

# PRIMARY POINT

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BRINGING NATIVE AMERICAN AND BUDDHIST TEACHING TOGETHER in the September 1987 "Expanding the Circle, Converging the Paths" conference at Providence Zen Center were (from left) Barbar Rhodes, Twylah Nitsch and Dhyani Ywahoo. See article on page 8. Story and photos by Sid Kemp.

Attaining truth and a correct life

## A NEW ZEN IS APPEARING

by Zen Master Seung Sahn

The following was taken from a talk given to a meeting of the Kwan Um Zen School's governing council on December 13, 1987. Soen Sa Nim was asked to speak about the purpose and vision of the school, which is grounded in the Zen teachings he has been transmitting here since 1972. In this talk he traces a brief but wide overview of the history of Zen teaching. A fuller account of some of the famous Zen stories can be found in *The Blue Cliff Records* and *The Mumon Kwan*.

What are the Kwan Um Zen School's roots in the past? What is the Kwan Um Zen School today? What is its future?

**1. Only practicing** First in the Kwan Um Zen School history is the fact that Buddha appeared in this world and attained enlightenment. He taught his students that everything is impermanent. He taught them about form going to emptiness, and how to attain Nirvana. He gave many Dharma speeches and his disciples only "did it" - practiced what they heard. There were no writings and not much discussion, not much checking [questioning]. At first, Buddhism was only practice and nirvana was the highest experience - "Make my mind the universe." Then Buddhism changed.

**2. From emptiness comes true form** After the Buddha died, his disciples gathered in four meetings to write down what Buddha had said. These writings, called 'sutras,' are not what the Buddha said, the same as the Bible is not what Christ said. They are the words of the disciples. The conventional form of the sutras was to state in the first line, "Thus I have heard..." Through the ensuing years the disciples created what is now called Mahayana Buddhism. It teaches that from emptiness comes true form, which is truth. If you keep an empty mind, your mind is clear like space, clear like a mirror. When

red comes, red. When white comes, white - everything is perfectly reflected. That became the highest teaching and can be found in sutras like the Lotus Sutra and the Platform Sutra.

After Mahayana Buddhism appeared, there was much discussion, much opinion - "Buddha taught this, Buddha taught that..." - much checking. Only studying Buddhism became more prevalent than practicing it.

Within 800 to 1000 years after Buddha's death, there were many volumes written about Buddhism and intellectual dissension with other religions. Also the sects within Buddhism argued with each other. Still there was more studying of the sutras than practicing, more talking and Dharma combat.

**3. "Don't know" practicing** Then Bodhidharma appeared, about 1500 years ago. He went from India to China, where Buddhism had already appeared some 300 years before. It was not a "pure" Buddhism, it was only "praying Buddhism" - "Pray and get happiness, pray and get whatever you want" Buddhism. Many Indian monks went to China teaching this. When Bodhidharma went to China, he saw that it was not correct Buddhism and began to change it.

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## "WHY DO I HAVE TO FINISH THIS?"

By Master Dharma Teacher Mu Deung

This talk was given on January 19, 1984, during the 90-day Winter Kyol Che intensive meditation retreat at Providence Zen Center, led by Mu Deung.

Mu Deung: So, someone left the retreat last night. That's not unusual in a retreat. It's part of growing up. Whatever we do in our practice, we learn from. If we keep a mind that can be a little open, we can learn from everything we do. Whether it's a big mistake or a little one, correct or not correct action, we can learn something about ourselves and other people.

When I was doing my first 100-day solo retreat, at about the 47th day I called Soen Sa Nim [Zen Master Seung Sahn]. I said, "Why do I have to finish this?" Whether we leave or not, have a problem or not, this is not a game. That's the point. My whole life, even at intense suffering times, has been a game. Since I was 13, if you said to me, "Don't do it," I was guaranteed to try it. If you said, "Do it," I might. But guaranteed if you wanted me to do something, all you had to say was "Don't do it."

I wouldn't do just anything. I could perceive that some things were not such good ideas. But anything I had a question about and somebody said, "Don't do," I did, be-

cause I could never believe anybody. I could believe my parents, I respected them and thought they were good parents. But at the same time if they said something I didn't quite understand or wasn't sure of, the only way I thought I could understand for myself was to try it. I got into lots of trouble!

I went away to boarding school. All the dorm masters were telling me not to do things, but I had to do them. Not things like disobeying the curfew or bringing alcohol onto campus or smoking dope - those were pretty clear, set rules. It wasn't necessary to test them. But things like "Don't go and hang around with these kind of people because they're not so good and you might become a bank robber or a bad person." - I was never sure why I shouldn't do them, so I always tried.

I had seen gang movies. They were kind of a big thing when I was growing up - "Blackboard Jungle" and gang fighting

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## IT'S OK TO LET GO: a hospice experience

By Master Dharma Teacher Barbara Rhodes

(The following talk was given at Providence Zen Center on December 16, 1986.)

Most of you know that I'm a nurse and I've been working with a hospice program in Rhode Island. The story I want to tell you is about this patient I've been taking care of since July. She has cancer of the liver and intestines. We have been doing guided meditations together for several months and have gotten very close. I care a lot about her. Her husband is very nice and they have three daughters with little children—it's a lovely Italian family, very close. Through the months I've gotten to know all of them, even the grandchildren.

In the past few weeks my patient has gotten sicker. Her pain has increased, so we've been trying to get the pain under control. She's needed more and more care in the past few weeks and I've spent a lot more time with her. A few days ago she went to bed and didn't get out of it again. When I went to see her Friday, she was almost in a coma and in a lot of pain. We changed her medication again and she got more and more confused.

This was the one thing she had been afraid of: losing control and not being able to understand what was going on. I understand that fear. I think that's why all of us are in this room right now: not being able to understand what's going on, not being able to control in a clear way what we need to do with our lives. I don't mean control in the sense of being rigid, but being able to control our destiny, our needs, our ability to be with our families, with our lives.

She used to say to me, "What is it going to be like when I get so sick that I won't be able to express what I need? I'm going to be so dependent. My family might not be able to take care of me." I told her that I thought it was going to be okay, that I

thought she was just going to be lying in bed and she would slowly lose consciousness. I told her that after all these months, her family would be ready and able to take care of her, and that I would come and help as much as I could.

That's pretty much the way it happened. She got weaker and weaker. As she needed more equipment, I would bring it to the house: johnnies [nightgowns] that are easy to put on and pads for her bed in case she was incontinent and a commode if she couldn't walk to the bathroom anymore. It's a step by step process when people die. Gradually you can't do these things for yourself, so the hospice is prepared for

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## NEW ZEN

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There is a famous story about his first visit to the Emperor in southern China, who told Bodhidharma that he had built countless temples, copied countless sutras and given supplies to countless monks. So he asked Bodhidharma how great was his resulting merit. Bodhidharma replied, "No merit at all."

That was the beginning of the destruction of "praying Buddhism." The Emperor then asked, "What is holy teaching?" And Bodhidharma replied, "Vast emptiness with nothing sacred in it." The Emperor was completely baffled. "Who are you?" he demanded, and Bodhidharma replied, "Don't know." (That is when don't know appeared, our don't know, the same as Bodhidharma's don't know.)

Bodhidharma explained, "If you don't know, and I don't know, that's don't know mind. That's my teaching." At that, the Emperor became his student and later attained enlightenment.

Then Bodhidharma went to northern China to its capital city, Chang An. At that time there were already many famous temples, but he did not stay in any of them. Instead he went to a holy cave near Shao-Lin and sat. (When we traveled to this mountain in 1986, we saw that it was very high and barren.) There were no gardens, so what did Bodhidharma eat for nine years? And what did he do, only facing the wall, for nine years?

That is what we might call 'hibernation practice' - like a snake or a frog going into the ground and not eating anything. Just breathing in and breathing out, very extended breathing in and out. If you practice like this, go 'underground' and do this extended breathing practice, then not eating even for nine years is no problem. In Korea there is a famous monk who has not eaten anything for 16 years.

**4. Mind to mind transmission** After nine years Hui-Ko (the future Second Patriarch) went to Bodhidharma and said, "Please teach me what is Dharma." Bodhidharma replied, "Even if I told you, you would not believe me."

Then Hui-Ko reportedly cut off his own arm: "Oh Master, the pain is terrible! My mind is in awful pain! Please put my mind at rest."

"Give me your mind and I will put it at rest."

"I cannot find it."

"Then I have already given you rest mind."

Then Hui-Ko attained enlightenment.

This was the first Zen teaching - only mind to mind connecting, teacher and student mind becoming one. Transmission went from mind to mind. Here's another example: the Fourth Patriarch was very sick when he was 13. The Buddhists used to meet in a big house, eat together and hear Dharma speeches, but he was so ill that he could not go out. So after one speech, the Master came to visit him.

The boy said to him, "Master, I have very heavy karma, please take it away so that I can become strong and study Buddhism." The Master replied, "Oh, you have heavy

**"The five Zen schools in China died, because they could not connect with everyday life. If we do not correct this, today's Zen will also die."**

karma? I will take it away. Show me your heavy karma."

The boy said, "I can't find my heavy karma."

"I have already taken it away. You are not sick."

"Oh, I am not sick. Why should I be sick?" All his sickness disappeared and he attained something, so he became a student and got transmission.

**5. Don't make anything** The next change in the teaching came with the Sixth Patriarch, who taught about cause and effect, about "making nothing." "If you don't make the cause, you have no effect." "Don't make anything. Then you are nothing, then no trouble." His poem answering the Fifth Patriarch was: "Bodhi has no tree, clear mirror has no stand. Originally nothing, where is dust?" When he gave that poem to the Fifth Patriarch, he got transmission.

**6. The beginning of kong-ans** These enlightenment stories about the Patriarchs and famous teachers began to be told over and over and used as teaching devices. For example, the Sixth Patriarch was famous for this kong-an: two monks were watching a flag ripple in the wind and arguing over which was moving, the flag or the wind. Overhearing them, the Sixth Patriarch said, "Neither the flag nor the wind is moving, it is your mind that is moving." This was very simple teaching.

When the Seventh Patriarch appeared before him, the Sixth Patriarch asked him, "Where are you coming from? What kind of thing comes here? Don't know." This is where the "What am I?" kong-an appeared. It was the same question that the Buddha sat with for six years. Buddha, Bodhidharma and the Sixth Patriarch, all asked "What am I?" and answered, "don't know."

Huai Jang sat in his temple for 8 years with "don't know." He would ask his visitors, "What thing do you bring here?" They might answer, "If you say it's a thing, that is not correct." So a kind of word-fighting began to appear, which we call Dharma combat. At this point it was still very simple teaching.

After him came the Eighth Patriarch, Ma Jo. A country boy appeared before him and asked, "What is Buddha? Ma Jo answered, "Mind is Buddha, Buddha is mind." Later his answers to this question grew more complicated. For a while he used to say, "No mind, no Buddha." And later, "Buddha is not a thing, is not mind, is not Dharma, then what is it?"

There is the famous story of Ma Jo and Pae Chang, riding together in a ship and seeing the geese flying north. Ma Jo asked him, "The geese, where are they going?" Pae Chang answered, "North." "North?" Ma Jo exclaimed, and twisted Pae Chang's nose very painfully. Pae Chang got enlightenment. When he returned home, he cried and cried. A friend asked him, "Why are you crying?" "Go ask the Zen Master." So the friend asked why Pae Chang was crying. Ma Jo told him, "Ask Pae Chang." The friend went back and said to Pae Chang, "The Zen Master said to ask you." Then Pae Chang began laughing. So, crying and laughing, are they the same or different?

**7. Simple, one-point answers to kong-ans**

After Pae Chang came Hang Guk, then Rinzai (Lin Chi), and at the same time many other lines appeared: Un Mun, To Ban, Da Hui, Wi San, and many other Zen Masters. Then the answer to the question, "What is Buddha?" became "Dry shit on a stick." "Three pounds of flax." And Jo Ju gave his famous answer to the question, "Why did Bodhidharma come to China? The cypress tree in the garden." These were one point answers, very simple, very direct.

After that many schools appeared, and there was some fighting between them. Many techniques also appeared, many different intellectual styles. Before, the teaching had been very simple. When these intellectual styles of teaching appeared, Dharma combat also appeared. Thus we have the **Blue Cliff Record** and the **Mumon Kwan**. There was much discussion as the wisdom of Zen developed. Practicing was very clear, but it was considered just one of several special techniques.

**8. Magic or 270° style** Zen began to look much more complicated to ordinary people. The practice of Zen and peoples' everyday, normal lives grew far apart. With esoteric sayings like "The wooden chicken cries, the stone tiger flies in the sky," people didn't understand. Zen became a practice only for the elite, in other words, your hair appears higher than your head. "Do you see the horn of the rabbit?" - everyday people didn't understand this kind of talk. You had to look at the hidden meaning behind the words, because the words themselves were not the true meaning.

This went on for a while, then more direct talk appeared again. "What is Buddhism?" was answered with "Spring comes, the grass grows by itself." "What is the true way? The sky is blue, the tree is green." - direct, one sentence answers. In the past, the answer had been a single word or action - "What is Buddha?" Hit! One

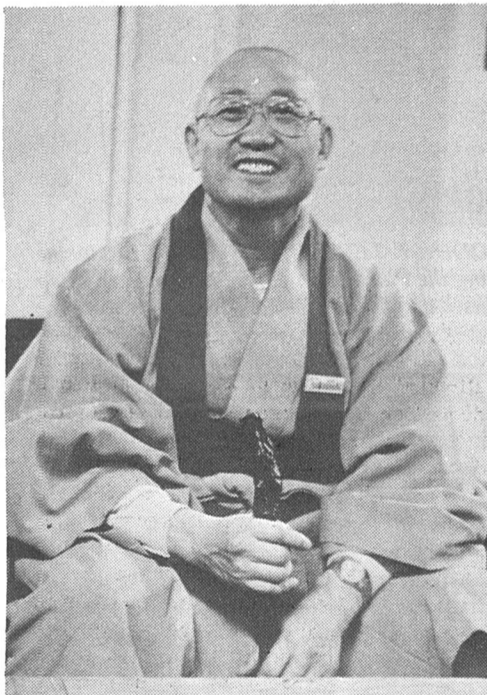
point. Then the answers to this question went through many changes. One sentence answers appeared, and later, even more more complicated forms. But they were all teaching truth.

**9. Correct function of an enlightenment experience** Truth means, how can you attain your true self, how can you attain your truth? How can you attain the correct way? This is now still the primary teaching in Japan, Korea and China. They start with how to attain the truth, the true self. But it is also very important to attain the correct way. What is the correct function of truth, the correct function of your true self? - this they do not teach.

**"We use kong-ans to make our direction correct, to make our practice and our life correct. That is the teaching of the Kwan Um Zen School."**

So the Kwan Um Zen School has appeared in the United States. Some schools are very focused on an enlightenment experience: what is enlightenment? They want to attain this truth, but they are missing the correct function of an enlightenment experience. Attaining your true self doesn't matter. When we first begin, both ways are necessary: attaining enlightenment and its correct function. If we attain the correct function of our true self, we attain truth. This is correct attainment.

If we want to attain our true self, a correct life is necessary. So we say, put it all down, don't make anything, moment to moment keep correct situation, correct function. Moment to moment do it! Doing



Photos by Paul Stevenson

it means we have already attained our true self. But we don't understand that, we don't believe that, so we must keep trying. Then correct function and attainment happens all at the same time. That is the Kwan Um Zen School teaching.

Only attaining truth is 'monk Buddhism': only keep your hair cut and go to the mountains, practice your whole life. Correct function is not necessary because you have no wife, no children, and no connection to society. But everyone else has hair, has a wife or a husband, children, job - how do we connect this everyday life and Zen? This is a very important point.

In the Kwan Um Zen School, it doesn't matter whether you are monk or layman. Everybody "does it" and at the same time attains true self, enlightenment. Correct function with correct life, at the same time - understand?

**10. Using kong-ans to make our lives correct** Our teaching is kong-an practicing. In the past, kong-an practicing meant checking attainment, checking someone's enlightenment. Now we use kong-ans to make our lives correct. This is a different way of using kong-ans than the traditional Zen way. In the light of our teaching, some of the kong-ans are correct and helpful, some are not. Whether they are correct or not doesn't matter. We use kong-ans to make our direction correct, to make our practice and our life correct. That is the teaching of the Kwan Um Zen School.

"Kwan Um" means perceive sound. This means perceive your true self. At the same time, perceive inside and outside. Perceiving this world sound means perceiving that many, many people are suffering. If you can hear this sound of suffering, then helping is both possible and necessary. That

is the Bodhisattva way. How to help other people is our practice and our job. It's not only attaining enlightenment, it's enlightenment's job. Enlightenment is a monk's job, but only someone like a Zen monk has the circumstances to do it: no family, no job, everyone giving support.

Your practicing is not a monk's job - it is how to help other people. First your family, then your friends, then your country and all beings: helping them is your obligation. If you want to help correctly, put down your opinion, your condition, your situation. If you do not put down these things, you cannot help. If you put them down, then true love appears. This means not special. Just

keeping your moment to moment correct situation is very simple. The name for that is love, compassion. That is the practice of the Kwan Um Zen School today.

It's a change in Zen practice and teaching. In order to do that, we need a school that both parents and schoolchildren can attend. This is not the old style. Korean Zen has not come here without changing. Many changes have been necessary. We do kong-an practice, but some Korean monks looking at our Zen style have said, "That's not Zen." Yes, it's not Zen. Zen doesn't matter. Original Zen is not Zen. Nothing is Zen. In fact, we don't understand what Zen is.

Ever since its beginning, Zen has meant many changes. It started with Bodhidharma, then after the Sixth Patriarch it changed. Five schools of Zen appeared, all different. Many sicknesses appeared, Zen sicknesses. The five schools in China died. Why? Because they could not connect with everyday life, with society. If we do not correct this, today's Zen will also die. If it is only monk Zen, it will soon die.

In China, Korea and Japan this kind of group does not exist: laypeople staying in a Zen Center, a temple, doing together action, meditation and practice. This has begun in America. It has never happened before - it's new, a new Zen. So it is necessary to have a new direction and new practices. We don't call it American style, it's just everyday life and correct direction.

Zen is a kind of revolution. In the future, what will happen? This kind of practicing will be very important: how does your practice connect with your life? How does your practice help other people? If it helps you, it will help other people, help this world. Then your practicing will connect with world peace.

There are many opinions in this world. Americans have American opinion. Russians have Russian opinion. All religions have their own opinion. They are attached to something. That is this world's sickness. In the future, it will be necessary to teach this kind of practice: you must wake up, ah! Then what, does being human mean? Being human means no meaning, no reason, no choice. But if you attain no meaning, you get Great Meaning. That is, put down any kind of opinion, any condition, any situation, then your life becomes complete. This will help your family, your country, this world.

This teaching means that if we practice sincerely and share our wisdom and teach correctly, there will be no more fighting among religions, among countries, no more atom bombs. If we take away the weapons, this money can go to India and Cambodia. Then world peace is possible. That's Kwan Um Zen School's future. □

## NOTICE

Due to an ever-busy schedule, Zen Master Seung Sahn is no longer able to answer teaching letters. You are invited to correspond with any of the Master Dharma Teachers. For a list of their names and addresses, write to Kwan Um Zen School, 528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864. Thank you.