

GEOMANCY

Geomancy, the Ancient Ecology

Goats and Power Spots

It is a classic Zen Master Seung Sahn story. Several years ago, on one of his early trips to Europe, he was visiting a fledgling Zen group in rural Spain. The main house was located on the down slope of a mountain, surrounded by slow running streams. The community tended to a small herd of goats, which lived in an old stone barn just uphill from the house.

The Zen Master was very pleased: "This is wonderful. You are practicing together. But this house," he added politely but firmly, "this house is not correct. It should be moved seven feet to the left. And these goats, they are living on the power spot, draining human beings' energy. You should be practicing where the barn is. And you should sell the goats."

We are amused by such anecdotes, but the Zen Master was serious. If Zen is grounded in our direct experience — what we hear, what we see, what we smell, what we sense — then we must ask: in that moment, what was he sensing?

What he was perceiving was a "balance of energy." Zen Master Seung Sahn hails from the rich tradition of Korean Buddhism. Disciples in that culture look for patterns of energy in much the same way that we in the West try to discern patterns of behavior. An Asian monk observes a house out-of-balance; your auto mechanic hears a faint rattle and instantly understands its origin. Both are practicing awareness. What we are trained to look for influences what and how we perceive.

The relationship of the natural elements has been studied in the Orient since the early days of civilization. Geomancy, the study of energy patterns at specific locations, uses an understanding of the natural world to find the human being's place in it. Its goal is harmony; its tools are mindfulness and compassion; and it is incomprehensible without interconnection. Man affects nature, nature affects man; the boundaries blur and disappear.

Richard Streitfeld □

The Power of Practice

A tale of old Korea

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Buddhism in Korea has a long oral tradition. These stories, transmitted across the generations, helped preserve Korean Buddhism during periods of invasion and repression. Zen Master Seung Sahn is a noted raconteur, and often relates this tale when asked about geomancy.



About two hundred years ago, a young woman, Mrs. Lee, lived with her husband in the city of Seoul, the capital of Korea. They had three young sons and her husband imported and sold fine, high-quality Chinese silk fabrics. It was a happy, comfortable existence for the family. Mrs. Lee herself was very devout and prayed to Kwan Seum Bosal constantly for the prosperity of her family.

One time the husband had to go to Pusan, a city in the far south, on a business trip. A few weeks later news came to Mrs. Lee that her husband had died in Pusan. Her world was shattered. But she was a courageous woman, and she went to Pusan to collect her husband's body and take possession of the inventory he was traveling with, the bulk of his capital.

In those days the only way to travel distances was to walk. Since it was not possible to carry her husband's body all the

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The Power of Practice

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way to Seoul, Mrs. Lee arranged to have the head cut off and embalmed. She put the head in a box, and wrapped the box with most of the Chinese silks her husband had been travelling with. Mrs. Lee hired a servant to carry the box back to Seoul. During their walk back to Seoul, they would stop overnight at country inns; at these inns, Mrs. Lee always kept the box in her own room.

They reached the city of Chonan, which is a major intersec-



tion of roads from the south (Pusan) and west (Seoul). At Chonan, Mrs. Lee stayed in a country inn. It so happened that another man who was staying at the inn at the same time was also a dealer in Chinese silks. With only one glance at the silks Mrs. Lee was carrying with her, this man knew that her silks were of a much higher quality than any he had ever dealt in. He knew he could get very good prices for these silks, so he decided to steal them.

Not wishing to be caught, however, he prepared a box of similar dimensions and wrapped it in a thin layer of inferior silks of exactly the same color. He knew only a connoisseur could tell the difference merely by looking at them. With his box ready, he waited for Mrs. Lee to go to sleep. To his frustration, he found that as the night wore on Mrs. Lee was sitting upright in her room and chanting the "Kwan Seum Bosal" mantra very softly for hours on end.

Finally, in the wee hours of the morning, she lay down to sleep. The businessman-turned-thief quietly entered the room and switched boxes. With the precious box in his hands, he left the inn and ran away as far as he could into the woods. Finding an isolated spot, he started unwrapping the box. To his great surprise, he found a wooden box inside the wraps, rather than the bale of silks he had expected. With equally great curiosity,

he opened the box and shrieked in horror at seeing a human head inside. He kicked the box away from himself; the head fell out and rolled down a slope into a lake.

Mrs. Lee woke up in the morning and started her journey back to Seoul. Soon she reached home and, in the presence of her grieving relatives, opened the box. She was dumbfounded to see that the box inside was empty; moreover, it was not even the same box she had packed in Pusan! What had happened to her husband's head? Completely puzzled, she nonetheless went through the mourning ceremonies and soon started looking after her husband's business. She took equally good care of her three sons. Her business prospered and she became the leading silk merchant in Seoul. Her business advice was widely sought. She put her three sons through the finest schools with the best tutors, and they became fine scholars. They all passed the civil service examinations and were appointed as magistrates and high administrators by the royal court.

The sons convinced their mother they could support her very comfortably, so she wouldn't have to work so hard at her business any longer. The business was very prosperous and sure to



attract a number of buyers. Mrs. Lee acceded reluctantly to her sons' pleas, but on one condition: that her sons help her build an inn in the town of Chonan, which she would operate herself! It was a most unorthodox wish, but she would not change her mind and finally the sons helped her build the inn.

Mrs. Lee opened the inn with an unusual offer. Anyone could stay free of charge for one night, provided they tell her an interesting story from their life experience! Many came to stay overnight at the inn, some out of curiosity, some out of gratitude for her generosity. Late each morning, she would

hold court in the front parlor, where the guests would gather to tell her their stories.

One day, an old man appeared among the guests. When it was his turn, he told how, many long years earlier, he had once stayed at an inn in Chonan. He had seen a young woman with a box of fine Chinese silks and had switched the boxes. To his surprise, Mrs. Lee became greatly excited. She grabbed him by the collar and started shouting, "So you are the thief who stole my box." The frightened guest protested that it was many years ago and there was no longer anything that could be done about it. Mrs. Lee calmed down and told him she didn't want to take any action against him; she only wanted to know what he had done with the box inside the silks. He then told her his whole experience of running into the woods, unwrapping the box only to find a head, and kicking it away in horror.

Mrs. Lee prevailed upon him to take her to the spot where this incident had taken place many years ago. From the top of the slope, she followed the path which her husband's severed head had taken when the box was kicked away by the horrified thief. She hired divers to try to find the head; she consulted skilled geomancers to find an auspicious place to bury the head if it were recovered.

After much consultation among themselves, the geomancers told Mrs. Lee that the spot in the lake where the head had originally landed was actually the most auspicious place for a burial. They listened to her whole story and told her that the success and prosperity she had been able to achieve in business after her husband's death could be attributed to the auspicious location of her husband's head in the lake. Furthermore, a geomancer-monk told her that the rolling down of her husband's head into that auspicious location was not an accident; it was due to her faith and constant chanting of the name of Kwan Seum Bosal.

After hearing all these findings, Mrs. Lee was very grateful to the thief who had been an unwitting tool for her good fortune. Even though his action had caused her great pain, it turned out to be a blessing for her. To show her appreciation for this accident of karma, she gave money and gifts to the thief and repeatedly expressed her gratitude.

This story is about the original mind of Korean Buddhism. This mind is very pure, very strong. Just have faith in something, then do your practice. Originally there is nothing; so, originally, there is no Kwan Seum Bosal. There is only the power of your mind. All things that happen to you, good things and bad, come from your own mind. That is karma. So, mind is karma, karma is mind. Both are empty. Then, how do you keep your mind in this moment? Just do it. Then you will get everything. That is the true meaning of geomancy, the true meaning of Buddhism. □



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