

TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Three Steps to the Left, Around the Front of the Car

Paying Attention and Being of Service

Mark Houghton, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Like most of you, I lead the busy life of a layman. In thinking about what to share with you today, I realized that what has been most helpful for me throughout my life and practice is just trying to be attentive and to help.

About a year and a half ago I was walking to work, a walk which takes me through several busy intersections in Cambridge. My mind was filled with the day's activities and plans. Consequently, my attention at this particular moment was not with the moment as it was unfolding.

I was crossing a particularly busy intersection; a blind man was walking beside me, waving his stick back and forth. We got to the far side of the street, where a car had parked right in the crosswalk. As this man was walking, his stick hit the car. I glanced over and you could see an expression of, "What is this?" on his face. He didn't know how to overcome this obstacle in his path. Perhaps he thought he had lost his way or that he had not counted his steps correctly. As I watched, another man nearby looked up and said: "Three steps to the left, around the front of the car." And I said to myself, "that's wonderful. But where was I?"

This is our practice. It is not some great, expanded commitment to the universe. It's not some hope of how things

can be in the future. It is not some longing for things to be as they were in the past. It is only in this moment, responding spontaneously: what can each one of us do that is of service?

Another story: a few years ago, my wife's grandmother died. I did not know her personally. Family members were gathering together for the funeral in Connecticut. I had a very strong idea that since I did not really know Dyan's grandmother, I should not be expected to attend the funeral. In addition, I had a very busy life and didn't have time to go.

But my seven-year-old daughter Amanda kept insisting, "I want to go to my great-grandmother's funeral." In response, I wondered what was wrong with this child — after all, she didn't even know this woman. Finally, I turned to her and said "Amanda, you didn't even know your great grandmother." And she looked up at me with tears in her eyes and said "Daddy, she's my great grandmother. I should go to her funeral."

That teaching was very, very wonderful, an abrupt "Of course — a family member dies, what is the correct action? What is it to be of service and help?"

I was raised a Quaker. The Quaker tradition was quite difficult for me as a child. At the meetings we would sit

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silently for an hour; if someone was moved by the Holy Spirit, then he or she would stand up and speak. My mother was very verbal, just like my daughter. She was moved by the Holy Spirit to say something at almost every meeting. She said many beautiful things, but because she spoke so often I felt a little embarrassed. When I got older, I started going back to Quaker meetings as part of my spiritual quest. At one meeting, about fifteen years ago, a man stood up and said, "I just sat a Zen retreat with a Zen Master. I'm grateful to be back here at this Quaker meeting, because the Zen style is not good. It is very tight, very formal, and it is very cold." After the meeting I went right over to this man and asked, "Where is this Zen Center? I want to go there."

I didn't ask that question because of some idea or opinion. It was karma. In the same way, we all share some kind of karma, bringing us together today. We have a connection with each other that is very deep, and that is why we are here.

Our task as we go through our daily lives is to cultivate this practice that we are already connected with. Only don't know; how can I be of service? I often wish it were more complicated, but just can't seem to find more to it. That's all there is.

Thank you for coming to this ceremony. □

Dharma Combat with Mark Houghton, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

- Q: What is "Dharma business" all about?
 MH: You already understand.
 Q: I ask you.
 MH: How may I help you?
 Q: Thank you for your teaching.
- Q: (*Mark's wife, Dyan*) Today, if you pass this test, then you will get inka. Your family will become very big. But you already have a family — me, Jessica, Amanda. Which one is your true family?
 MH: You already understand.
 Q: So I ask you.
 MH: (*Leans over and kisses his wife*)
- Q: You've been my friend for many years, and I'm very happy for you today; also, I'm very nervous for you. I wonder: what is the meaning of today?
 MH: You already understand.
 Q: No, I don't.
 MH: Today is December 8.
 Q: Is that all?
 MH: Not enough?
 Q: Not enough.
 MH: Dog runs after the bone.
 Q: Thank you for your teaching. □

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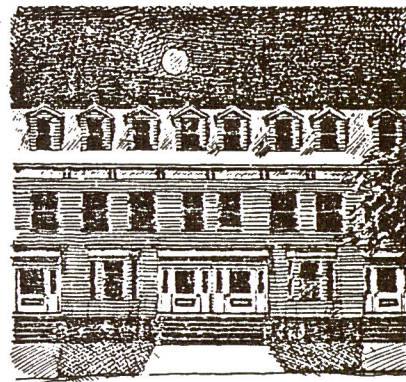


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