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PRIMARY POINT

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ONE PERSON'S ENERGY HELPS ALL PEOPLE

An Interview on Family and Practice with
Zen Master Seung Sahn

Primary Point (PP): In many families now, both the husband and wife have to work. They also have children and social responsibilities. How can the parents make a living, raise a family and still have time to practice?

Zen Master Seung Sahn (Dae Soen Sa Nim): If you have children and both parents are working, it can be very difficult to practice, especially if you live outside of a Zen Center. So, some kind of together action practicing with children is necessary. Simple exercises like breathe in, breathe out; hands up, hands down, like in Tai Chi; make a circle with your arms and breathe deeply. Children like doing these kinds of exercises with their parents. You can do this together action at

home every morning and evening, just for ten minutes. Then, maybe you can sit for awhile, with the children joining you for a few minutes. Husband and wife should also do one hundred and eight bows every day, together. Altogether, the practice should take one hour every day.

PP: How old should the children be?

DSSN: At least seven years old. Doing some kind of "Tanjen" practicing (i.e. breathing in and breathing out from "hara" — the area just below the navel) is very important. Then, their consciousness becomes very clear. When children are growing up, they cannot control their feelings. They often have only "I want" mind— anger mind. If you do breathing

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Altered States of Consciousness

by Lincoln Rhodes, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

Lincoln Rhodes, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim, holds a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from M.I.T. He has been instrumental in the formation of many Zen centers and groups around the country, and has lived and taught at the Providence Zen Center for many years. He currently owns and manages a construction and home renovation business. This article is composed of selections from dharma talks given during 1983-85 at the New Haven Zen Center.

Someone was talking about using drugs to open your consciousness. I think the evidence is overwhelming that most of this planet is in an altered state of consciousness already and our job is to find out what's it like to not be in an altered state of consciousness. I grew up and my family wasn't too much different than any other family. I had a rather set way of seeing things that was given to

me. You don't realize it but you're given and taught ways of seeing things. When you realize there are other ways of seeing things, that is, as soon as there's not just one, it opens up a whole different ball game. It is very helpful to know that there is more than one way to view things. That's a necessary step somehow. You don't have to know what all the ways are, but you do know there isn't just one way to see.

I was quite shocked because I had all this training as a scientist. I thought while I was doing it that the reason you do it is to discover some ultimate truths about the universe and the way things are. So, I went about trying to do that. Then, lo and behold, I discovered that there are all these controversies about the ultimate na-

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Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Ninth Student Receives Inka

GETTING A ZEN STICK

by Robert Genthner, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim*

At a ceremony held at Providence Zen Center this past December, Robert Genthner, of Lexington, Kentucky, became the ninth student to receive formal teaching authority from Zen Master Seung Sahn. Bob is a long-time student of Zen under several teachers and a practicing psychotherapist. He and his wife, Mara, started the Lexington Zen Center in 1982. Bob and members of the Lexington sangha have purchased a large piece of land in Kentucky that Dae Soen Sa Nim has christened as a major retreat site; it is rapidly becoming an important gathering place for the sangha. This talk is excerpted from a talk at PZC after the ceremony. Excerpts from the formal Dharma Combat encounters that traditionally precede the granting of inka, or teaching authority, can be found on page 6.

The issues of giving and taking, and of generosity appear regularly in our practice. I was reading recently in the Mu Mun Kwan. Case 44 is a case called Pa Cho's Zen Stick. Pa Cho was Korean, and he went from Korea to China traveling around and then he met his teacher and later became a great Zen Master in China. The case goes like this: "If you have a Zen stick, I will give you a Zen stick. If you don't have a Zen stick, I will take it away." Some of you who came for interviews this morning worked on some kong-ans that are like this. The wonderful gift that Pa Cho gives us is Don't Know

Mind. It's very confusing— if you have a Zen stick, I'll give you a Zen stick, but if you don't have one, I'll take it away. It interrupts our thinking. It interrupts our logical analytic discursive thinking. What does that mean? That's the beginning of don't know. To give you an example of Pa Cho's mind (he was a brilliant Zen master), a monk came to him and asked him "what is the water of Pa Cho Mountain." (He was named after the mountain.) And Pa Cho said, "Warm in the winter, cool in the summer." He had an incredibly clear, non-analytic, non-logical mind. He saw the essential nature of things.

In Zen talk, the stick is symbolic of or represents our true nature, our essential nature. And, all of us who have come here today have something in common with Pa Cho, he's our ancestor. We also have in common this way seeking mind. Nobody is here by accident. All of us are here together out of some question, some wonderment, and this is our ancestor who is saying to us, if you have a Zen stick, if you have essential nature, if you have true nature, I will give you a Zen stick, I will give you a good beating. Whap! If you don't have true nature, if you have emptiness, everything is blankness, or nirvana, I'll take it away from you. So, it's not resting on either/or. Not having, not-having. Not resting in some conceptual perspective. Life simply isn't that way. Our life is

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* See page 12 for an explanation of this new title for Master Dharma Teachers

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practice with them, it will help them. Do any kind of exercise where you breathe in slowly and breathe out slowly. This is the most important practice for children. It will help their mind and your mind. When everyone has a clear consciousness, there

DSSN: There are many ways of expressing your gratitude to your parents. You can practice yourself and clean up your karma; then, many people will respect you and, also, think highly of your parents, because you are a good person. If you have the resources, you can make a meditation room or building where other people can practice. Then, merit comes to

and son have the same cycle. That's why they are part of the same family. When you are practicing strongly, its like a television antenna. It connects the energy cycle between members of a family. When you practice strongly, your antenna is a sending antenna; your parent's, or child's or husband's antenna is a receiving antenna. You send them strong, clear energy and they receive it and gradually conform to the same cycle as your strong, practicing cycle.

PP: Thus, it is because you are so close that your strong practice can help your parents?

DSSN: Yes. If one person is practicing strongly, then the whole family is getting good energy from this person and becomes a happy family. One person's energy helps all people. The absolute energy of this person controls the cycle of the whole family.

PP: Can you see this energy?

DSSN: No, this energy cannot be seen. It's like the force of a magnet. You cannot see it, but the force is there. This energy can change your family's karma.

PP: Some people say that even before you are born you have decided who your father or mother are going to be. Is this true?

DSSN: That's try mind. In past life, you did together action with your parents and created strong karma with them. Thus, in this lifetime you are together. Parents have created karma with their children and children have created karma with their parents. If you have strong karma in this life with your parents or with your children, then in the future maybe your parents will be your children or your children will be your parents. The name for this is samsara.

PP: In what other ways does family karma appear?

DSSN: Family karma is always clear. If you are fighting with your family in this lifetime, next lifetime you will

also fight and have much suffering. If you practice together with your family or practice strongly for them, then next lifetime you will have harmony and a good situation for your family. What matters is the kind of together action you do with your family. Good karma/bad karma comes

big waves are like the country karma and smaller waves correspond to family karma. The smallest waves are individual karma. All waves are always up and down, changing, changing.

PP: This country karma seems impossible to change, it is so big.

DSSN: Yes, country karma is very difficult to change. But if one strong person with a clear direction, any direction, appears, then country karma begins to change.

PP: Like China...?

DSSN: Like China or Russia, yes. In this century they have had strong leaders like Mao and Lenin. These people had very strong karma with their country, so they could change their country's karma.

PP: Is this good or bad?

DSSN: Good or bad is not the point. The point is changing the karma, whether it's the country karma or family karma or individual karma. Before this lifetime you and your country shared karma. That's why you were born where you were.

PP: How do family karma and individual karma come together? Many people in poor countries lead simple and pure lives, yet they have much suffering. Is this family karma or country karma? Or something else?

DSSN: This is all together action karma. In India, people have much suffering. But why does a person get born as an Indian? It comes from doing together action with these people in a previous life. Thus, someone becomes an Indian, an American, a Korean. In some past life I had much together action with Korean people, so I became Korean, have Korean parents, Korean country. If in some previous life I had made some together action with Americans then I would have been born in America to American parents.

PP: But if you are practicing strongly....

DSSN: If you practice strongly then you become free. You don't share as much karma with your native land. For example, one of my students was born in India, then came to America, practiced strongly and became a monk. He has not much together action with Indian people, not much suffering. Strong practice helps him and his country. That's very important. I came to America to help American people; that also helps my country. If one person is strong, then slowly, slowly, helping your country is possible. Helping the whole world is possible.

PP: You are then free of country karma?

"Too busy is only speech. Only a lazy mind says 'I have no time to practice.'"

is less fighting and more harmony in the family—not as much anger or desire. If a family is not practicing, then their centers are not strong—only "my opinion is correct"; that kind of mind appears. If a family practices together, it's better than watching television or going to a dance. Practicing together will make a family's center stronger and stronger. Then, not so much fighting, not so much holding my opinion.

PP: What if they are so busy they cannot practice together?

DSSN: Too busy is only speech. Only a lazy mind says "I have no time to practice." When you wake up, if you can practice even for ten minutes, no problem. But if you say, "I am busy, cannot do that," that's lazy mind. If someone says to you, "If you don't do one hundred and eight bows tomorrow, I will kill you," then tomorrow morning you will do one hundred eight bows.

PP: Then, how does a family make this practicing important?

DSSN: Together the family decides a practicing time, every day the same time. Then, they understand, everyday the same way. Everyday wake up, practice 10 minutes or 20 minutes or 30 minutes.

PP: Sometimes children don't want to wake up.

DSSN: If children cannot practice every morning, that's no problem. In that case pick a time in the evening for family practice. In China children start learning breathing exercises when they are seven or eight years old.

PP: Sometimes, one person in a relationship wants to practice and the other doesn't. The practicing person wants to do retreats. The person who does not practice becomes jealous of all the time spent in daily practice or retreats. What can the practicing person do?

DSSN: Then, some clear, persuasive talk is necessary. Say to your husband (for instance): "When I am not practicing, I have more anger mind, more like/dislike mind. If I go to a retreat, I can become more clear, we can help each other more and love each other more. But if I don't practice, I will be more angry, fight with you more. Do you like that?" Then, the husband may see that this is true. Also if you are already strong, then going outside for practice is not so important, just sitting and walking meditation at home is OK. Not only sitting and walking; keep a practicing mind at all times.

PP: So, you say only follow the situation.

DSSN: "Only follow situation" means keep an inside practicing mind. Then, you can practice in any place, any situation. Then, your dharma is working and your center is strong. Then, your dharma spreads to your husband or wife.

PP: You often talk about the importance of expressing gratitude to your parents. How does one do this?

your whole family, not only you but your parents and your children.

PP: What if you don't have the means to provide a practice place for other people?

DSSN: Then, you can go to a center to practice or only do good actions for other people. If you have no money, you can go to the center or temple and just clean the bathrooms. If you don't like cleaning



bathrooms, then only give food to hungry people. Many kinds of action for other people are possible. This is the Bodhisattva way.

PP: Many people have a parent who has a drinking problem or is depressed. What can children do to help?

DSSN: In this situation, strong practicing for the parent is necessary. Do Kwan Se Um Bosal 3,000 times or 5,000 times every day for the parents. Try, try, try. Then, merit will appear by itself. How? When you do Kwan Seum Bosal practice very strongly, you get universal energy. This universal energy is absolute energy. Absolute energy controls the opposites energy of your parent (or child)—the like/dislike, the anger mind. Because you are practicing only for your parent, your absolute energy can change your parent's opposite energy slowly, slowly. If you have only good speech and good action for them then you will be able to help.

PP: What about when you see your children or parents and they are very angry, don't even want to talk to you. What can you do?

DSSN: Same thing. Only good speech, good action. Never have an angry mind toward your parents. Then slowly, change becomes possible. Everyone in a family shares the same karma cycle. A father and son have the same karma cycle, mother

"If you have a Bodhisattva mind and only help other people then the whole universe is your family."

from the kind of together action you do with and for them.

PP: Are different parents possible?

DSSN: Yes. If you have a Bodhisattva mind and only help other people then the whole universe is your family. You have not so much attachment to your own family. You have big mind, big family. Then, it is possible to connect with many, many people as parents or children.

PP: Does a country also have karma? Is this similar?

DSSN: Country karma is a very big version of family karma. In the ocean there are big waves, and within these big waves are smaller waves. Within the smaller waves, there are still smaller waves. The

DSSN: Yes, then you are free. Then, any country is no problem. If you practice strongly then any country or any family is no problem. You will always have a good situation. If you don't practice, you will make more together action with the same country and same family. Same action, same suffering. If your country is suffering, you also suffer; you suffer and your country is also suffering. But if you practice strongly, your country may be suffering but you are not suffering. It is possible for you to help your country and your family. Not only your family and country but also the whole world. Only practice can make it possible.