

# Transmission

## You please add in the last line

Zen Master Wu Kwang  
(Richard Shrobe) at his  
transmission ceremony

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*(Hits table with stick)*

Empty sky makes full moon. Full moon makes empty sky.

*(Hit)*

Empty sky never made full moon. Full moon never made empty sky.

*(Hit)*

Full moon shining brightly. Empty sky black like ink.

Which one is the correct statement?

KATZ!

Wake up! Why all this talk about moon and sky?

The sun is hot as hell outside this morning!

About nine years ago, after Zen Master Seung Sahn certified me to be a teacher, I went around leading retreats at various Zen centers and giving talks and many times,

the same question would appear: "Would you please say something about Zen and psychotherapy?" Sometimes that question would even appear in the middle of a three day Yong Maeng Jong Jin, when we have a dharma talk. I always thought, "That's an odd question." And I wondered if people were just indulging their conceptual minds with comparisons. But later I began to realize that in some way, they were probably asking about the role of emotions, imagination, and even fantasy in our Zen practice.

There's a famous story, one of the kong-ans in the Mu Mun Kwan. A monk came to call on Poep An Zen Master before a ceremony. The Master pointed to the bamboo blinds and two monks simultaneously stood up and rolled them up. Then Poep An said, "One has got it. One has lost it." You have to understand, when we hear in one of these stories that a monk came to call on a Zen Master, it doesn't mean that he just came for a casual cup of tea. In the biographies of Zen masters, we read how, as monks, they traveled many hundreds of miles calling on different teachers. So the monk in the story probably had traveled a long way looking for instruction. And Poep An pointed to the blinds.

Maybe this monk thought, "Oh! Buddha raised up a flower, Guji Zen Master raised up one finger, this Zen Master is pointing." Then the two monks got up and rolled up the blinds, and the Master said, "One has got it. One has lost it." The monk at that time probably had a big headache and a big question about what it all meant and I'm sure that if he sincerely stayed with his great question, he would have eventually had a moment of "just doing something." Maybe just seeing or just hearing or just offering food to someone, or just saying "Can I help you?"

At such a moment, his experience would certainly transcend "getting" and "losing." If you look at this kong-an from another perspective, you could say that all the characters in this little drama are all our own mind, and are all engaged in the issue of dealing with gain and loss. When you have to get off your behind to move toward something, you've lost something. When you roll up the blinds, you've also lost something — we all know the comfort of darkness when the early morning bell rings for meditation. So it's not without giving up something or losing something that we enter into this life of Zen practice.

Someone in New York told me a story. When he was a young boy, maybe in the sixth grade, he changed to a new school. He was seated at a table with two girls. He said one was very, very pretty, and he felt attracted to her, and the other was not so pretty. But he liked both of them,

and the school was having a dance; and this was still the time in history when boys asked girls to dances, and girls didn't ask boys. He asked the less pretty girl to the dance.

When he told me this story, he put it in the context of his own decision to not go after what he really wanted. But I see it as something more complex than that. He had some compassion for the feelings of the less pretty girl, and felt he would have hurt her feelings and disappointed her if he asked the other one to the dance. And so I think in our phenomenal existence, we are always gaining something and losing something, and that's a very important point for us to bear in mind.

On the subject of emotions, fantasy and imagination in Zen practice, there's a poem by Zen Master Seung Sahn in his book *Bone of Space* which I became very interested in a while ago. So, I'm going to read it twice. The first time, I'm just going to read it straight through. The second time, I'm going to make a little commentary on the poem. In the old Zen literature, there are two kinds of commentaries which discuss poems or kong-ans. One is a long discourse like a dharma speech. The other is a series of comments inserted in between the lines or sentences of the poem. It's more like heckling. It's sort of like the fans of the Brooklyn Dodgers, before the team moved to Los Angeles, sitting in the bleachers yelling, "Go Bums!", which was the team's nickname. So in the Zen literature, you read statements in commentaries like, "He showed his gall bladder, how regrettable." And that's a compliment.

Zen Master Seung Sahn's poem says:

Looking over the southern mountain, I  
Clap my hands: cumulus clouds transform  
Into dog, tiger, man, Buddha, then disperse

And to my sorrow disappear over the mountain's  
Edge in a rush of wind leaving  
The sky blue, the trees green.

And now for the second version. Zen Master Seung Sahn warned us about this, by the way. When his book *The Whole World is a Single Flower* came out and he had little commentaries on his poems, he said, "I made a little commentary, but in the future you all will add more and more commentary." And a few weeks ago, I remembered this Yiddish expression that my mother and father used to say. It's *kochlöffel*. It means literally, a cooking spoon. The significance is that some people can't leave the soup alone, they have to keep stirring it. So I couldn't leave the poem alone, either. So...



Looking over southern mountain,  
(Which way did you say?)  
I clap my hands  
(Oh, there's some magic there!)  
cumulus clouds transform into dog, tiger, man,  
Buddha, then disperse.  
(So soon? Where did they go?)

And to my sorrow, disappear over the mountain's  
Edge in a rush of wind  
(How sad, how sad. Ji Jang Bosal, Ji Jang Bosal.)\*  
leaving the sky blue, the trees green.  
(Thank you for the teaching. If you hadn't told me,  
I would never have known.)

(Hits table with stick three times)

Today, two new Zen Masters appear.  
Which one has got it? Which one has lost it?  
KATZ!  
You please add in the last line. ☸

\*Universal bodhisattva who acts as a guide to the dead.