

NATIVE TRADITION IN KOREAN ZEN

by Mu Soeng Sunim

Mu Soeng Sunim is senior monk and Abbot of the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in Cumberland, Rhode Island. He is the author of "THOUSAND PEAKS", a history of Korean Zen.

(Part one of a talk given at the Providence Zen Center in January, 1987)

One time someone asked Dae Soen Sa Nim about the importance of the history of Zen, and he said, "Knowing the history of your tradition is like coming face to face with your own ancestors. These ancestors are your roots; when you know these roots, you also know something about yourself." So when one studies within a certain tradition, it is a natural curiosity to want to know about the roots of that tradition, where the tradition has come from, and what are the sources of inspiration within that tradition.

This talk is primarily about the thirteenth-century monk Chinul, who is the founder of the native tradition of Zen in Korea. But it is also, by necessity, a talk about the larger spectrum of Chinese and Korean Zen traditions. One cannot really understand Chinul's impact on Korean Zen without knowing what went on in Korean Zen before him and that cannot be understood without some understanding of Zen in China.

Chinul is to Korean Zen what Hui-neng is to Chinese Zen. Hui-neng was not only the sixth patriarch in the line of succession from Bodhidharma, but actually he was the real founder of Zen in China. There are four stages of development of the Zen tradition in China. Each of these stages is associated with a historical incident and points to a key ingredient of Zen practice.

The first was the arrival of Bodhidharma in China. He arrived at the court of Emperor Wu and had an interview with him in which the Emperor enumerated the temples he had built, all the charities and the good works he had done. He then asked Bodhidharma, "What do you think? What is the merit of all this?" Bodhidharma, very coolly, said, "None whatsoever." This must have shocked the Emperor because the answer was so contrary to everything he believed. He then

asked Bodhidharma several more questions, to which Bodhidharma gave equally unsatisfactory (to the Emperor) answers. Finally, in frustration, the Emperor asked him, "Who are you?" (meaning, "Who are you to be giving me all these crazy answers?"). And Bodhidharma said, "I don't know," (or, "I have no idea.") Obviously, after this exchange, Bodhidharma was not very welcome at the Emperor's court, and he went off and sat in a cave at Shaolin Temple for nine years. So, that is the first step in the tradition of Zen in China—the example of Bodhidharma sitting motionless and facing a blank wall. This is the way we sit even today in our dharma halls.

The second step relates to Hui-neng. Hui-neng was a poor, fatherless boy who used to sell firewood in the marketplace so he could support himself and his mother.

One day he heard a monk reciting a line from the Diamond Sutra; he was maybe thirteen years old at the time and when he heard the verse from the Diamond Sutra, he got enlightened on the spot. This is the second step, the tradition of sudden enlightenment. I will not get technical about sudden or gradual enlightenment but only know that according to tradition, if one's practice is mature enough and solid enough, enlightenment will happen all of

a sudden. You never know the time or the place where it's going to happen or how long it will take to reach this state. Students of Zen practice in the hope that this event will happen in their life. This is the inspiration from Hui-neng's life.

Up until the time of Hui-neng, all the monks were reading the sutras and building temples, hoping that all these good deeds would bring them merit in the next life. Hui-neng said that none of this was necessary to get enlightenment. He went even one more step and said that even meditation wasn't necessary. That was a very radical step in Chinese Zen. Hui-neng never explained how to get to this state of enlightenment but our own

teacher, Dae Soen Sa Nim, goes all over the world and talks only about this "don't-know" mind. He keeps saying over and over again that if you keep this don't know mind one hundred percent at all times, then you are already enlightened. So, if you keep a don't know mind at all

times and all places, then sitting meditation is not necessary. This is a direct connection between Dae Soen Sa Nim's teaching and Hui-neng's teaching. Later in this article when Chinul and Korean Zen are discussed, it will be seen that Chinul is also talking about one moment

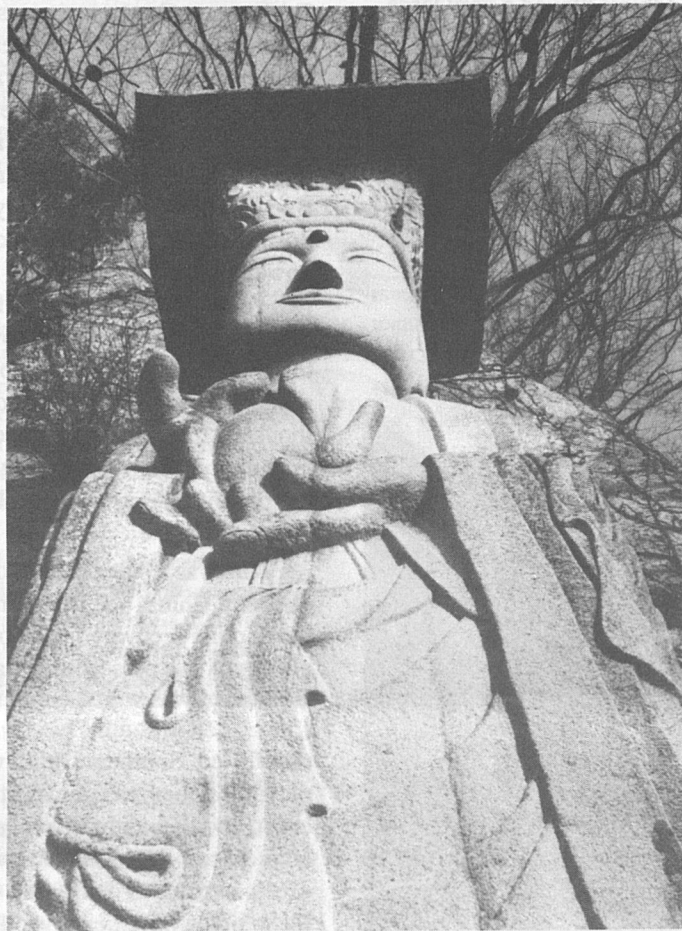
of effort— *this moment of effort*— and that's all it takes.

The third step that took place in the history of Chinese Zen is associated with the patriarch Ma-tsu, who was the second generation successor of Hui-neng. Ma-tsu invented the shock tactics of suddenly shouting at a questioner, hitting the questioner, or suddenly calling out the questioner's name as he was about to leave the room. Ma-tsu was a true innovator in this regard; he wanted to break through all the conceptual thinking we have. Hui-neng talked about arriving at this point but he never talked about how you arrive there. It was left to Ma-tsu to invent all those tactics of sudden shock which jar your consciousness and make a breakthrough.

The fourth step was the complete systematization of the koan system. Ma-tsu and his successors were very gifted teachers. Some of his successors also had relatively few students, so they could have personal encounters with their students and be creative enough and skillful enough to bring the student to enlightenment through a shock tactic. This was the Golden Age of Zen, approximately from 700-900 A.D. However, as the number of students grew, personal instruction became very difficult. So, the Zen master used the stories of the old Zen masters to teach their own students. In Sung China (10th century A.D.), this system was perfected and most effectively used by Zen master Ta-hui.

Before Hui-neng, Zen (or Ch'an) had flourished in northern China. Bodhidharma had stayed at Shaolin temple and his successors were monks from the northern part of the country. That's where they had their temples and some patronage from the royal court. In fact, until Hui-neng, Ch'an was just one of the many competing Buddhist sects in northern China. The story of Hui-neng's transmission is quite well-known so it need not be repeated here, but when Hui-neng had to flee his teacher's temple after receiving the secret transmission, he crossed the Yangtze River and traveled as far south as the present-day Canton. When he finally es-

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Native Tradition in Korean Zen

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established his temple in this extreme southern part of China, a new kind of Zen appeared: it was rural and centered around a community of farming monks. Northern Ch'an had relied on the sutras, on building temples, and patronage of the royal court, but Southern Ch'an was economically self-reliant and revolved around the work ethic. The monks farmed the monastery land during daytime, didn't read any sutras, didn't even have a meditation hall or practice any formal meditation. They kept their practice alive in the midst of doing physical labor throughout the day.

When Zen appeared in Korea, it was a direct successor of southern Ch'an. During the period from 828 to 935, there appeared the so-called Nine Mountain Schools of Zen. These temples and their ethos were a mirror-reflection of what was happening in Chinese Zen at the same time. The marvelous thing about these nine schools is that seven of these schools were started by Korean monks who were students of Ma-tsu's successors.



Ma-tsu is a very interesting figure in the history of Zen. In a comparison to American history, it would seem that Bodhidharma is like George Washington, and Hui-neng is Zen's Thomas Jefferson. Ma-tsu is more like Theodore Roosevelt, the rider on horseback. He was the greatest Zen teacher of his time and it is said that there were, at times, as many as eight hundred monks in his monastery. He gave transmission to one hundred and thirty-nine dharma successors, and is known to history as the Great Patriarch.

Of these one hundred and thirty-nine successors three were some of the most influential teachers in Zen history. One was Pai-chang, who formed the monastic rules that we follow even today, and whose successor, Huang-po, was the teacher of the famous Lin-chi. The second was Nanchuan (Korean: Nam Cheon), perhaps the most brilliant of Ma-tsu's students, and the teacher of Chao-chou (Korean: Jo-ju). The third of these teachers is not quite so well-remembered in history; his name was Shi-tang Chi-tsang. Three of the founders of the Nine Mountain Schools in Korea were students of Shi-tang Chi-tsang, one was a student of Nam Cheon and three were students of Ma-tsu's immediate successors.

Thus, our lineage is from Ma-tsu and from Hui-neng and this is the tradition of Korean Zen. Korean Zen is also called Chogye Zen, after the name of the temple

of Hui-neng in south China. Dae Soen Sa Nim is the seventy-eighth patriarch in his particular line of succession that starts with the Buddha and continues through Hui-neng and Ma-tsu.

When the Nine Mountain Schools of Zen appeared in Korea in the ninth century, they modeled themselves along the same lines as the temples of Ma-tsu's successors, that is, temples in the mountains with the monks working the farm land around the monastery and being economically self-reliant. However, the development of Zen in Korea differed in one significant aspect from Zen in China or Japan. In China and Japan, Zen always had a special place of its own; it was autonomous and quite independent of Buddhism. But that never happened in Korea for a number of reasons: Korea is and was a very small country; they had a period of civil war that lasted for about a hundred years in the fifth and sixth centuries, and Buddhism played a very large part in the formation of the United Silla kingdom in 668 A.D.

Buddhism played the role of a state religion, and was protected and patronized by the rulers. So, when the new branch of Buddhism called Zen ap-

peared in the ninth century, instead of having time to develop its own system and institutions, it was immediately absorbed into mainstream Buddhism and received the same patronage from royal court as other schools. Thus within a hundred years of the founding of Nine Mountain Schools of Zen we find that Zen in Korea cannot be distinguished from the other schools—Zen monks wore the same fancy robes, lived in fancy temples, enjoyed all the riches of food and had access to the power centered at the royal court. The royal court instituted a system of exams for Zen monks corresponding to similar exams for other Buddhist monks. This was one way for the state to have control over the shape and development of Zen. Traditionally, Zen monks were always found sitting in meditation in mountain temples but now here were many monks living in the city temples and spending three years memorizing the sutras and other texts. Thus, within a short time, Zen lost all its vitality and drive.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, Korea suffered a series of attacks from the north by Mongolian tribes, most especially the Khitans. There was never any peace in Korea during this time and as a result of these conditions, both the affairs of state and religion fell into disorder. This was the situation of Buddhism in Korea in the latter half of the 12th century

when Zen Master Chinul appeared on the scene.

Chinul was born in 1158 A.D. This was a very interesting time for Buddhism in East Asia. Zen Master Ta-hui, who was mentioned before and who perfected the system of koan practice in China, was only one generation removed from Chinul. As a matter of fact, Ta-hui died in 1163, five years after Chinul was born. Also, at a time when Chinul was trying to sow the seeds of a native tradition in Korea, Zen was brought from China to Japan, where Zen Master Dogen became one of its great exponents. By the year 1200 Zen had largely disappeared in China but there was a new flowering in Korea and Japan.

But, why did Zen die out in China? First of all, there was a severe repression of Buddhism in China in 845. Buddhism had originally appeared in China in the first century A.D. and it supplanted Taoism and Confucianism as the state religion for China's dynasties over many centuries. Buddhism gained a lot of economic and political power at the expense of Taoists and Confucianists, so, all this time, they were conspiring against Buddhism, trying to find ways to bring it down. In 845, Emperor Wu came to power and he called himself a Taoist. For two years from 845 to 847 there was extremely severe persecution of Buddhists; the statistics of this repression are quite remarkable: two hundred and sixty thousand monks and nuns were forced to give up their robes; forty-eight hundred major monasteries and temples were destroyed.

This was a staggering blow to Buddhism in China, one from which it has never quite recovered. One of the ironic effects of this persecution was that while Buddhism was wiped out in northern China, Zen in south China was relatively unaffected. Southern Ch'an was not a player in the power games at the royal court, and they didn't have temples with large statues of the Buddha with gold and precious stones. In northern China, when the temples were destroyed the statues made out of bronze and copper were melted down and used for making coins. The monks of southern Ch'an didn't even read sutras and lived a simple life of a farming community, so they didn't have any possessions that could be taken away. They didn't have a high profile and so they didn't have much to lose in the persecution.

When the Sung dynasty came to power in 960 in northern China, the only form of Buddhism that was left in the country was the southern Ch'an. The Sung emperors made it their house religion, and as a result, it too became corrupt and lost its vitality. Zen master Ta-hui was the last major figure to infuse any vitality into the system; once he was gone, there was no teacher of his stature to sustain it.

Returning to Chinul, one finds that he was a sickly child. His parents prayed to the Buddha and vowed that if he recovered they would allow him to become a monk. He did recover, and had his head shaved at the age of six or seven. This is a very graphic example of how Buddhism benefited as a state religion in East Asia—Buddhism was an all-permeating religion with strange beliefs and superstitions far removed from the teachings of the historical Buddha. This happened to many children and Chinul was by no means unique in this respect.

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PRIMARY POINT

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— The Editors



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The Teachers: Zen Master Seung Sahn is the first Korean Zen Master to live and teach in the West. He is the 78th Patriarch in the Korean Chogye Order, and became a Zen Master in his native Korea at the age of 22. After teaching in Korea and Japan for many years, he came to the United States in 1972 and founded the Providence Zen Center, now located in Cumberland, Rhode Island. He is addressed as "Soen Sa Nim" (Honored Zen Teacher) by his students.

Soen Sa Nim has established over 50 Zen centers and affiliated groups in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Europe and Korea. These centers comprise the Kwan Um Zen School. The Providence Zen Center is Head Temple in the United States. In 1984 a Kwan Um Zen School of Poland was formed which includes five Zen Centers and ten affiliated groups, of which the Head Temple is Warsaw Zen Center. In 1985 a Kwan Um Zen School of Europe was established, with its Head Temple at Centre Zen de Paris.

Soen Sa Nim travels worldwide leading retreats and teaching Buddhism. Working to strengthen the connection between American Zen and Korean Buddhism, he has established

the Seoul International Zen Center in Korea and the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery in the United States. At Diamond Hill, Zen students who wish to may become monks and live the traditional monastic life in the original practice style of Bodhidharma.

Published works by and about Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching include **Dropping Ashes on the Buddha and Only Don't Know** (collections of his teaching letters and Zen stories); **Ten Gates** - the Kong-an teaching of Zen Master Seung Sahn; **Only DOing It** (the 60th birthday tribute book with anecdotes from students and friends and a biography); and **Bone of Space** (a book of poetry).

He has given "inga" - authority to lead retreats and teach kong-an practice - to seven senior students. Called Master Dharma Teachers, they regularly travel to Zen Centers and affiliates in North America and abroad, leading retreats and giving public talks. They are: **George Bowman** and **Mu Deung**, Cambridge Zen Center; **Barbara** and **Lincoln Rhodes** and **Jacob Perl**, Providence Zen Center; **Robert Moore**, Dharma Sah (Los Angeles); and **Richard Shrobe**,

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Training Programs: Zen Centers offer daily meditation practice and introductory talks on a regular basis. These events are free and open to the public. Some centers also offer personal interviews each month with the teachers in our school when available.

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schedule includes 12 hours of sitting, bowing, chanting and formal silent meals. Personal interviews and Dharma talks are given frequently. Registration is for 90 days, 21-day periods or a one-week intensive. The School offers annually three long Kyol Che's (one in Poland, Korea and the United States) and a three-week summer Kyol Che at Providence Zen Center. See schedule.

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At the age of fifteen, Chinul went to live in a temple and took the formal precepts of a novice's life. One interesting fact about Chinul's life is that he never had a formal teacher, one who may have guided his intellectual or spiritual development. He had a preceptor, like any other Buddhist monk, but he always studied on his own. His self-study program was quite remarkable and innovative for a monk of his time, for he combined his study of sutras with Zen practice.

Ever since the arrival of Zen in Korea with the establishment of the Nine Mountain Schools, there was a fierce rivalry between Zen and the sutra schools and neither wanted to have anything to do with the other. The sutra schools insisted on studying the sutras for twenty or thirty years, and gradually becoming a Buddha. The Zen schools started with the premise that you are already a Buddha and all you have to do is to rediscover that through personal meditation. Thus studying the sutras is quite irrelevant. Chinul became the first thinker in Korean Buddhist history to effectively resolve this conflict between the two approaches, and it was resolved in his own experience.

Chinul had three major awakenings or enlightenment experiences in his life. The first was when he read the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (Hui-neng). The second awakening was one when he read the Avatamsaka Sutra and the third was when he read the Records of Zen Master Ta-hui. Two of these documents, the Platform Sutra and the Record of Ta-hui are classic statements of Zen tradition, whereas Avatamsaka Sutra is the basic document of the Hua-yen (K: Hwa-om) School which was the most influential sutra school in Korea. Thus, throughout his life, Chinul laid big emphasis on a simultaneous cultivation of both doctrinal understanding and personal practice.

At the age of twenty-two, Chinul came to the capital city to take his monk's exams but was dismayed to see all his fellow monks struggling for fame and power. They all wanted to pass the exam and get a position at the royal court with prestige and influence. As a reaction to this jockeying for power, he wrote a manifesto urging his fellow monks to leave this worldly struggle and retreat into the mountains to form a practicing community. He was able to have ten other monks sign this manifesto and they decided to meet together at some time in the future and start the community which they proposed to call "Jung Hae Sa" or "Samadhi and Prajna Community". Samadhi means meditation practice and Prajna means wisdom or intuitive understanding.

It is a tribute to Chinul's influence that today there are at least fifteen temples in Korea that call themselves Jung Hae Sa. Our own lineage comes from Su Dok Sa temple on Duk Sung mountain where one of the major temples is Jung Hae Sa. This temple was established by Zen Master Mang Gong in the early 1930s for the training of his senior students. Dae Soen Sa Nim calls this Jung Hae Sa the primary point of our lineage; so, Jung Hae Sa

of our school and the Jung Hae Sa community that Chinul founded have the same focus.

At this point, it is useful to note some remarkable parallels between the lives of Dogen and Chinul. They were near-contemporaries, Chinul being older. They were both dismayed by the struggle for fame and power at the royal court and went into the mountains to establish their communities of monks. They both dedicated their lives to intensive practice and lived very pure and simple lives. There is nothing dramatic in the lives of either Dogen or Chinul. They had both a very strong direction in their life and dedicated their entire energy in following that direction. It is not an accident that Dogen is considered the most original thinker in Japanese religious history, and Chinul occupies the same lofty position within the Korean religious tradition. It is interesting to note that Thomas Aquinas appeared in Europe at approximately the same time, roughly after Dogen, and became the fountainhead of all subsequent Christian theological thinking. Thus, within a period of fifty years, these three original religious thinkers appeared in different parts of the world, and shaped their traditions in such a way that their influence is felt even today.

When Chinul did not hear from his fellow monks who had signed the Jung Hae Sa manifesto within the agreed time, he went traveling and lived in a temple in the southwest corner of Korea. There is speculation that he chose to live in this part of the country because this was the only area of Korea to have any maritime contact with China. As a result of Khitan invasions in the north, Korea did not enjoy any diplomatic or overland trade relations with China. The port towns along the western coasts of Korea were the only places where merchants could carry on any kind of trade with China. It is possible that Chinul may have hoped to get hold of some news of Buddhist activities in China through these merchants. However, he never went to China. It is also interesting to note that two of the greatest thinkers in Korean Buddhist history, Won Hyo and Chinul, never went to China, although it was quite common, even obligatory for Korean monks to go to China, study under a great teacher and come back to establish their own temple. Won Hyo and Chinul never made it. But Chinul did come into possession of Ta-hui's writings during his stay in the southwest and these writings were a lifelong influence on his thinking.

In the next issue, Part II: The Teachings of Zen Master Chinul

What Is Thinking For?

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one thought, karma is created. With karma, we keep on reincarnating and are slaves to it. So, through thinking we can have five different kinds of enlightenment. Like Dae Soen Sa Nim said, thinking is not good, not bad. But if you utilize it correctly, this thinking can lead you to great enlightenment, and you can become an enlightened person. When one thought appears, Dae Soen Sa Nim said don't attach, but not attaching to one thought is very difficult. How do you not attach to your thinking? First of all, when a thought appears, if we attach, then you think only you don't want suffering. You don't

want to lose your afterlife. So, you keep thinking, thinking, thinking. But thinking actually creates your desire. We have five different kinds of desire: desire for sleep, sex, fame, food and wealth. But you must remember that all these kinds of desire are impermanent. Nothing is permanent. So, when a thought appears, ask yourself, is this permanent or impermanent? When you see and attain that everything is impermanent, then thinking will not bother you. You must attain impermanence. Mountain becomes water. Water becomes a mountain. Young lady becomes an old lady. Old lady becomes a baby. Understand? Everything is impermanent. So, when you attain impermanence you can eliminate your rubbish thinking. When you eliminate thinking, you will attain everything as emptiness. We come from emptiness and we are going back to emptiness. So, if you attain that everything is emptiness, then whatever thinking you have attached to you can easily detach. We come from emptiness and we will return to emptiness, why am I holding this thinking? If you hold onto your thinking, you'll lose a lot of energy. By following your thinking, you'll lose tons of energy. That is why when people get old they get a lot of wrinkles—because they think too much. So, if you attain emptiness, you can stop holding your thinking and like Dae Soen Sa Nim said, your mind becomes clear like a mirror. Clear like a mirror is just like the exquisiteness of the Universe. That clarity is our divine power. From this divine power, you create this Universe. Trees, mountains, water, human beings and animals.

So, from there, I can give energy to people and perceive their karma. That is exquisiteness of enlightenment. Once you attain this "without thinking," you can see that the tree is green. You can attain: why is the sky blue? You can attain: why is the floor red? Which means, you attained the truth. When you know that everything is the truth, you will know exactly what is correct function in your life without being attached to your thinking. If you understand how to function correctly in your life, as Dae Soen Sa Nim said, your thinking won't waste your energy. You can just deal with every moment. When moment to moment is clear, then you won't be hindered by anything.

Question: When you do business it is difficult not to think.

Dae Soen Sa Nim: Go to movie (laughter), then no problem. Ah, wonderful! E.T. or a cowboy movie, then not thinking. If you don't like the movies, go dancing. No thinking. That's all. Just do it. When you are eating very good food, no thinking, only eat. Do not think, "I like this," "I don't like that." When you're doing it, there is no thinking. But that is an outside condition. My desire cuts all thinking. But that is not correct cutting thinking. My energy or practice cuts all thinking is very important. So, Dae Poep Sa Nim has given everybody a mantra. First time is very difficult. In one day, three thousand times. Very difficult, but try, try, try. . . Dae Poep Sa Nim does ten thousand mantras everyday. Only try, try, then automatically every day will work. When you're talking, sitting, eating, or driving, the mantra constantly goes around and around inside, so you cannot think. If you cannot think, your mind is clear. If your mind is clear, then

everything is clear: driving, talking, office job, or business. If you have three hours of work, in three minutes you're finished. You'll have this much power. So, practicing everyday is very important. Everyday many people are not practicing, they are only thinking, thinking, thinking. . . always, non-stop. So, cutting off thinking is very difficult. Everyday, you must practice, then a new habit will appear.

Dae Poep Sa Nim: Many people ask this question. Using a mantra is very important. Of course in business you have to think and plan for now, next month, or next year. But what Dae Soen Sa Nim means is, don't attach to your plans. You plan, but if you keep digging into it, you are attaching to it. Sometimes your computer's movement is very clear. Sometimes your thinking cannot move anywhere, cannot move forward or backward. It cannot find a good idea. At that time, do the mantra and completely forget about business. For example: you go to work at ten o'clock and try to think about something but there is no way you can find a result. Then drop it. Don't go any deeper. Then do the mantra. This mantra will make your entire brain work. Whatever blockage you have will come completely clear. Then, all of a sudden, your mind will become very clear. For example, you go for a walk or to a coffee shop. You're drinking coffee and doing the mantra. All of a sudden, a thought appears about what you were worried about. Just like a cloud. Ah, that's right. I'll take that. Then put that into your computer. Which means, that when your mind is clear with a mantra, you don't have to think. Just like a movie, it just appears. Ah, I better do that. To each person, I give a different number of mantras. When you finish that number, everyday, that means you have eliminated your screen or cover that much. Once you have finished your mantra that day, you have taken off the cover on your energy. Then your mind is clear. Then "just thinking" appears. What ever you have forgotten before, it comes up. Oh, I have to send some money to this company. You weren't thinking about it, but it appears. That kind of clear thinking comes from your practice's energy power. So, it is not "not thinking." It is clear thinking. People say, cut off thinking; if I don't think, what will happen? It's not that. The best way to keep clear mind is to do the mantra, finish the number and your mind will automatically appear. Just like seeing a movie. Ah, I have to plan to do this, next month I have to do this, I have to call this guy. Just keeping doing your mantra all the time and you will become an expert.

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