

ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAHN

Earth, Air, Fire, and Water

Repaying the Universe

By Zen Master Seung Sahn

In 1986, I visited Swami Satchidananda's yoga ashram in West Virginia for the opening ceremony of the Lotus Shrine, a beautiful ecumenical pavillion. They had a dedication ceremony and had invited many teachers. All the teachers were asked to give a short talk and do some chanting from their tradition. I talked to them about how every day we breathe in air, breathe out air. We breathe in and breathe out all the time but we never pay for this most vital of our needs. The sun shines every day and nourishes our bodies with sunlight and energy for all things to grow. We live on this earth and use its resources, but we don't pay any money to the air or the sun or the earth.

Our body is made up of four elements: earth, air, fire and water. Everything we eat or use is also made of these four elements. So these four elements are us and we are these four elements. This means we are the universe and the universe is us. But how do you show your gratitude to the universe? If you understand that, you understand your correct job as a human being. A human being's correct job is to make harmony with everything in the universe — with the sky, with the tree, with the dog, with the cat, with everything. If you have this harmony mind, you cannot kill an animal or kill a tree. That's the correct idea. This correct idea appears when you put down your opinion, condition, situation and moment to moment keep correct function, correct situation, correct relationship. Then you and the four elements become one.

After the talk, we tried the Om Mani Padme Hum chanting. In the middle of the Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra, we have this mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum. These four words mean the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. If you try this chanting, then taking away your opinion, your condition, your situation is very easy. You become One Mind; you and the universe are never separate. You return to your original nature.

In Korea, there is a school of Buddhism called Jing Gak Jong. Their mantra is Om Mani Padme Hum and they chant it all day long. It's the same style as the Kwan Seum Bosal chanting that we do in our school. Om Mani Padme Hum means Kwan Seum Bosal. They both mean Original Mind. Also, Om Mani Padme Hum means eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind.

In India, Om is a sacred sound, sacred mantra. The whole universe begins with Om. In our Thousand Eyes and Hands Sutra, we have another mantra: Om Nam. Om Nam means cleaning our minds, cleaning this world. If you use something it becomes dirty and then you need to clean it, like your clothes

or your body. When you use earth, air, fire and water — the four elements and the universe — without giving anything back, your mind becomes dirty. So we use Om Nam to clean our minds.

If you try Om Nam or Om Mani Padme Hum forty-nine times in the morning and evening then everything becomes clean: your stomach, your head, your job, your house, your universe. Why forty-nine times? In the Oriental belief system, seven is a holy number. Seven times seven is forty-nine, so we try a forty-nine day kido or forty-nine day ceremony after someone dies.

If you try mantra practice, your mind will become quiet. But if you become attached to quiet, then you have a problem. Another time, many years ago, I went to Swami Satchidananda's ashram. They do a lot of very wonderful chanting. It's like samadhi; people close their eyes and feel very peaceful and



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PRIMARY POINT

almost sleepy. I gave a talk and shouted KATZ! Everybody was very surprised. Brother David (*ed.: Stendhl-Rast, eminent Benedictine monk*) was sitting next to me and he said, "Soen Sa Nim, everybody was surprised. They woke up." I said, "Not wake up. Everybody got enlightenment!"

I explained that if you only stay in your mantra, you enter Nirvana. But, if you only stay in Nirvana, you cannot save all beings. Wake up means entering Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi (*see glossary*). So KATZ! is not KATZ!; it is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi. So this time when I went again to Swami Satchidananda's place, he saw me and said, "KATZ!" I also said, "KATZ!" Then everybody laughed. So our direction means, how do you make your center strong? You must decide for yourself what kind of practice you want to do everyday. Once you decide something, you must do it. And do it at the same time every day. If you have a special situation such as a guest coming and you cannot do your practice at your decided time, then doing it some other time is okay. But if nothing is happening and your lazy mind appears and you don't do your practice, then your center will not become strong. When you stay at the Zen Center or go to the Zen Center, you do together action with other people: chanting time, chant; sitting time, sit; bowing time, bow. Doing together action will take away your karma. It will help you let go of your opinions, conditions, and situations. Doing together action will help your lazy mind disappear.

Sometimes your "don't like" mind gets very strong. But like/dislike doesn't matter. If you continue to practice, like/dislike mind will become weaker and weaker. Making this mind completely disappear is very important. Why? Strong like/dislike mind means your direction is not clear. Then your practice is "only for me" — I like that, I don't like that. But if your direction is your clear, you understand that your practice is only for other people. With that mind, any kind of situation is no problem. You only practice. That's a very important point.

There is a story that illustrates this. It is about my teacher, Ko Bong Sunim. He didn't like chanting; he only liked to sit. One time he was staying in a small temple in the mountains. The Abbot of the temple had to go away for a few days; while he was gone a woman came up to the temple with rice and other food. She asked my teacher to do a ceremony for her. Without hesitation, Ko Bong Sunim said, "Okay, okay," even though he didn't know the ceremony chanting.

The woman washed the fruit and cooked the rice and put everything on the altar. Then Ko Bong Sunim picked up the moktak and did some strong chanting. But this chanting was not Buddhist chanting; it was Taoist chanting. He had studied Taoism, so he knew one Taoist sutra. He chanted for one hour. The woman was very happy and said to him, "Thank you very much."

On her way down the mountain, the woman met the Abbot of the temple. She explained to him how Ko Bong Sunim had done the ceremony for her. The Abbot was very surprised. He said, "But he doesn't know any chanting!" The woman responded, "No, no, he did some fine chanting. I understand this kind of chanting." This woman had been a nun and she
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understood that what Ko Bong Sunim had chanted was not Buddhist chanting, but she was impressed by his try mind, his only do it mind.

When the Abbot came up to the temple, he said to Ko Bong Sunim, "I met a woman who told me you did a ceremony for her." "Yeah, no problem." "But what kind of chanting did you do? You don't know any ceremony chanting!" the Abbot said. Ko Bong Sunim said, "Oh, I did some Taoist chanting." They both burst out laughing.

This is a story about only do it mind. When you just do it, there is only One Mind. That mind is very important. It doesn't matter whether you do Buddhist chanting or Christian chanting or chant Coca-Cola. In One Mind there is no subject, no object, no inside, no outside. Inside and outside have become one. Then you connect with everything. You can connect with God, with Buddha, with a dog, with a cat, with a tree, with the sky, with everything. One Mind means becoming completely still.

*If you have this harmony mind,
you cannot kill an animal or
kill a tree.*

So when you try Om Nam or Om Mani Padme Hum or Kwan Seum Bosal or any mantra, just do it. Then your opinion, your condition, and your situation will disappear. If you come to the Zen Center, then waking up, together bowing, together chanting, together sitting, together eating becomes very easy. Then just doing it is very easy, because it's together action. In the beginning, you will have strong like/dislike mind: "I don't like Zen Center food," "I don't like bowing," but if you do together action, then slowly, slowly this mind disappears. Then you can control your feelings, your condition, your situation. Then you can believe in yourself 100%.

There is no life, no death; no coming, no going; no time, no space. You make time, so time controls you; you make space, so space controls you. But if your practice is strong, you can use time, you can use space. Then moment to moment you can do anything. Then you see clearly, hear clearly, act clearly. If somebody is hungry, give them food. It's not good or bad; it's only Bodhisattva mind. But if you have this kind of mind, "Ah, I have done Bodhisattva action for this person," then that's a big mistake.

One time, my great-grandteacher Kyong Ho Sunim was walking with his student Yong Song Sunim, who was to become a famous Zen Master in Korea. Kyong Ho Sunim was a person of wide mind and wide actions. Yong Song Sunim was a person of kind mind and kind actions. As they were walking, they saw a group of children who had captured some frogs and were torturing them. So Yong Song Sunim offered some money to the children and bought the frogs from them. Then he put them back in the pond.

They started walking again. Then Yong Song Sunim said,

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POETRY

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"Today I brought free life to many frogs. That certainly is good karma for me and for the frogs." Immediately Kyong Ho Sunim said, "That's wonderful action but you will go to hell!"

Yong Song Sunim was very surprised, "You said it's wonderful action. But why do you say I will go to hell?" "Frog is free but you will go to hell," said Kyong Ho Sunim. Yong Song Sunim begged him to explain. Kyong Ho Sunim said, "You keep saying 'I' brought free life to frogs; this 'I' will go to hell." Then Yong Song Sunim understood and bowed to him.

Therefore, anytime you have "I," you have a problem. Our teaching is only do it. Don't make I. When you do a good action, it's not "I make good action"; it's your original job as a human being. It's your payment to the four elements, to the sun, the moon, the stars, the universe. A helping action is not good, not bad. Nature does its job without making good or bad. Water is flowing; is that good or bad? Sky is blue, tree is green; is that good or bad?

Don't make anything. Just do it.

Bowing in Korean

National Treasure Number 49

Your cracked face

Roof curves ancient as

Synclines

Standing 1200 years

of wind strain, frost

And mending human love

For no one in particular

Wider than both arms' circumference

Your great limbs, columns,

Dry cracked from centuries

Of bowing

As I do

For no one in particular

Jan Sendzimir

The Whole World is a Single Flower

Korea trip leaves August 16, 1990



Ellen Sidor

The seasons are changing . . . soon it will be time for the second triennial visit to Korea of School members world-wide. Tentative schedule includes: depart for Seoul Thursday, August 16 from New York/Los Angeles; second **Whole World is a Single Flower** ecumenical gatherings August 20-23; tour of Korea's temples August 24-30; leave Korea Saturday, September 1.

Korea's temples are a unique cultural, historical and architectural testimony to a glorious Buddhist civilization. This year's tour will include three days in the rarely-visited Eastern part of the country. This region includes the spectacular Sorak mountain range; Shi-nungsa temple, which lays claim to being the oldest Zen temple, predating even Hui-neng; and Naksan-sa temple, with its majestic statue of Kwan Seum Bosal right on the edge of the sea. We will conclude with a journey to the central and southern part of Korea, home to, among others: Haein-sa temple, site of the "Tripitaka Koreana", the entire Buddhist canon carved in 1251 A.D. on 81,137 blocks of wood; Sokkuram Buddha, one of the finest achievements of Buddhist sculpture in the Far East; and the great temples of Pomo-sa and Bulguk-sa.

The cost of the trip is estimated at \$1250, subject to change depending on group size. Price includes: Round-trip airfare; all meals; tour buses and guides; group accommodations at the host temples; and visa preparation. This extraordinary price is possible because of the hospitality of Korean Buddhism. Please let us know your plans as soon as possible; a \$600 deposit is due by **June 1, 1990**; full payment will be due by **July 1, 1990**. Your cooperation is essential to reserving group-rate seats. For further information, please contact:

The Kwan Um  School of Zen

528 Pound Road, Cumberland, RI 02864 (401) 658-1476