

What Will We Do With Our Time?

Nancy Brown, JDPSN

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

Is this a good place or a bad place?

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

Is this no place? Is this a magic place? Is this a special place?

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]

If we make any of these kinds of places, then we're lost.

So how can we find our place?

KATZ!

Providence Zen Center, large dharma room.

These weekends are wonderful. We come together three times a year, and we usually have precepts ceremonies. This always reminds me of a conversation I had with my parents when I first decided to take five precepts. They asked me, "What are these precepts?" I listed them, and they said, "But we taught you these already." "Yes," I said, "But this practice helps me to live them."

All of us have had many, many teachers: our parents, school teachers, our family and friends. Zen Master Seung Sahn and all of these wonderful teachers sitting here. One another. The clouds. The sky. How we live all of this teaching we receive is very important.

One of my teachers while I was growing up was the minister of our Congregational church. He was a wonderful man—dedicated, gentle and with an artist's mind. He was quite well-read and always brought to his sermons stories he had been reading that inspired him.

One story this minister told was of a man who drove a trolley car. At the end of this man's work day, he would leave his trolley car at the end of one track, and he would wait 42 minutes for the next car to come, pick

him up, turn around and take him on his way home. At first he simply sat at the end of the track and was restless for 42 minutes. But day after day passed, and he began to notice his surroundings and noticed that it was a junkyard, with old broken-down trolley cars and car parts and litter and weeds. One day he not only noticed these, but acted. He started to pick up and stack litter; he'd bring a rake; he'd bring a plastic garbage bag and haul it away full: 42 minutes every day. Then an occasional Saturday. Then others began to notice the change and began to pitch in—time or money or tools or a truck load hauled away or plants. Slowly, slowly this place began to be a park. In his mind, it had already been a park.

So what will we do with our time? With our hands and with our money and with our energy? What kind of place can we make? And with what kinds of entrances? What kinds of gates?

We come into this world: birth gate. We leave this world: death gate. We have phases of life. We have eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind. Many gates. We have the dharma gate and the gate to the meditation room. Precepts. Relationship. Nature. Friends. Family. Work. Desire. Anger. Ignorance. Many, many gates. Moment to moment, which gate do we go through? Which direction will we take? I want this; I don't want that? Up, down, good, bad, right, wrong—opposite directions? Become one direction? Save all beings from suffering direction?

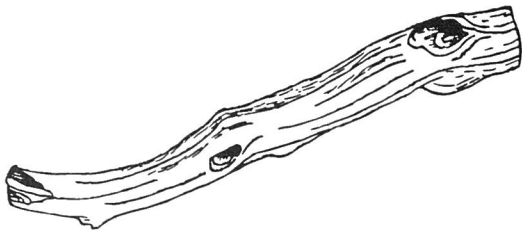
So which way will you turn?
What kind of gate do you like?

[Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table]
If we find our gate, then what?

KATZ!

After this ceremony we have one, two, three, four, five, six doors. How will you leave?

Thank you. ☺



Dharma Combat

Nancy Brown, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Q: When you moved into the Zen Center you established yourself as the mother of two cats. Your two little children, whom I'm allergic to, have a habit of running right into my room, spreading their fur everywhere. So these kong-an answers are really flip. Everyone's good at giving a really snappy answer. But please teach me my correct relationship to your cats.

NB: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

NB: Ahchoo! Ahchoo!

Q: Yesterday three people took novice monk precepts: Hyon Mun Sunim, Chong Do Sunim, and Chong An Sunim. Do An Sunim said at the precept ceremony that this is the end of the "Hyon" family. But "hyon" means infinite, so how can there be an end?

NB: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

NB: So after Hyon Mun, then Chong Do Sunim appeared.

Q: So where is the end?

NB: Not enough?

Q: Not enough.

NB: The dog runs after the bone.

Q: Thank you for your teaching. Congratulations.

NB: Thank you.

Q: Well I'm no longer worried about Grazyna's direction. I no longer worry about her center. But I'm very worried about your direction. Sometimes you were a nun, then you were a lay person. Where are you going?

NB: You already understand.

Q: Please teach me.

NB: End of the ceremony, then out the door.

Q: Is that all?

NB: Not enough?

Q: Not enough at all.

NB: The dog runs after the bone.



Nancy Brown, Ji Do Poep Sa Nim

Q: Since fourteen years ago you've been my dharma sister. And now you're becoming my teacher. So what has changed?

NB: You already understand.

Q: I don't. Please teach me.

NB: It's very good to see you today.

Q: Thank you.

Q: So I have a very simple question. This is my hand. I understand this finger and this finger and this finger. But these two fingers [*thumb and index*], are they the same or different?

NB: You already understand.

Q: So I ask you.

NB: [*Makes shape of gun and "shoots."*]
[applause] ☸