

Zen Master Seung Sahn on *Little Buddha*

During his recent swing through the East Coast, Zen Master Seung Sahn was asked by several people his opinion of the movie, Little Buddha. As the first feature-length movie to deal with the life of the Buddha and Buddhist teachings, Little Buddha has drawn many different reactions from members of the American Buddhist sangha. The following comments were made in response to a question asked by a student during Zen Master Seung Sahn's public Dharma talk at the Providence Zen Center, June 24, 1994:

Q: Zen Master, someone told me that you recently saw this movie, *Little Buddha*. What is your opinion of this movie and the teaching it contains? I heard that the filmmaker tried to use this movie as a vehicle to transmit Buddhist teaching to a wide audience...

ZMSS: The first half of this movie was very good, and had good teaching. The beginning of the movie showed the Buddha as a young prince, how he was struck by the suffering of the world. The movie also showed the Buddha leaving home to find his true self. That's a very important point: the Buddha left home, left his wife and child, left the palace in order to answer this question for all beings: "What am I? What is a human being?"

But the second half of the movie was not as clear. The Buddha left home, and never went back to his family. He never went back to his good situation. In the movie, this young American boy is taken by the teachers. He leaves the world of samsara, just like the Buddha did. But at the end of the movie, the boy is back with his parents again. That's not clear teaching. He already left home: Why go back to his parents? What kind of teaching is this? It does not connect to the Buddha's life.

Also, this movie does not show the young boy growing up, getting enlightenment, and teaching other people. That's the point of him being recognized as a teacher. So that's not complete. It's like when you go to the bathroom. After you use the toilet, you must wipe yourself. That's how you finish the job! This movie should show what happened to this boy—that he studied hard, became a great person, and helped many beings. This movie did not finish the job, so a bad smell appears! Same as that. If the filmmakers only want to make a happy ending, that's not clear. Why spend the whole movie to find this dead teacher, and then this teacher ends up with his parents again? Same with the young Nepali boy and girl, who were also chosen as teachers. The movie would have been complete if it showed them practicing hard, getting enlightenment, and helping other people. But why finish this movie before that? If you finish the movie before that, it does not connect to the Buddha's life. It does not show how Buddhism is about teaching other people *today*. So it's not complete—not clear teaching. ☉

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