



THE GREAT MATTER

Zen Master Kyong Ho

*Zen Master Kyong Ho is Zen Master
Seung Sahn's great grand-teacher. His
name means "empty mirror."*

of
Life
and
Death

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12. Once Zen Master Dong Sahn wrote: Do not seek noble titles nor wish to have possessions nor ask for prosperity. Wherever you happen to be, just live in accord with your karma here and now in this life. If your clothes wear out, patch them again and again. If there is no food, barely even search for it. When the warm energy under your chin grows cold, suddenly you become a corpse. What remains after death is only a hollow name. After all, how many days will this transient body live? Why work hard only to acquire useless things? That only makes your mind dark and causes you to forget your practice.
13. After awakening one's own mind, one should always preserve its purity and tranquillity. Cultivate this mind without allowing it to be tainted by worldly things. Then plenty of good things will happen. Faithfully trust in this. When you have to die, there will be no more suffering or sickness. You can go freely to Nirvana or anywhere else you choose (i.e., you control your own life as a free person in the world).
14. Shakyamuni Buddha said that if anyone—man or woman, old or young—has faith in these words and practices, each will become a Buddha. Why would Shakyamuni Buddha deceive us?
15. The Fifth Patriarch, Hung Jen Zen Master, said, "By examination and observation of mind, one will become enlightened naturally." Then he further promised us, "If you don't have faith in what I say, in future lives you will be eaten by tigers over and over again. On the other hand, if I have deceived you, I will fall into the dungeon of hell with no exit." Since the Patriarchs have said these words, should we not take them to heart?
16. If you take up this practice, do not agitate your mind; let it be like a mountain. Let your mind be like a clear and empty space and continue to reflect on enlightening Dharma like the moon reflects the sun. Whether others think that you are right or wrong is not your concern. Do not judge or criticize others. Just be at ease and go on mindlessly like a simpleton or a fool. Or, be like one who is struck deaf and dumb. Spend your life as if you cannot hear a thing, or like an infant. Then, sooner or later, all delusion will disappear.
17. If one wishes to accomplish Buddhahood, it is useless to attempt to understand and master worldly life. It would be like one trying to fix food out of dung, or like trying to cut jade out of mud. It is totally useless for accomplishing Buddhahood. There is no reason for occupying oneself with worldly affairs.
18. See your own death in the death of others. Do not put your trust in this body. Rather, remind yourself again and again not to miss a moment to awaken your own mind.
19. Ask yourself repeatedly, "What does this mind look like?" In your daily rounds, continue to ask yourself, "What does this mind look like?" Reflect upon this question so intensely that you are like a starving man thinking of nothing but good food. Do not lose hold of your questioning at any time.
20. Buddha has said that whatever has a form—that is, everything—is all delusory. He also said that everything that the ordinary human being does is subject to life and death. There is only one way for us to be a true person and this is Realization of our own mind.
21. It is said, "Do not drink liquor," since it will intoxicate and make your mind dull. Also, do not speak lies, since it will only accelerate delusive states of mind. Furthermore, do not steal, since it only helps to make your mind jealous and full of desires. You should observe these and all the precepts. Breaking the precepts can be very harmful for your cultivation and for your life itself. You should not cling to or incline yourself towards breaking any of them.
22. Master Ox-herder Mokguja (Chinul) once mentioned that the desire for money and sex are like vicious, poisonous snakes. Watch your body and mind carefully when such desires arise and then understand them as they are. Detach yourself from them as much as possible. These words are very important and they should be remembered. They will make your study more effective.

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23. The Buddha teaches that becoming angry even once raises ten million vicious sins. A student must simply endure and tolerate the angry mind. Many masters have also said that because of anger, one becomes a tiger, a bee, a snake, or some similar stinging or biting creature in a future life. From foolishness, one becomes either a bird or a butterfly. Depending upon his degree of low-mindedness, one becomes either an ant, mosquito or the like. From craving things, one becomes a hungry ghost. The type of desire or anger molds the nature of the hell into which one will accordingly fall. Each and every state of mind determines the kind of creature one is to become.
24. However, if one's mind is unattached, one becomes a Buddha. Even a "good" or positive state of mind is useless. For although such a condition of mind can create a heavenly future life, it is still limited. As soon as one reaches heaven, he immediately begins descending to the hellish or animal realms in successive rebirths. If no intention is held in the mind, then there is no place to be born again. One's mind is so pure and unconfused, it cannot go to the dark places. This pure and quiescent mind is the way of Buddha.
25. If one questions with one-pointed determination, then this mind naturally settles down and becomes tranquil. By this one automatically realizes one's own mind as quiescent and tranquil. This is the same as becoming a Buddha.
26. This way is very direct and goes right to the point. It is the best way one can practice. Read and examine this talk from time to time and, on the right occasions, even tell other people. This is as good as reading eighty-four thousand volumes of scriptures. Practicing in this manner, one will accomplish Buddhahood in this lifetime. Do not think this talk to be some contrived encouragement or expedient deception. Follow these words with whole-hearted determination.
27. In the deep canyon where the clear stream is flowing continuously, all kinds of birds are singing everywhere. No one ever comes to visit this place. It is the so-called Sunim's place (monastery), and is quiet and tranquil. Here is where I sit and contemplate and examine what this mind is. Now, if this mind is not what Buddha is, then what else is it?
28. You have just heard a very rare talk. You should continue to look into this great matter enthusiastically. Do not hurry, otherwise you might become sick or get a terrible headache. Calm yourself, then ceaselessly meditate. Most of all, be careful not to force yourself. Rather, relax and let your right questioning be within!