

TEACHER CERTIFICATION

It is Not an Idea

Reflections on questioning and realization

Do An Sunim, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

HIT! (*hits table with stick*) Understanding is not understanding. Not understanding is understanding.

HIT! No understanding; no not understanding.

HIT! Understanding is understanding. Not understanding is not understanding.

About one hundred and fifty years ago, Karl Marx said, "Philosophers want to understand the world; the point, however, is to change it."

At about the same time, Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian writer, said, "Everybody wants to change this world; nobody wants to change themselves."

Wu-wei quotes an ancient worthy as saying, "If you understand this world, this world is just like it is. If you don't understand this world, this world is just like it is."

So, which of these statements is correct?

HO!

Outside, it is dusk. Inside, the candles are burning bright.

Most people are looking for some kind of explanation or understanding of the perplexities of life. Some people even come to Zen looking for a better set of concepts to explain their existence. Much of my life, too, has been spent searching for some kind of understanding. I'm sure you experience this also: "What is this life all about, anyway? I want to understand," or "What is it that I'm not getting? How come none of my explanations seem to satisfy me?" Underneath this kind of questioning lies a deep longing to resolve the basic human question — "What am I?"

My first encounter with Zen was through books. I spent many years reading books about Zen. I was very intrigued by its way of expressing things, and often perplexed. One day a friend of mine told me about a talk being given by a Zen Master Seung Sahn from Korean. During the talk this Zen Master said something which really put me in a tailspin: "Understanding cannot help you." Something went off in my mind; a deep dissatisfaction had been touched. Here I was, just finishing my graduate studies, and this Zen Master says, "Understanding cannot help you." I heard that.

After this I started looking more closely at Buddhist teachings. The Buddha is a very interesting teacher because, just like us, he didn't understand life, didn't understand why human beings are on this earth. Why do we suffer and cause so much pain? He absorbed himself in this fundamental and profound question. But his search for the answer was not just for himself — for his own salvation — but for all beings. In

the end his deep questioning and pure, clear intention came together in one point, enlightenment. The enlightenment which we are celebrating today is the result of this trying, this intention, and this profound questioning.

Buddha's Enlightenment Day could also be called "Buddha's question answering day." He attained what it means to be a complete human being, to live a life of openness and compassion for all beings. His enlightenment was an attainment, not just a change in how he understood life. He became compassion. True compassion is a way of being, not a mere idea.

Because of this, the Buddha is unique. Unlike many religious leaders, he did not put forth a new religion, philosophy, theology, ideology, or psychology. If Buddhism is now a religion, this is something which was created later. Sutras are not discourses to be understood, but wisdom which needs to be made ours. At the end of his life, Buddha did not admonish us to believe in him or what he said. Rather, his last words urged us to earnestly investigate this life for ourselves.

One of the first stories I heard about Zen was a story about Zen Master Un Mun. One day as Un Mun was on his way to the outhouse, a new monk approached him and said, "Please, Zen Master, tell me, what is the first principle of Zen?" Then Un Mun said, "Excuse me, I have to take a piss," and marched off. Then, as he was walking away, he turned around, looked back at the student, and said, "Imagine, even such a simple thing I have to do myself."

The teaching style of Zen is very uncompromising. As the story illustrates, the student is thrown back on his own resources. There is no explanation to help the student to understand. Rather, the teacher's intent is to evoke a direct experience of the truth. A very famous kong-an in the Mu Mun Kwan, Nam Cheon's "Every Day Mind is the Path" (case 19), speaks directly about understanding and true life.

One day Joju went to Zen Master Nam Cheon and asked "What is the true way?" Joju was a very high class practitioner but still he had some doubt, some question.

Nam Cheon answered, "Everyday mind is the true way." We have all heard many times that Zen is very, very simple, that Zen is not special. So, everyday mind: what could be more simple than this clear, unattached, spontaneously manifesting mind that we all possess — everyday mind.

But still there is some doubt in Joju's mind, so he says, "Then should I try to keep it or not?" Nam Cheon then says, "If you try to keep it, already you are mistaken." If you want

something, or are holding on to something, already you have made a mistake. It is not possible to hold on to anything in this life. Try to keep it? Already a mistake.

Then Joju has a further question. "If I do not try, how can I understand the true way?" Again, the deep desire that we all have: I want to understand life, figure it out.

Nam Cheon replies, "The true way is not dependent on understanding or not understanding. Understanding is illusion; not understanding is blankness. If you completely attain the true way of not thinking, it is like space, clear and void. So, why do you make right and wrong?" Then, Joju suddenly got enlightenment, realization.

The question put to Nam Cheon is also our question: "What is the true way?" Any time we grasp for anything, any time we want something, we are already in the quagmire of opposites-thinking. We are separated from the true way.

HIT! (*hits table with stick*) Sosan Taesa said, "Before Ancient Buddha appeared, one thing was already perfectly clear. Shakyamuni Buddha did not understand it; how could he transmit it to Mahakasyapa?"

HIT! The fourth great vow says, "The Buddha way is inconceivable; I vow to attain it."

HIT! The view of all Buddhas and Patriarchs is the same — no view.

Which one of these statements is correct?

HO!

Outside, it is dark. Inside, the candles are burning bright. □

Dharma Combat with Do An Sunim, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Q: Many years ago you were born; today, the Zen Master is checking your enlightenment; sometime, you will die. Your birthday, your inka day and your death day — are they the same or different?

DASN: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

DASN: Before, the sky is gray, the grass is green; today, the sky is gray, the grass is green; later, the sky is gray, the grass is green.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: I ask you, what is the source of all our consciousness?

DASN: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

DASN: What color is the floor?

Q: Brown

DASN: Already appeared.

Q: Thank you for your teaching.

Q: Today you are receiving inka. When you get it, where are you going to keep it?

DASN: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

DASN: May I help you?

Q: Thank you for your teaching. □

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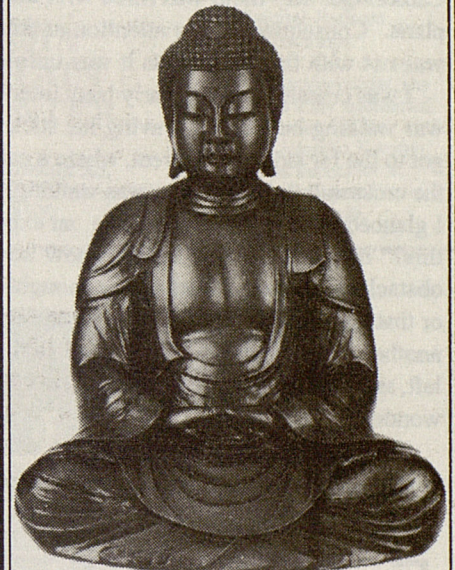
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