

this?" on the in-breath, and "Don't know" on the out-breath. For a long time I did that.

George: Just throw yourself into it, whatever it is— fly closer and closer to the flame until you're gone! It's very difficult to practice pure *not knowing*. I think it's the most wonderful, challenging thing in the world. I have this wild love affair with Zen practice, but it's very difficult to *just sit*. The tendency is to fool ourselves and to think that we are practicing when we're just lost in our own fantasy and just spaced out. "I just don't know." "No Problem." "Don't know." Hey. That's not practice. That's automatic pilot. You slip into your invisible, familiar self. And every time you do that what happens is then you slip into doubt, or you feel cheated. Like, I don't need to do this. Just "Don't know." Or you slip into hiding but you don't know what you're hiding from.

Yes, it's very hard to just sit. And traditionally in Zen practice, in the purest form, we're studying the self. We're not studying the art of attention. The art of attention is like studying a tape recorder and taking each little piece apart and you realize that there's nothing left. That, if you're really careful, you could put it back together again and there's your tape recorder. That's a kind of Vispassana style. Zen studies the self, itself, how it comes to be born and how it dies. Where does this wave of experience come from? How does it manifest itself, what does it return to?!

Traditionally with Buddhist practice, it's taught that there is a balance between concentration and focus, and this open hearted quality. So both are necessary and both are absolutely important. And the foundation of practice is concentration. The foundation of our practice is Samadhi, which is not some sort of space zone but the ability to pay attention to

nothing under it. Otherwise you will suspect that there's something under it. Right? So you have to look. You cannot take your doubt lightly. You have to exhaust your doubt, completely. So if you think it's under the glass of water, look. Nope. Now look around this room. There are a lot of hiding places here. Look under the mike. Nope. There is a moment of relief for each one of us. When we've looked and we say, "Whew, just like I read." "I can relax now, it's not there." And then the doubt appears again. That's what we call exhausting the *Hwado*.

But rather than trying to get rid of the doubt we'll look again for this ungraspable fundamental principle. And maybe you'll think it's under the cushion, so you look under the cushion and it's not there. Well, we're working on it now. We know where it's not. It's not under the glass. It's not under the mike and not under the cushion. The closet! It's back there. And during walking meditation you can just sort of peek, but it's not there. Or maybe you get in bed at night, if you're on a platform bed, you might think it's under the bed. Or under your Zafu. So we continue this practice of sincerely looking into this matter of, "Is it there?"

What we find continually is that it's not there. Sometimes this causes us frustration, disappointment and anger, all from the perspective of the small I. But from another perspective, this can mean our liberation, our release and to our becoming a truly sane and loving human being. So, we look and look and finally, we begin to get the message from the other side. Rather than from the fearful side of losing what we never had to begin with, we start to experience it and perceive it from this other perspective. This "I" does not exist.

"There is no attainment with nothing to at-

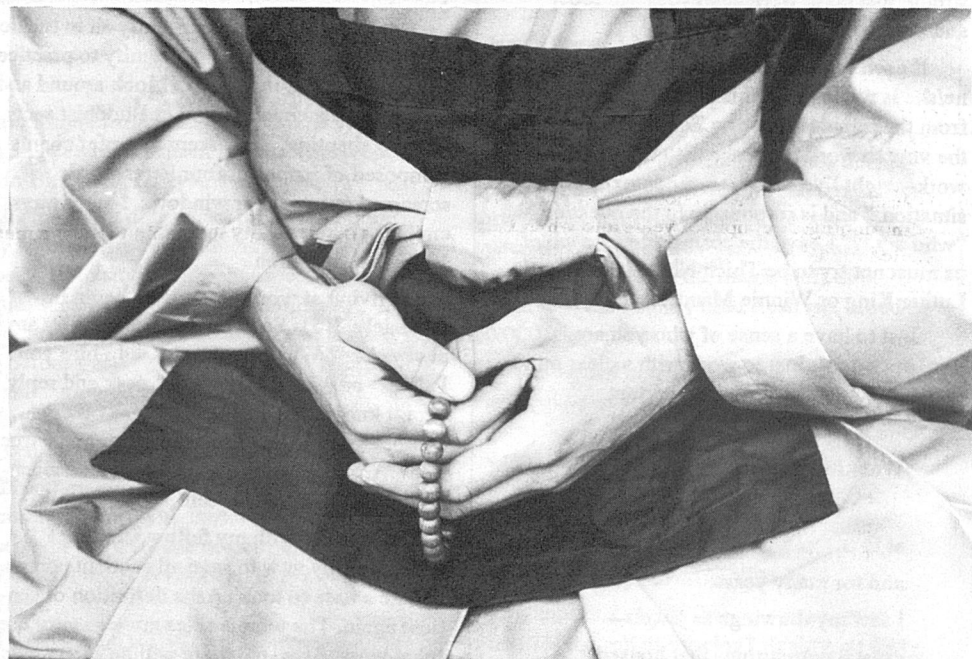


Photo by Steve Wunrow

one thing and to keep your attention there. And you are either doing it or you aren't. It's that simple. Feel your breath. Are you with it or aren't you? Or is your mind a mad gorilla, somewhere swinging through the trees? And if it is, be aware of that and continue. You can collect yourself so that you can in time actually feel your whole breath. It's a wonderful, wonderful experience to be able to sit in the evening and to enjoy a quiet and peaceful Samadhi with occasional thought fading by. Simple. But it's a wonderful thing, the content of that moment of experience, whether it be a happy moment or a sad moment. The content of each moment of experience is that which doesn't move. That which is clear and before thought. That's what practice is. Realizing that each moment of experience has as its content zero. Or Not-moving Mind. Or Mu itself. Or "Don't know." Or Buddha Nature. Or whatever you're comfortable talking about. And in order for you to realize that clearly you have to stay with it and see what it is that's happening. What's happening is the truth.

So, in the Zen tradition if you can focus your attention on anything. If you can understand one particle of dust clearly, you've got the whole picture. Because everything is working under the same fundamental principle. It's an interesting thing, this not knowing. What am I? It's completely unknowable. Completely ungraspable. Where is it? Oops, almost saw it that time. I'll try again. I mean you have to look under the glass of water to see that there's

tain." This is not a belief or understanding or experience— this "I" is simply not to be found. That's a tremendous relief. It's like being on a wonderful desert island, filled with fruits and vegetables, where you can fish and the sun shines brightly, and every conceivable thing is there right at your fingertips. But you are convinced that this island belongs to someone else. And the owner is going to appear momentarily and snatch it away from you. You've really covered the island thoroughly and could not even find another foot print. You could never find anyone, then it would dawn on you, "It's my island. I can enjoy the sunlight. I can eat the fruit. I can swim in the ocean. I can roll in the sand. It's my home." Imagine. "Sariputra perceives that all five skandhas are empty and is saved from all suffering and distress."

Well, then let's go back to our sitting, and take refuge in the Buddha. Taking refuge in the Buddha is taking refuge in ourselves. Now we can take refuge in the fact of our experience, trusting and taking refuge in what we are experiencing because it is true and entirely trustworthy. No one knows better than you how it is for you. Take refuge in the Sangha, which is all sentient beings. Sentient beings, from our perspective of Dharma practice, includes the stones and the trees and this floor and our cushions. So, let's sit still and appreciate this moment!

First Kyol Che

by Do Won

Kyol Che is the Korean name for the 90-day retreat that is held twice a year (winter and summer) in Korea and has been held at Providence Zen Center (or across the pond at the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery) every winter since 1980. Kyol Che's are also starting in Poland. Do Won is a senior student of Zen Master Seung Sahn and is Abbot of the Providence Zen Center.

The meaning of 'Kyol Che' is *Tight Dharma*. It is a time for intensive practice. Silence is maintained except for functional talking, one-on-one interviews with the teacher twice a week and the one or two Dharma Talks a week. Participants can do one to four, 3-week intervals, and there is an intensive week in the middle of the Kyol Che (when 12 midnight to 2 a.m. practice is added onto the schedule).

Over the years the schedule has changed slightly, but generally it means rising at 4:45 a.m. and practicing through most of the day until bed at 9:40. Fifteen minutes of prostrations are the kick-off to the day, followed by sitting meditation from 5:30 to 7 and then 45 minutes of chanting. Shortly thereafter we have a formal breakfast followed by a work period and again sit until the formal lunch at noon. After lunch is the longest break of the day— almost one hour (a treasure time— I would generally walk to a solitary spot in the woods to sit and look and listen or would add my own voice to the sounds of nature with chanting). The practice begins again at 1:30 and goes until 4:30. These sitting stretches are generally 30-40 minutes with 10 minutes of walking meditation in between. Occasionally, there is a long walking meditation outside during the afternoon. A light, formal supper is served at 5:30, chanting is from 6:30 to 7:30, and sitting goes again until 9:30 when the evening winds up with one final effort: chanting together for 10 minutes. (Kyol Che in Korea maintains a schedule that is very similar except wakeup is at 3 a.m. when the Korean temple where it is held begins the day.)

Kyol Che offers the opportunity to simplify the structure of our life and serves as a wonderful background against which to attend to mind's functioning. Outward distractions are minimized so that our focus can more readily return to this moment.

To me, a new student before my first Kyol Che, it sounded wonderful—a perfect and rare opportunity to hunker down with the habits of mind that seemed to me to hinder a clearer, more energetic and compassionate functioning of my life. And the group support would be so useful in maintaining the schedule—in not buying into my own wavering mind when the original intention and motivation would be fogged in. It seemed like a very good idea, and making that space in my life was possible. So...

Lying awake for a little while before the bell and listening to the stirrings of those still asleep and those beginning to awake— outside in the woods and on the pond the sounds are still too quiet to hear. Some mornings it's still hard to get up and others it's easy and natural. In any case these is no choice: We're all sleeping together here on the Dharma Room floor, so it's time to get up, roll up our mats and sleeping bags, put them away and use the bathrooms quickly. Then we meet back at our seats for bows. Today I'll try again to be, mentally as well as physically, here for bows— or at least for one third of them— so far it's probably been about one eighth.

Today is interviews— good— a break for the old knees and back— but then there's that damn kong-an. George gave me this one four months ago and still no clarity about it. (Hey— cut the crap— stay with this moment— What is this!?)

How can I sit really deeply when there is this person next to me sneezing for the 20th time? Once more— just one more time, and I'll scream!

Oh, God! The pain is too awful— surely we've sat past the scheduled time. Is the Head Dharma Teacher sleeping— or is she simply

torturing me? I've read stories about this, purposefully making us sit longer to push our limits. Well, it's damn inconsiderate. Don't they know how painful this is? (Sound of the wooded clapper) Oh— right on time— my thinking again.

Okay. Just walk around this room... One step at a time... Whoops— once again I haven't been here for 7 minutes— okay— there are 3 minutes left— just come back to this step and this step.

Bananas again?! I want something more substantial— and some variety. Boy! when this thing is over I'm going to the "Swiss Alps" for cheese fondue and salad with that wonderful house dressing and wine and chocolate mousse and coffee.

Gradually there is a change— small inroads into complaining, wanting mind— periods of quiet; light changing on the floor as a cloud passes overhead. The small bruise on an apple— wow! It tastes of slightly hard cider.

And bows— at times it is just the movement of the body, up and down— and not just me. This whole group moves as one— one body— is this it? When I finish here I'll give a Dharma Talk about this experience: This is what practicing is about! Whoops— How many bows have we done? There are countless ways to lose this moment, even through wonderful insights and feelings.

Interviews again... there's the bell... my turn... up, walk to the room... close the door... holding this question carefully. The same question asked— still no answer... return... sitting down. Oh, that's it! Of course! So simple, so obvious, open the window of mind ever so slightly— the joy of a fresh spring breeze...

And now a new kong-an. There's no handle on this one. Anyway, I look at it— just a smoothly polished metal ball with no place to catch hold or to penetrate. Impossible! Let it go. What is this?!

Day after day— how many now? 65? That willow— every day now there's some sense that buds are beginning to expand. The cold creaks of winter winds are giving away to enormous winds carrying some warmth. More frequently now there are downright balmy days. Today after lunch with my sweatshirt off, I'm down to a t-shirt. The big rock I sit on more often now gives warmth rather than draws it from me.

83 days? One week left. Can't believe it. All these days and minutes are suddenly almost at an end. Such mixed feelings arise. Family, friends soon to see and talk with. And these increasingly precious moments on the cushion soon to decrease. So what is this! Let's not waste this time.

And this group. I know next to nothing of anyone's like history yet some strong bond has grown here— through sharing this effort together. The idea of one body/mind has given way to a fuller experience of one body/mind— so much more complete than the idea and so ordinary, too... What is this? Breathing, light changing— still pain at times but the flow of the day and its rhythm is smoother with less struggle. Still many kong-ans unanswered— and these, too, are part of the rhythm. The willow is glowing with a light yellow-green. Spring bird songs fill our ears. No more creaking of the massive trunk with these gentler winds.

Tomorrow we finish. Tonight many of us sit later and rise earlier, a habit that has been gradually happening over the last few weeks. All of our habits seem to remain, and yet softer— the raw energy of beginning has given way to a more supple movement as group; the openness of the air jives with the milder air of Spring.

Today we finish— stay with it... What is this? Movement— of light, of season, of bodies through the day, of each of us offering a stick of incense and any merit earned to all sentient beings, of packing our bags and hugging and speaking 'hello' and 'goodbye' and moving on.