed warmly and said, "I had the feeling about Soen Sa Nim that I was about to be with an

mind reaches out, says "Give me a solution," but the mind is the problem.

FIRST QUESTIONER: I'm not happy with your answer.

SL: The mind is not happy with not getting what it wants. The mind is at war.

SSN: I only ask you: What are you doing now?

FIRST QUESTIONER: I am feeling sad, now.

SSN: Sad. What kind of sad?

FIRST QUESTIONER: Because I did not get the answer I was looking for.

SSN: Sad is part of it, it is your feeling. What are you doing, what is your body position, and how are you feeling.

FIRST QUESTIONER: I am sitting here, feeling sad.

SSN: All right. Just do it. If you're sad 100%, then there is no "I." When you asked your question, you said "I" feel this way, and "I" don't see that. This "I" has a problem. The "I" makes my opinion, my condition, my situation. If you put down your opinion, your condition, and your situation, then everything is no problem. Where does sadness appear?

FIRST QUESTIONER: I don't know.

SSN: You are holding "my opinion, my understanding." If you have too much understanding, then you have a problem. You must digest your understanding, then wisdom appears. Then with wisdom, if this sadness appears, that is love and compassion. Not "my" sadness, not that "my"

"Most of our life is an afterthought. We're hardly here, we're hardly one, we're hardly present."

feeling.

There are two kinds of sadness. "My" sadness is only my opinion making me sad. But when someone sees suffering and says, "That's very sad," then that is Bodhisattva sadness. Keeping your direction clear every day is very important. If "help all beings" is your direction, then, and feeling—happiness, suffering, sadness—any feeling is no problem.

Once a mother had a child. That child was very sick. The child doesn't understand anything, doesn't understand sickness. So the mother understands more than the child. Soon the child is very sick, the child may die. At that time, the mother doesn't think of anything, she just takes care of her child. That mind is a very important mind. There is no life and death, no happiness or sadness. Only take care of it, only do it. If you keep this mind all the time, then moment to moment everything becomes correct.

SECOND QUESTIONER: I get confused between the idea of being present, moment by moment that you describe, Stephen, and what the Zen Master is talking about, Just doing it, which seems almost unconscious. On the one hand, you're talking about having a consciousness that is present every moment. On the other hand,

old friend I'd never met, which is not unlike dying."

Some participants that I talked with couldn't recall having a "reason" for attending the weekend. But many of us work in hospice or with people with AIDS or have had the experience of visiting a friend or relative who is dying. Some people knew Stephen from his wonderful books, *Who Dies*, *A Gradual Awakening*, *Meetings on the Edge*, and *Grist for the Mill* (with Ram Dass). Others had read *Bone of Space* and *Only Don't Know* by Soen Sa Nim and wanted the rare privilege of sitting with him.

I hope I can give you the flavor of the weekend by relating it to my own situation. When I was getting ready to leave for the conference on Friday night, my friend was late returning my car. I began to feel hot and restless, my mind darting around, "Where is she? What can she be doing? This always happens..." I was about to escalate to "Doesn't she respect my time?" when I looked at her dog, whom I was dog-sitting because he was near death, and saw his brown and white fur heaving out and back, out and back. I remembered why I was

"just doing it" sounds like there is no thinking, and no consciousness. Is there a difference?

SL: Most of our life is an afterthought. We're hardly here, we're hardly born, we're hardly present. We're thinking ourselves walking down the path in the woods. We're thinking ourselves seeing a rose, but we're not smelling, we're not walking. There's not the crunch of gravel, there's not the miracle of nature around. We are someone inside a shell, peering out through thought as a protective mechanism, not allowing ourselves to die into the moment, to just be there. To just do it, is to just be.

Usually we're thinking our lives, instead of just being. What we are describing may sound like another self-conscious process which is only going to cause more problems. But when you are moment to moment meeting with a merciful awareness, the senses, the experience—once you get inside that experience—you see that the fear of being overly self-conscious is only another thought about the experience. Inside of it, it is not that. It is not self-consciousness. It is instead more consciousness of self. Only the mind confuses it. The experience is not confusing at all.

One even gets so that the watcher is noticed as just another object floating in the vast spaciousness of awareness. There is no watcher, just a watching. Because, as long as there is a watcher, there is a point of view. And as long as there's a point of view,

there is confusion.

In fact, as long as there's a point of view, there's war.

THIRD QUESTIONER: I tend to worry a lot about the world situation, about famine, about nuclear war. I was struck by your comment, Stephen, that giving up suffering is the hardest thing we will ever do. I don't know why, but I keep feeling as much suffering as possible. And I was wondering, how do I overcome his resistance?

SSN: Many people look for happiness, freedom, or peace outside themselves. If you look for it outside, you will never get it. In the outside world, everything works by natural process. Nuclear accidents, famines, these all happen by natural process.

But if it is by natural process, then you cannot choose what will happen. Outside, you have no freedom of choice. There is only one way: Where is outside? Where is inside?

Your thinking makes outside and inside, and your thinking makes the line between them. If you have no mind, then you have no thinking, and you don't make inside and outside. So, if you go inside, inside, inside, then inside and outside will disappear, and then you can understand your treasure.

If you find your treasure, then you can do anything. You get peace mind, you get

there: to be with this tired old critter for an afternoon while his mom ran errands. In that moment I realized I was already at the conference on dying and that I had a choice to be angry with my friend or to be present to this dog. So I knelt down by Pretzels and stroked his wispy face hairs. When my friend came home I hugged her good-bye. "Late" became "ample."

The next day Stephen said, "There is no such thing as 'waiting patiently.' Only 'waiting' or 'patient.'" Over and over during the weekend, I heard just what I needed to hear from Stephen, Soen Sa Nim and other participants.

"I am one of those people who is always busy rearranging the room," said a woman who had been visiting a dying friend, "because the pain is too hard."

"What happens if you do nothing?" asked Stephen.

"It's just very painful," she answered. "Is 'just very painful' okay? Of course, the tendency to rescue is very common. So try some small pains first. Start with little moments of distrust, confusion...and build on your capacity...Before you visit, visual-



freedom and happiness. With that mind, you can help other people, moment to moment.

THIRD QUESTIONER: How do you find your treasure?

SSN: WHO ARE YOU? That's all.

I hope everybody goes inside, inside, until inside and outside disappear. The inside and outside become one, and you find your treasure. I hope everybody finds their treasure, gets enlightenment, and helps all beings. Thank you.

SL: In a way, the wars outside ourselves are a mirror, an opportunity to see the war that has been going on inside us forever, the war between the mind and the heart. Let us stop the war. □

HOW TO GET TAPES AND BOOKS

Zen Master Seung Sahn is author of *Only Don't Know*, and *Ten Gates*, which are available from Primary Point Press, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864. A tribute book about his life, including contributions from many colleagues and students, entitled "Only DOing It for Sixty Years," was compiled and edited by Diana Clark and is available from the Kwan Um Zen School, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864. See the order forms in this issue.

Stephen Levine is co-author (with Ram Dass) of *Grist for the Mill*. He also wrote *A Gradual Awakening*, *Who Dies?* and *Meetings at the Edge*. His books and tapes (including meditations) are available from Warm Rock Tapes, P.O. Box 100, Chamisal, NM, 87521.

ize stillness. Visualize the distress before you go and let it arise. Soften. Let it float. As you meet your distress mercifully, it will dissolve, as all things do. Resistance invites it to stay, makes it more intense."

One man who was dying of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease) talked about the grief of losing everyone at once and some lingering feelings of disappointment about his brothers.

Stephen said, "Finishing business means not waiting for someone else to respond. Not give and take, just give. Not to wait for them to respond to it—then you have unfinished business...Just send forgiveness, give, just give."

Meditations on forgiveness, the "ahhhh" breath, and SOFT BELLY were interspersed throughout our questions and answers. I paired up with a massage therapist to learn "co-breathing." He lay on the floor face up. I watched his abdomen and, as he exhaled, I breathed out audibly "ahhhhh," the great sound of letting go. "Ahhh" allows energy release. Co-breathing is one way to be with people who are restless or in coma or near death.

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SOME DAY WE ARE ALL DYING

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One of the most helpful ideas for me was SOFT BELLY. "The belly. Very important," Stephen said. "Much tension in the belly. We can use it as a diagnostic for how present we are. If we keep coming back to soft belly, ground, we can tell the degree of our presence by hard belly."

I had been HARD BELLY with a friend of mine who has AIDS. I would get scared that he would fall down or scared that he would insist on walking beyond his capacity and collapse or that he would be angry and hostile toward me because he was tired of all the "helpers." All of these things had happened before. So, two days after the conference, I was walking next to him and he was unsteady on his feet. I touched the back of his waist to support him. He didn't like it. He took my hand away. I got afraid. He had already fallen that morning. Then I remembered SOFT BELLY. I bent my

knees a little as I walked and breathed lower down. I paid attention to his feet maneuvering the brick walk, grass, flagstones, planks of deck. I saw how careful he was, how precisely he prepared his foot to lift at each rise of the brick walk. And I realized that he might or might not fall and I might or might not catch him. Don't know. But at least my arms would no longer surround him with my anxious tension. I began to enjoy walking with him. I began to notice the poppies and sweet peas near his ankles. And later on, when I rubbed his back with lotion, I felt his skin under my hand, the fine texture of it, the bones underneath. I felt less separation-- his back, my hand, his breathing, mine, comfort, time passing.

Stephen said, "It isn't that we don't have feelings, but not to be afraid of our feelings. Let them pass through. 'Don't know' is soft belly. 'Don't know' is receiving healing. Hard belly is 'can't let healing happen,'

angry preferences, like and dislike, trying to 'get it.'"

In my relationships I often don't let feelings rise and pass, rise and pass. I hold on to them. I want to control myself, other people, my feelings, theirs. So now I ask my belly to go soft, let all rising and falling pass through.

One man who was diagnosed with AIDS said, "I have found people and agencies who are very willing to help me die. I've been fortunate that I've also found some who are willing to help me live. What have you seen in people who go beyond their diagnosis?"

Stephen responded with a story of a very hard belly businesswoman who was dying of cancer and alienating everyone around her by judging and blaming. "After six weeks in the hospital she couldn't stand it anymore...She let herself drop into the pain. All of a sudden she experienced herself as a black Biafran woman on her side in a hut nursing a dying child. She experienced herself as an Eskimo woman dying of starvation with great pain in her back. She experienced herself as an Asian woman crushed by a rock...Finally she said, 'I experienced the ten thousand beings suffering at the same moment. It changed from being my pain to the pain.' In the next six months, her room became the center of mercy. Everyone came to her room...But I don't know what healing is anymore. I don't know."

I have to admit that I did not understand all of Soen Sa Nim's words, but it didn't really matter. "Don't try to understand," he said. "Just do it! ...Someone hungry, feed them. Someone dying, comfort them. No outside, no inside. No subject, no object. Just do it."

Soen Sa Nim gave us several very animated performances where he played all of the roles in the story. "When child play outdoors, fall down, bleed, go play again. Then the mother comes, sees the blood, says, 'Oh! blood! Child remembers...much crying. Our mind makes everything!' He flung his arms around wildly as the child playing, drew his eyebrows up in a horrified expression as the mother, then heaved great sobs as the wailing child. We laughed and

laughed, recognizing our own mind-manipulations.

"When you are thinking, then your mind and my mind are different. But when we don't know, then we have same mind, empty mind, before thinking. Stillness, emptiness, silence... 'Be still and know that I am God...' If you say 'don't know,' then you are the universe, universe is you."

Some of us took the opportunity to sit zazen in the early morning and evening. What a privilege to sit with others and to chant in that full-bodied, no-room-to-think way.

"There is nothing you can do for yourself that will give you what a daily meditation practice can give you," Stephen said. "If you only meditate when you feel like it, then all you see is the 'feel like it' mind. You can't just do it when you feel like it. Then you lose the opportunity to bring into balance the 'feel like it' mind and 'not feel like it' mind."

I had sat at the Providence Zen Center for two days last winter and had difficulty with the chanting--too demanding, foreign sounds, too long sitting, not enough breath in me. But I was told to do it anyway, "This is not a spectator sport!" This time, I really heard Soen Sa Nim when he said, "You can do anything. The choice is: I can or I cannot. Don't check, moment to moment, and you can do anything." So I got into it. I blasted out my syllables of Korean and thoroughly enjoyed not having room to think.

Perhaps the most touching moment for me was Soen Sa Nim's response to the question, "Do you have suffering?"

"If you have suffering, I have suffering. When your suffering is over, then I have no suffering."

Stephen then ended with, "Let yourself die... name, reputation...let all solidity fall away. Let fluidity come, like ice cube melting...In our life, just do one thing at a time. That's the way to prepare for death." □

Ellen Anthony is a writer, artist and former TV producer living on Cape Cod. A Quaker and student of Zen Buddhism, she works with the Provincetown AIDS Support Group.

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