

Two excerpts from the forthcoming revision of the Compass of Zen, the essential statement of the teaching of the Kwan Um School of Zen.

The Purposes of Buddhism

Zen Master Seung Sahn

“The purposes of Buddhism” means understanding Buddhism’s direction. What we call Buddhism is the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Buddhism is not a revelatory religion; it is based entirely on what the Buddha taught as a result of his great enlightenment. So Buddhism is based not on some idea of divinity but on the enlightenment experience of Shakyamuni Buddha, the central event in Buddhist history. The Buddha himself is not special. He attained his true self, which means he completely understood himself and this world. So we say Buddha is Mind, Mind is Buddha.

If you completely understand yourself, completely attain your true self, you too become a Buddha. The experience of the Buddha says that it is possible for each one of us to have the same enlightenment experience and to become Buddhas ourselves. This means it is possible for each one of us to completely understand ourselves, attain correct way and correct life.

What is attaining correct way and correct life? When the Buddha attained enlightenment, he was not sure if it was possible to transmit the truth he had received in the hour of his enlightenment to others. He thought that mankind, addicted to its delusions and attachment, would find it hard to understand his dharma. According to Buddhist legend, Brahma, the highest god in the pantheon, read the Buddha’s mind. Brahma,

fearful that the Buddha’s teaching would be lost to this world, appeared before the Buddha and pleaded with him, “May the Blessed One teach the dharma; may the Well-gone One teach the dharma. There are living beings who have only a little dust in their eyes and who have fallen away through not hearing the dharma. It is they who will be recognizers of the dharma.” Then, out of compassion for all beings, the Buddha looked

at the world with his Buddha-eye and saw that indeed there were some beings who had keen faculties and only a little impurity. Realizing that there was a suitable audience for his teaching, he decided to proclaim the dharma.

The decision by the Buddha to share his dharma with others was a critical choice in Buddhist history. If he had decided not to act in this world, his withdrawal would have been insignificant for human history. The motive for his choice was compassion for all mankind. At the same time, he must have realized that the truth received by him had a dynamic quality and needed to be converted into a message; otherwise, it would go to waste. So the direction or purpose of Buddhism is the same as the Buddha’s example: if you completely understand yourself and attain your true self, you must teach others.

So every day we recite the four great vows. The first vow is, “Sentient beings are numberless; I vow to save them all.” This vow is a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha’s own compassion for all beings. This means that our practice and our enlightenment is not just for ourselves but for all beings. Once again, the purpose of Buddhism is to attain truth, attain “prajna” (wisdom); that means attain correct way, correct life. Then you can save all beings. This is human beings’ correct job. Attain your true self means attain universal substance; attain universal substance means attain whole-world situation; attain whole-world situation means attain your correct job. How? It means, moment-to-moment, keep your correct situation, correct function, correct relationship. That means, moment-to-moment, how do you help others? Not only human beings, but this whole world. When enlightenment and correct life come together, that means your life becomes truth, the suffering world becomes paradise. Then you can change this suffering world into paradise for others. This is human beings’ correct job; this is the purpose of Buddhism. □

Inflatable Zafu

Actually an inflatable beach-ball inside a fine quality zafu cover. It's lightweight, convenient, and guaranteed. Colors: Plum, Burgundy, Navy Blue, Royal Blue, Black, and Green. Cost: \$18.00 Freight-Paid. Free brochure on this and traditional meditation cushions.

We've Moved!

**Carolina Morning
Designs**

1580 Hannah Branch Road
Burnsville NC 28714
(704) 675-9575

Second excerpt on page 18