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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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movies. These gangs were always depicted as not so good people. So I moved into New York City for a summer and my street was a Spanish neighborhood, one side Spanish and the other side Greek. There were gangs on both sides. I could recognize them as gangs from all the movies I had seen. They were hanging out on the street corner, in front of the laundromats. The second day I was in the city I was walking around and saw this group. I wanted to see what a gang was, so I walked up to this group of three guys - really rough-looking guys. Here I was, with a crew cut and from a private school. I didn't know anything about the street. I came from a small country town in Hawaii and never grew up in the city. My first experience away from home was in a boarding school.

So I went up to these street kids and said, "You guys want to be friends?" They were scared. I guess they thought I looked crazy, so they wouldn't touch me. Even if you are mean, fighting a crazy person is difficult. They thought I was crazy, so they only looked at me and walked away.

Every day I thought that all I had to do was just hang out on the street corner where they were and we would get to know each other. I would stand on the corner and eyeball them (which I found out later was not such a good thing to do). But that was okay because they were already scared of me. They thought I was eyeballing them because I was going to attack them the first chance I had. Anyway, we never became friends.

I tried lots of things like that. When I was about 19, I went to Washington Street in Boston [the so-called "Combat Zone"]. People said prostitutes and gay people and street people were no good, so I asked why. These people and I have a human body. We eat the same food, all require sleep, all have some kind of job to make money. They also have feelings, people they care about, parents. What is our difference? Yes, their action and speech is different, but just because of those things, does that make them bad?

For a year I sometimes hung out with them. I didn't do a lot of the stuff they did, but I hung out with them. For some reason they accepted me even if I didn't do complete together action with them. That was no problem for them. And I saw that they were not so different. They liked to have parties. They cared about each other, had feelings. They weren't especially meaner than some husbands and wives and families are to each other. I couldn't figure out what the difference was. This was a big question.

"For me, practice had often become an intellectual game."

Then I began practicing Zen. At that time "What is this life?" was a big, big question. But soon it became a game. You know, how many koans can you answer? I didn't know it had turned into a game. When I first started practicing, sitting was very painful. I had to put out a lot of effort. My first two or three years were difficult. When I sat, it was intense and I was really looking for something. After a while it became a way of life. Retreats, doing things around Zen Centers, became just things to do. Sometimes there was a question, but generally it was just going along, like we go along in our daily life with a question.

Then yesterday I talked to Soen Sa Nim. He always says, "If you make a mistake, then make it correct." So I said to him, "There's good action and then there's mistake action. If a mistake can help you learn, why not make it anyway?" Silly question, huh? He looked at me and shouted strong and loudly, "This is not a game!"

Then pow! That question, "What am I?", appeared again. For me, practice had often become an intellectual game. So when Soen Sa Nim said, "This is not a game!", he was a little pissed. Then "put it all down, your opinion, your condition, your situation" (a frequent teaching of his) means something, not just words. If these are just words to you, then it's a game.

"Not a game" means what? Try. "Not a game" means try mind. At the end of our talk Soen Sa Nim did a little more shouting. "Checking, checking - I don't like that." So I said, "You are my teacher. I come in

here and tell you anything and you yell at me. Then I understand, but only for a short time. Then this checking appears again. When I come in here again, you must yell at me again. So, you must yell at me a lot." He said, "Correct! That's try mind. 'Not afraid' mind. Try mind is the mind that says 'Mistake, not mistake, doesn't matter....just try.'"

Holding an opinion of yourself or of some situation, not exposing yourself, that's okay. But when you can completely expose yourself, whatever that means, without anything, only asking "what is this? Don't know....okay, only try." That's try mind.

If we don't open ourselves, we cannot see anything. Koan practice is like that: only reflect. Only reflect everything completely. Mistake, not mistake, doesn't matter. Only what comes out - poof! Aha! That's a mistake! But what did that do? It took away some shield, some veil. Even if it's a mistake or not a 100% correct answer, it's taken away some veil. If you keep doing that, doing that, finally the correct answer comes out - poof, aha! Then what? You can begin to trust exposing yourself.

So whether you leave a retreat or not, it doesn't matter. You've already exposed yourself. Every moment you sit you've exposed yourself to yourself. Then when we can completely expose ourselves to ourselves and believe it, then we can see. "Aha, now I trust myself, now I believe myself 100%." But it doesn't end there.

"Now I believe myself" means I also see I have this karma. If you can perceive your karma, then you can change it, maybe, then you can use it. All the time, your karma is controlling you, but when your direction becomes clear, you can see your karma. When your direction becomes clear and strong, then your karma can follow you, which means only go straight don't know. Then you have no attachment to your karma and you can begin to use your karma.

Soen Sa Nim says that try mind is already enlightened mind. So only sit, only try, only go straight don't know. These days I think try mind is the most important thing there is, the only thing we have that's substantial. What else have you got to hold onto? This life? This feeling? This attainment, no attainment? How can you hold that? How can you hold clear eyes? Maybe you got enlightenment, how do you hold that? Nothing's guaranteed. Everything's always changing. You cannot hold your life. "Coming empty-handed, going empty-handed, that is human." That means we cannot hold anything.

But there is one thing you have that is not changing: don't know plus try mind. That's guaranteed. You don't even have to try to hold it, it's yours. But you must make use of it, find the correct direction for it. The name for that is only go straight, try for 10,000 years.

Several days ago we were talking about a lot of spiritual leaders in this world and different kinds of groups, and how at the outset, they all have something to give people. Sometimes this direction becomes a proud thing: "I've got this, I attained that." Then this try mind slowly away and everything becomes cloudy again, not sure, not clear.

A Zen Master said, "So you attain enlightenment, so what? If you don't practice, all that's going to be left is a trace of a memory." The Heart Sutra says, "No attainment with nothing to attain." But that does not mean "no attainment." It means try. In clear try mind, there's no idea of something to attain, only try. Why is there no idea? Because try is "don't know" and don't know has no word, no name, no form, no speech, so no attainment with nothing to attain. You don't know what you're going for.

You are sitting with the mantra "Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal." But what will you get from it? Do you know? You don't know. You have no idea what you'll get from it. That means trying "don't know." "Nothing to attain" means completely, 100% don't know. Do you understand? Neither do I.

Before, I used to practice with Kozan Roshi. When he was a student, he thought there was something to attain. He was afraid of heights, so he wanted to attain no fear of heights. He practiced a lot. Out in the country in Japan there was a big well. At night he would put a plank across it, a one by twelve inch plank, and then sit on the plank. There weren't any houses

around, so if he fell in, he was probably a goner unless someone happened to walk by.

He would do that at night, go there and say, "I'm going to sit all night." Then he would crawl out on the plank. He had to be really careful. After a while he found he could crawl out there and not be afraid, so that it was very easy to sit. He didn't have to sit up rigidly and be aware all the time, he could doze. That's how easy it became. So he thought he had attained something.

Next he went to Tokyo. Around the top

"Whether you leave a retreat or not, it doesn't matter. You've already exposed yourself."

of big skyscrapers there is a little wall called a parapet. So he went up on a 16-story building and walked around the parapet. He had practiced sitting on the well so he would not be afraid. Then to test this "not fear" he went up on the skyscraper and managed to walk around without much of a problem. He walked around several times before the police came and took him away. They put him in jail for being crazy. His teacher had to come and sign him out.

I said to Kozan Roshi, "Your teacher signed you out. Then what did he say?" Kozan Roshi said, "At that time I thought Zen meant getting some magic, some special superhuman characteristic like being able to fly or not having any fear. My teacher shouted at me, scolded me and said, 'This is not the reason you are practicing.' Then I said, 'what do you mean? Then why?' And my teacher replied, 'In Zen there is no attainment with nothing to attain, but why do you do that?'"



Master Dharma Teacher Mu Deung (formerly See Hoy Liou) was born in Hawaii and has two teenage sons living in Los Angeles. For a number of years he was Abbot of Dharma Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles (formerly known as Tahl Mah Sah). He studied at the California Institute for the Arts and worked as an industrial designer. In 1974 he began studying with Soen Sa Nim. A skilled carpenter, he has worked on many building projects within the Kwan Um Zen School, most recently supervising the renovation of the Cambridge Zen Center. He was ordained a Bodhisattva monk in 1982, a full monk in 1984, and is now living as a Bodhisattva monk at Cambridge Zen Center. He was named a Master Dharma Teacher in 1981 and travels in North America and sometimes Europe, giving talks and leading retreats.

But we have to attain that "nothing to attain" so that we can return to our human nature. We all think there is something to attain in this life: good car, good money, good job. So we all fight each other, lie to each other, cannot get along together. If you attain "no attainment with nothing to attain," which means "not only for me," then this life is very simple. Then you and I have a chance of getting along. We don't have to compete. You and I are already the same, which is "don't know," so we sit Kyol Che.

This together action takes away competition. Why? Because together action

makes everybody equal. We all wear the same robes, eat out of the same colored bowls. In this together action, we're equal now. We have this opportunity to see, at least to taste that we are equal and that there is something common to all of us which is much deeper than some personal goal we want to attain.

There's something a little deeper that haunts us. That's why we're practicing here. We serve food to each other. Sometimes serving in my house is only for me.

But we come here and take this pot and serve everybody. It doesn't seem special, but it has a taste of "not only for me," a small taste anyway. Three times a day we do only that for 90 days. Then somewhere in our consciousness that idea becomes a habit, which means just doing it. This habit's name is great love, great compassion.

We all know these are the correct things to do. But we have to attain that so it comes naturally, so we don't have to be confused about whether some action is correct or not. We can just do it.

Q: You said earlier that on your 100-day retreat, you felt like you had enough sitting. What kind of mind did you have, that made you think like that?

Mu Deung: I had "I am" mind, which means "Oh, I'm already finished. I can do anything. I have freedom." That mind.

Q: What did Soen Sa Nim say to you?

Mu Deung: I said to him, "Soen Sa Nim, now half of the retreat is over and it's no problem." Before, I had talked about always having this mind that wanted to try something, especially if someone said don't do it. When I went on this retreat, the mind I had was not retreat mind. Lots of people go on retreats and think, "I'm going to practice hard for 90 days and only follow my schedule, and I will do it!" That's try mind. When I went on retreat, I made up my schedule and then said, "I'll see what it's like." So I didn't have try mind, I had "see what it's like" mind, kind of like "checking it out" mind.

When fifty days came and I wanted to leave, it was no problem. I had to hitchhike a long way, six or seven miles to the outskirts of a little town, to get to a public phone. I called Soen Sa Nim and said, "The next 50 days are no problem. My body can do it. If you say, 'stay,' then I will stay. But why should I do that?" Asking him meant I thought I already had freedom mind and it wasn't necessary to finish the retreat.

Soen Sa Nim said, "You must only try." I said, "Yes, I can, but why?" Then he said, "For all people," and slammed down the phone. It took me two hours to get back home, and the only thing in my mind was "For all people - what on earth does that mean?" I asked him, why sit? And he said, for all people. What does this sitting do for all people? For the next forty days I only had this question. I had no choice. It wasn't that I asked myself the question, it was there all the time. "For all people - what on earth could that possibly mean?"

It was there while I was eating, while sleeping, while practicing. I just wanted to vomit. I wanted it to be out and done with. I didn't care whether I found an answer or not, I just didn't want the question any more. Then one day I was sitting and all of a sudden it wasn't there at all. I didn't understand anything, but it wasn't there. I was very happy.

Q: Did you finish the retreat?

Mu Deung: Yes. That happened on the 87th day. I only had 13 days more. Those last 13 days were just a bliss-out because I didn't have this frustrating question. It was like going to the beach and lying around, but better than that. I could just do it: get out, chant, sit, wash my clothes. I thought that was wonderful.

When I came down from my retreat, I still had that good feeling for three days afterwards - "only do it" mind. Any kind of action, I could only do it. Some people said, Korean people like to take you out after a retreat like that, it's a big deal. So let's take you out to dinner. Let's do this or that. Anything, I could do it. Then after 3 or 4 days it was done. "I" appeared, then all karma appeared. Then again, only sitting, still sitting, still trying, only go straight don't know. □