

# A Free Gift For You!

*Zen Master Seung Sahn*

Excerpted from a talk  
by Zen Master Seung Sahn  
at Cambridge Zen Center  
on May 7, 1993

Question: What's the relationship between karma and free will?

Zen Master Seung Sahn: Even if you decide, you cannot decide anything. When you are born, already everything has been determined. So, everything is already decided. Decide... something will happen. Don't decide... something will happen. I ask you: Why were you born in this world? Why?

Q: I'm here talking to you so...

ZMSS: That's just an idea. Talking, what kind of "talking to me"? "I" is not necessary. I ask you.

Q: You already know.

ZMSS: Ah, I don't know. So, when you are born... we say "put it all down." That means when you are born, already your karma appears. So, if you want to understand your past life, look at what you receive now. What do you get, now? If you want to understand your previous life... what do you do now?

Q: So, my question is: at this moment, is there something that I am deciding? Or is there no such thing as a decision? Am I deciding what will happen to me? Or maybe I don't have to decide anything?

ZMSS: Decide anything?

Q: Do I have free will or don't I?

ZMSS: Who said that?

Q: That's the point. Is there something that decides or

is there nothing that decides?

ZMSS: Of course. If you decide to come into this world, "you can decide" is possible. But even if you decide something, you cannot get anything.

Q: I was afraid of that. *[laughter from the audience]*

ZMSS: If I want a life that lasts a thousand years... it's not possible! Before one thousand years, already you are dead. So, if you understand what human beings are—what this world is really like—then you understand that you cannot decide anything. You only have this moment. If this moment is clear, then your whole life is clear. Also, your next life is clear. "This moment clear" means: "What are you doing now? Just do it!" Do not make a choice this way or that. Even with a choice you cannot get anything—that's human beings! But if you attain this moment, you can do anything—that's the point. You must attain this moment. Then you can do anything. If you lose this moment, you cannot do anything. I give you this as a present... very important. Also very expensive, but you don't have to pay today. *[laughter from audience]* Free—good Zen Master, eh? *[more laughter from audience]* ☉

*Zen Master Seung Sahn is founding teacher of the international Kwan Um School of Zen.*



*Zen Master Seung Sahn  
in China, October 1993*