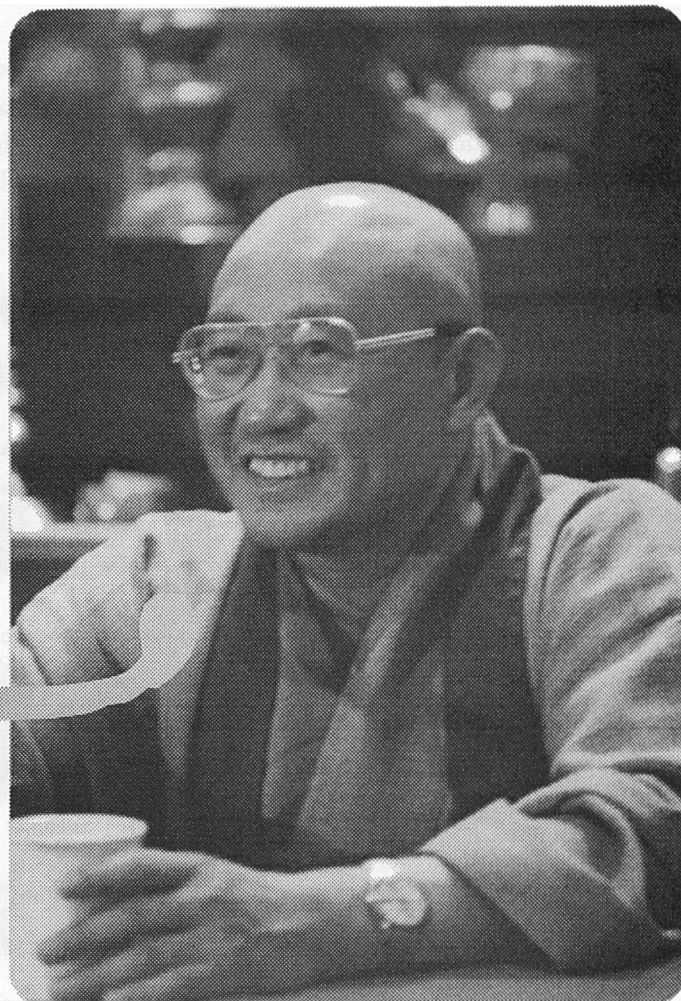


# HUA T'OU CHINESE FOOD



*A conversation at lunch in Hong Kong between  
Zen Master Seung Sahn, a famous monk, and some students*

**Monk:** Dae Soen Sa Nim, what is the difference between hua t'ou\* and kong-an?

**Zen Master Seung Sahn:** The hua t'ou is like a pointing finger. The finger itself is not important. Direction is most important. The hua t'ou has no meaning. It's just a finger pointing. Most important is direction. Hua t'ou means your direction. A question like "Who is speaking?" has two points, subject and object. If you have two things, then opposites have already appeared. Don't make opposites. "Who is speaking?"... then thinking, thinking, thinking appears. Hua t'ou means cut off all thinking. "What is Buddha? Dry shit on a stick." This has no thinking; it's a direct pointing! Kong-an also means cut off all thinking. Just do it.

**Monk:** But, when you ask a question you want to find an answer, correct?

**ZMSS:** You shouldn't want to find an answer. Now in China, Pure Land practice is very popular. Many people practice by asking themselves, "Who is O Mi To Fo, who is the Amitabul Bodhisattva?" That is OK, but not true Zen. It's like this: "What is Buddha? Chopsticks." Then if thinking appears, "why chopsticks?" that's not so good. "What is Buddha? Chopsticks." Then, only action—use the chopsticks, eat! That's correct. "Who is chanting?" If you are thinking, then two minds appear: chanting mind, asking mind. But hua t'ou means cut off these two minds—cut off all thinking. Da Sung Il Pung—HIT! Become one. Just do it!

**Monk:** But everyone is practicing, “Who is chanting O Mi To Fo?” Da Sung Il Pung is very high class! Nobody understands that.

**ZMSS:** Yes, this style of teaching has been used for such a long time that the true meaning has been lost. Today, nobody understands. During the Tang and Sung dynasties everyone understood the correct teaching. Live words are very important—that’s Zen. Not thinking words. Just perceive, then inside and outside BOOM! become one. Here’s a poem for you:

阿彌陀佛在何方

Where is Amitabul now?

著得心頭切莫忘

If you keep this question, all thinking disappears.

念到念窮無念處

You return to the place of no thinking

六門常放紫金光

Then your mind light is shining bright.

So, everyone, please eat!

**Monk:** Sir, what do you do during sitting meditation?

**ZMSS:** Sitting meditation, lie down meditation, walking meditation, it doesn’t matter. Right now everything must be clear in front of you.

**Monk:** From what I understand from your talk, when doing a mantra, reading sutra, etc. just do it. But, Chinese people, when they recite O Mi To Fo, they are thinking about O Mi To Fo, Pure Land, etc. But you say, “only do it”—is that right?

**ZMSS:** Yes, correct. Only do it! Then repeating O Mi To Fo and Zen are not different.

**Monk:** Then bowing time, only bow?

**ZMSS:** Correct. Only do it!

**Monk:** They don’t have Zen Masters like you in China. There, they only sit. They will not bow or do mantra practice. Also, they only stay at the temple. But you use everything as a practice.

**ZMSS:** Bowing, chanting, sitting—only do it. If you want anything, it’s a big mistake. If you want to go to the Pure Land or want enlightenment, you will have a problem. Only do it! Doing O Mi To Fo or eating, you must try. If you don’t have a try mind, everything is a problem. If you have a try mind, nothing is a problem. Please eat.

**Monk:** I am very happy, I cannot eat.

**ZMSS:** Eat, eat! Eating time, eat.

**Monk:** You are the live word. Now I have attained the live word!

*\*Hua t’ou means “head of speech”. Its the point just before thinking. Traditionally its a word or phrase (like “mu” or “what is this?”) used by a practitioner to cut off all thinking and return to before thinking, the original self.*