



Providence Zen Center, April 5, 1997. Robert Moore — professor of music, guiding teacher of Dharma Zen Center in Los Angeles, student of jazz, and teacher of t'ai chi and chi kung — received a ceremonial whisk, wooden bowls and an embroidered gold kasa from Zen Master Seung Sahn, the symbols of formal Transmission of Dharma. The following are excerpts from his formal dharma combat with students at the ceremony and his first formal dharma speech as Zen Master Ji Bong (“Wisdom Peak”).

# Wisdom Peak

## ROBERT MOORE BECOMES ZEN MASTER JI BONG

### DHARMA COMBAT

JBZM: Good afternoon, great computer man!

Student: Good afternoon, Poep Sa Nim. For many years now you've told me off and on that you and I are very much alike. You said it again at lunch today. And I know we both come from the same neck of the woods and have a few other things in common, but I really don't know how we actually are alike. Maybe you could help me understand.

JBZM: You already understand this!

Student: No, I actually don't.

JBZM: Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal.

Student: Thank you so much!

JBZM: Good afternoon, great new monk! How are you?

Student: I'm very well, thank you. A couple of years ago we were talking about music, and you said, "Oh, you must pick up this CD by a great guitar player named Sonny Sharrock; the album is called 'Ask the Ages.'" It's a very interesting title. So I wonder, if you ask the ages, what kind of question would you ask?

JBZM: *[Makes loud guitar noises.]*

Student: Very strange answer.

JBZM: You've already attained.

Student: Congratulations.

JBZM: Thank you.

Student: Often in your talks, you quote Jesus Christ, and you talk about God sometimes. So my question is, if God is so all-powerful, can he make a rock so large that he himself can't lift it?

JBZM: You already understand.

Student: Please tell me!

JBZM: *[makes grunting noise and motions lifting rock]*  
Oooooogr....Boom!

Student: Thank you.

JBZM: Maybe I can lift a rock, but not you. *[Student is a very large man.]*

Student: Oh, great teacher.

JBZM: My other Bridget.

Student: You had a heart attack almost a year ago. So, you seem to be on the repair. How do you mend a broken heart?

JBZM: You already understand.

Student: So I ask you.

JBZM: *[hugs Bridget]* Thank you for taking care of me when I had a broken heart.

Student: You're welcome.

JBZM: She sat with me all night the first night that I was in the hospital. When I didn't know whether I was going to live or not, she was there holding my hand. That's how one helps in mending a broken heart.

# FORMAL DHARMA SPEECH

*[Holds stick over head then hits table]*

In ancient times, Buddha once went to Vulture's Peak to give a speech. But rather than giving a speech, after a long pause, he simply plucked a flower and held it up. Everyone was astonished.

*[Hits again]*

At that time, Mahakashyapa, one of his senior students, cracked a smile.

*[Hits again]*

Then the Buddha said to Mahakashyapa, "I give to you my all-pervading true dharma, incomparable nirvana, exquisite teaching of formless form. Not dependent on words, a transmission outside the sutras, this I give to you." So the Buddha delivered a lot of bullshit talk: I, incomparable nirvana, all-pervading true dharma. Much, much bad speech. But something did transpire between these two people. What was it that actually happened?

KATZ!

Today is April 5th and I see before me many, many smiling faces.

Today obviously marks an important signpost in my life, and it most specifically indicates a climax, not the end, but an important landmark in a forty-three year search that began when I was just thirteen years old. At that time, I was trying hard to make the junior high basketball team. I started to feel bad. I thought that it was because the basketball practices were very long and that was so exhausting. However, one morning I woke up and my body had begun to swell. I had gained almost forty pounds overnight as fluids started to collect in my body. I was very, very sick and I was rushed to a hospital. They later told me that I actually died before they could get a specialist from Chicago to come and work on me. During that process I had one of these experiences where I left my body and sort of observed the doctors running around and doing all this work on me. After some period of time I rejoined my body. I remember not being particularly interested in doing that, but it seemed like the thing that I should do given the circumstances, so I came back into my body. But during this I had a strong sense that everything in this universe is constantly in flux, coming and going, and literally that we as human beings are thrust into this time and space and later yanked out of it into some other place in an ongoing process.

This initiated a great search for me. At first I thought that since this had happened to me, it must mean that I was destined to become a preacher. (Please remember that this was Texas in 1954.) So I decided that I would become a Baptist preacher. I began to go around to all of the Baptist preachers in my hometown of Marshall, Texas. I had interviews with them, but none of them had any idea what I was talking about. Eventually, I got very disgusted with the preachers and decided that I would become an atheist instead of a preacher. (While preparing to come here this weekend my wife looked at me sardonically and said, "Well, it's forty-three years later, and I guess you now get to be a preacher!")

Several years after this experience, during my freshman year, I

was in the college bookstore when I saw one of the very early translations of Zen writings. There was a story that I'd like to share with you:

Great Master Ma Tsu was once in the mountains late at night with three of his senior students: Shi Tang, Pai Chang, and Nam Chuan. It was a very, very beautiful summer night and the moon was shining brightly. He turned to the students and said, "This is such a beautiful evening, how can we use it properly?" Immediately Shi Tang started bowing and said, "I think that we should do many bows of supplication to honor the Buddha for giving us this wonderful evening." Then Ma Tsu turned to Pai Chang, who merely sat down in a meditation pose and said, "I think we should use the evening for hard training. We should sit for three or four hours, clearing our minds with hard meditation." Finally he looked at Nam Chuan, who took the sleeves of his robe, shook them three times and began to walk down off the mountain. Ma Tsu said to Shi Tang, "To you I give the lineage of the sutras and the great knowledge and wisdom of Buddhism." To Pai Chang he said, "I give you the task of starting a monk's order and establishing the methods of correct meditation." Then he said, "But I have a very special transmission for Nam Chuan, because he has already transcended all things."

So when I read that story as a nineteen year-old anarchist, I decided what I really wanted to do was study Zen. I searched for many, many years after that, going around the country to visit various teachers. Finally in 1974, I took a teaching position at Yale University. A couple of months after my arrival in New Haven I went to a talk at Berkeley College on the Yale campus. That was where I met and heard Zen Master Seung Sahn for the first time. It was a revelation because after reading Zen books for almost fifteen or twenty years, I actually heard that evening this person do dharma combat and utter all of these wonderful insights that I had loved to read in the Zen literature. Dae Soen Sa Nim invited me to attend a retreat in Providence shortly thereafter. During that retreat he showed me how to hit the floor and taught me about primary point. I thought that this teaching was the best thing since sliced bread because for twenty years I'd been trying to intellectually figure everything out. Dae Soen Sa Nim showed me that genuine insight was not dependent upon intelligence. And it was great to just keep returning to primary point.

Once Dae Soen Sa Nim and another Zen master in the Japanese tradition were asked to co-lead a retreat at the Ojai Foundation. Dae Soen Sa Nim had to go back into the city during the middle of the retreat and I was the senior student in those days in Los Angeles. So he asked me if I would come out and help him with the retreat. Jane McLaughlin-Dobisz JDPSN and I drove up to Ojai after I finished teaching at the university one evening. It happened that on that particular weekend we had one of the worst rainstorms in California during the entire decade. Jane and I arrived at Ojai in the middle of the rainstorm at about one o'clock in the morning; there were no lights and we couldn't find anything. We tried to walk down a hill but we slipped and fell in the mud and rolled down to the bottom of the hill. Eventually we found the yurt where we were supposed to stay, and we went in and changed our clothes. I had brought two sets of clothes. Now one set was already ruined. Finally we were able to try to get some sleep—the four-thirty wake-up call was going to come very soon.

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As I laid down, I put my glasses next to the place where I was sleeping, thinking that they would be safe there. A few minutes later, Jane had to get up to use the bathroom. She lost her balance and stumbled, stepping on my glasses. She crunched them and absolutely smashed them. I don't think I ever told her that. So anyway, four-thirty the next morning comes, and it's time for interviews, so I put on my robe and go to practice, broken glasses and all! The interviews were in a yurt up on the top of this hill and the hill at this point had turned into a mudslide. It was very, very treacherous. My shoes had gotten ruined the previous night, so the only thing I had left were some sandals. Dae Soen Sa Nim rang the bell, and I began to trek up the hill for my interview.

Now the first thing that you have to understand is that Dae Soen Sa Nim and I are not alike in some ways. I am what in the South is referred to as a "rumpled person." I can put on brand new clothes, with pressed creases and the whole nine yards, but I will still look rumpled. And Dae Soen Sa Nim is always so elegant and properly creased and all of that. So when I'm around him I try very hard to be meticulous, but nevertheless he's still always adjusting my collar and fixing things for me.

So anyway, I got almost to the top of the hill, maybe two steps to go, when, suddenly, my feet went out from under me. I proceeded to slide twenty feet down this mudslide of a hill. When I got to the bottom, not only was my kasa and my robe all full of mud, even my underwear was full of mud. Everything was full of mud. And Dae Soen Sa Nim was continuing to ring the bell. Finally, I crawled my way back up and went into the interview room. Dae Soen Sa Nim looked at me and said, "What happened?" And at that moment, I just didn't give a damn anymore. He and the other Zen Master both tried to jump on me, and I just didn't care at all. So not only did I fight recklessly with them, but I actually finished a koan that morning that I'd been working on for nine years. As I left, I sat down to put on my sandals and the sun came out. It was shining brightly and the clouds had parted. I thought, "Gee, this really is a very beautiful morning." Then I heard Dae Soen Sa Nim laughing. He said to the other Zen Master, "Not bad."

That's the first kind of transmission. For me that process started a long time ago, it started when I was thirteen. That's transmission of the Buddhadharmā by direct experience.

Earlier, Jeff Kitzes JDPSN asked me about old hippies. When Dae Soen Sa Nim first came to this country, many of the early students were basically hippies. In some of the old photographs, you can see it; everybody's hair is down to their shoulder and so forth. But when one looks at a photograph taken ten years later, the students nearly all look like me, all of the hair has disappeared. We begin to look like him. Dae Soen Sa Nim told us in the early days, "You are all outside hippies, but you still have no freedom inside, so you must attain inside-freedom."

What finally convinced me to become a teacher in our School and eventually to love doing it so much was the model of Dae Soen Sa Nim himself. There's a wonderful story, it's one of my favorite Zen stories about Nam Chuan, the man who shook his sleeves in the story I told a few moments ago. This dialogue occurred about twenty-five years after the other. Nam Chuan was visiting one of his student's temples. They were preparing for a big ceremony to honor his teacher, Ma Tsu, who had died several years earlier. It was late at night and there were some young monks helping Nam Chuan to prepare the temple. Nam Chuan, in an off-hand manner, mused aloud, "I wonder whether Ma Tsu will actually show up for

tomorrow's ceremony?" One young monk, who was later known as Dung Shan, was working at the altar. He turned around and said to Nam Chuan, "I think that if he finds a companion, he might show up." Nam Chuan said to this young monk's teacher, "This fellow is a little green, but I think with some carving and polishing, we might make something out of him." To this Dung Shan replied, "Why do you want to put shackles on a free man and make him a slave?" Dae Soen Sa Nim's teaching is like that. He lets each one of us be Bob Moore or Barbara Rhodes or Richard Shrobe or Mark Houghton or whomever. So the bone of his teaching is always the same, but the freedom to express that teaching comes through each one of us as individuals. And that's second kind of true transmission. That's the transmission from master to the student.

Now I have taught in our School for ten years. But last year I also had a major heart attack. After I was moved out of the intensive care unit and put into a place where I could have flowers and so forth, I found this room with thirty-two bouquets of flowers waiting for me. And over a hundred telegrams and letters were sent to me. One nurse who had been on this ward for a long time said to me, "I've been working on this ward for nine years. I've never seen anything like this. What do you do?" And I said, "Well, I'm a teacher." And she said to me, "That must really be a wonderful job. I've never seen anything like this in this hospital." I have thought about her comment a lot. The sangha raised money so I was able to take the whole of last summer off from work and recover. I was able to keep my daughter in college and all sorts of other things because of the generosity of the sangha. One of the things I want to really make clear today is how much I appreciate all of you. I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for your generosity and kindness. The process also made me realize why I had to be here today: I am here today to begin to pay all of you back. And that is also the final transmission, perhaps most important of all. It is the transmission from sangha to teacher.

I began this talk with the story about Buddha holding up a flower. He didn't hold that flower up just for the crowd at Vulture's Peak; Buddha held up that flower for this assembly, too. If our eyes are open and we can perceive directly that flower, it will never wilt, and it will last for ten thousand *kalpas*. The only thing that makes Buddha's flower wilt is if we check it, want it, think about it, analyze it. Then we will surely kill it. If we just perceive the flower, then we get everything. Mahakashyapa smiled: how wonderful!

*[holds stick above head and then hits table with stick]*

Zen Master Sol Bong went to Kung Sahn Hermitage to see his teacher, Zen Master Man Gong. Sol Bong asked, "Buddha held up a flower on Vulture's Peak in ancient times. What's the meaning?"

*[hits again]*

Man Gong held up one finger and Sol Bong bowed deeply before him.

*[hits again]*

Buddha held up a flower and Mahakashyapa smiled. Man Gong held up a finger and Sol Bong bowed. Are they the same or are they different?

KATZ!

Today is Transmission Day. "Bob" thanks you from the bottom of my heart; I hope that we're all together for ten thousand years, and that we can make this world not only a single flower but a single smiling flower.