

# Losing It

# Is Getting It



*This is an excerpt from a talk given by Zen Master Seung Sahn to the members of Hwa Gye Sah, our temple in Seoul, on the evening before Buddha's Enlightenment Day. Traditionally Buddhists will stay up all night practicing meditation on this night in emulation of the Buddha before his great enlightenment. Second of two parts.*

*[Zen Master Seung Sahn begins this second part of his speech by chanting a poem.]*

Before the ancient Buddha was born,  
There was this one thing—lucid, round and clear.  
Na Mu Ah Mi Ta Bul  
Originally nothing, but today  
White snow covers the world.  
Na Mu Ah Mi Ta Bul

Tomorrow is Buddha's Enlightenment Day. Just like Buddha, we have gathered here to attain something. Someone tries Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal, Kwan Seum Bosal: Who is trying Kwan Seum Bosal, who is that? Who is chanting? What is that thing that chants? What is that thing that tries Kwan Seum Bosal? We call that "don't know"; we call that "cut off all thinking"—before thinking. We come here and try to keep a before thinking mind.

For six years the Buddha kept "What am I?" and kept "don't know." But in front of the Buddha many beautiful women were dancing; demons appeared, many things appeared. He understood that all these things came from his mind. They appear and disappear over and over again. If I have no mind, then nothing appears. So, I ask all you Hwa Gye Sah members, do you have mind or not? If you say you have mind, this stick will hit you. If you say you don't have mind, this stick will also hit you. Will you say you have mind, or will you say you have no mind? You must understand how to answer! If you want to understand how to answer, you have to earnestly and sincerely practice Zen.

A long time ago Shakyamuni Buddha sat under the bodhi tree for six years. Then one morning he saw a star and got enlightenment. In our world many kinds of religion have appeared: Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Today many people believe in these religions. In the Buddha's time, also, there were many kinds of religion. But the Buddha left all

these beliefs behind and went to the mountain. He only asked himself, “What am I?” Then he attained enlightenment. So Buddhism is a religion of enlightenment, not of belief. Of course, we say somebody becomes Buddha or somebody attained dharma. All these things are necessary, but they are only teaching words. Originally Buddhism means attain my true self, attain “Buddha is mind, mind is Buddha.” You must attain to that! OK?

The Sixth Patriarch, Hui Neng, unlike the Buddha, had a very simple situation. Every morning he helped his mother; went to the mountains, got firewood, sold the firewood, got money and bought food. He did not get married; he only went to the mountain every day and supported his mother—a very simple mind. But look at our minds; they are very complicated. We have many things to do: save money, make investments, etc. But the Sixth Patriarch’s mind was very simple...too simple.

One day on his way home after selling the firewood, he encountered a monk who was reciting the Diamond Sutra. Just as he passed by he heard the monk recite the line, “don’t be attached to anything that arises in your mind.” BOOM! he got enlightenment, attained his true self and “what am I.” He had never learned Chinese characters or studied Buddhist texts. All he did was to go to the mountains and get firewood to help his mother. But he attained enlightenment upon hearing one line from the Diamond Sutra.

Then he asked the monk: “What book is that? What text are you reading?”

“This is the Diamond Sutra. If you go to the North, you will find the Fifth Patriarch, Hung Jen. He has thousands of disciples and teaches the Diamond Sutra.”

He went back and told his mother about what had happened. After arranging for his mother’s care, he traveled north until he found the Fifth Patriarch’s temple.

He said, “I’ve come here to practice with you. I want to learn the dharma from you.”

The Fifth Patriarch asked, “Where did you come from?”

He said “I’ve come from the South.”

“From the South? Ah, barbarians from the South have no Buddha nature!”

Then Hui Neng said, “Human Beings have North and South, but in Buddha nature is there North and South?”

What a beautiful way to answer. That is the speech of an enlightened person—remarkable. How could this kind of speech appear from somebody who just worked in the mountains cutting wood and helping his mother? It can

only appear if you attain something, if you have enlightened yourself. At this point the Fifth Patriarch already understood his mind and said, “You go into the rice pounding room and work.” Later, as everybody here knows, the Fifth Patriarch secretly gave him transmission.

So, how do you attain an enlightened mind? It took the Buddha six years, but the Sixth Patriarch heard just one word and attained enlightenment. Some people just hear one word—BOOM!—get enlightenment. People can attain enlightenment in just one instant; it doesn’t always take six years. Every day we chant, everyday we sit in the dharma hall. How come we are not enlightened people? How come we have not gotten great enlightenment? Our minds are complicated, that’s why. The Sixth Patriarch’s mind was very simple, so he easily got enlightenment. A complicated mind takes a long time. However, we look, we see, and even though it takes time, we can get enlightenment.

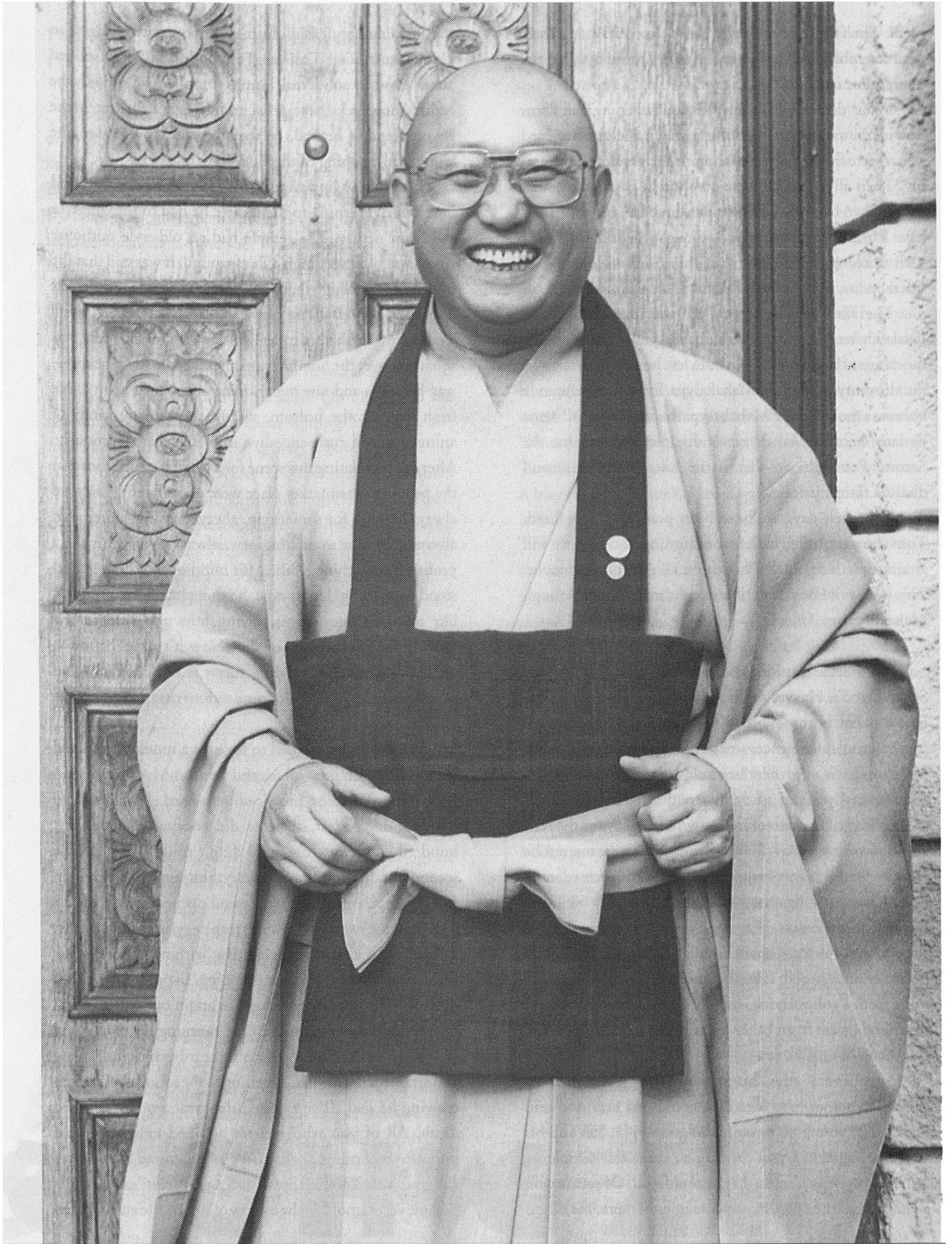
Among the Buddha’s disciples, Ananda was one of the foremost. Known for his phenomenal memory, he remembered everything that the Buddha taught—just like a tape recorder. If you said to him, “At this time, at this place, what was the dharma speech?” he could tell you precisely. In the Buddha’s time there were no sutras. It was not until after the Buddha died that the sutras were made. Many people wanted to hear about what the Buddha had taught, so they asked Ananda. One problem was that Ananda had not yet attained enlightenment himself. At one time five hundred great arhats gathered to compile the sutras. All of these great monks had gathered, but Ananda could not join them because Ananda had not yet attained enlightenment. He approached his senior brother Mahakasyapa and asked him, “Older brother, besides the golden kasa and bowls, what else did the Buddha transmit to you? What else did you get from the Buddha?”

Mahakasyapa said, “Ananda.”

Ananda replied, “Yes.”

“Knock down the flag pole in front of the gate.”

So what does that mean? He asked Mahakasyapa what he got from the Buddha, and Mahakasyapa said “knock down the flag pole in front of the gate.” Ananda went away and for seven days only practiced. He didn’t eat. He didn’t lie down. He stood constantly and meditated on this question. That’s the origin of the seven day Yong Maeng Jong Jin practice that our western monks are now doing. Tomorrow, when we see the morning star, it’s all finished. On the seventh day it is said that Ananda got enlighten-



ment. Then the five hundred arhats welcomed Ananda into their assembly. Mahakasyapa said, "Without opening the door, come in."

What does that mean, "Without opening the door, how can you come in?" The meaning is that all five hundred arhats were finally willing to accept Ananda into the assembly. Then all the sutras were composed. Every sutra says, "Thus have I heard..." Those are Ananda's words. "Thus have I heard" means "I heard from the Buddha such and such teaching at such and such time." If you look at our sutras today, they all have this mark on them.

The First Patriarch was Mahakasyapa. The Second Patriarch was Ananda. But Mahakasyapa became a monk much later than Ananda. Ananda left home and became a monk twenty years before Mahakasyapa. Even though Ananda became a monk before Mahakasyapa, because of the dharma he later became Mahakasyapa's disciple, and became the Second Patriarch. So that is the history of the second dharma transmission.

For seven days we have been practicing very hard. Tomorrow morning, look at the morning star, then we will attain something, OK? I hope you all get enlightenment. This is how the Buddha's dharma was transmitted through Mahakasyapa to Ananda.

Next, let's consider the great Korean Zen Master, Sosan Dae Sa. He was originally from Pyong-Ando Province in what is now North Korea. As a child he demonstrated great intelligence, so at an early age his stepfather took him to Seoul, where he could learn Confucian texts. After several years of study he stood for the civil service examination. He was required to write an essay for the test. He also wrote the essays for his friends. When the test results came back he was very surprised: all his friends passed; only he did not pass! Again he tried; he wrote very well and finished all the essays. But, again he did not pass. A third time he took the test—again he failed. Why was that? Then he finally understood: It was because of his background. He came from Pyong-Ando—the northern part of Korea. All his friends were from other parts of Korea: Chungchong Do, Kang-Won Do, etc.

After several tries, his stepfather suggested that he should go somewhere where he could rest and just read books. The young man wanted to go to Hein Sah and his stepfather agreed. Upon arriving at Hein Sah temple he found many, many books that he could read. Of course, you all know that the 84,000 sutras are housed there. He found

that reading about Buddhism was more interesting than Confucianism or Taoism. The Buddhist Sutras talked about how to solve real human problems. Suddenly he realized how lucky he was that he didn't get a position in the government. If he had, he would never have known the wonderful teaching of the Buddha.

One day Sosan was sent into town to buy brushes and ink. Upon returning to the temple he had to respond to a call from nature. The temple had an old-style outhouse which was built very high off the ground. It was said that the outhouse was so high that if shit dropped when a traveler left Taejon, it wouldn't land until the traveler reached Seoul! That's how high this toilet was! So, as Sosan Taesa was squatting over the hole he happened to look down below—way below!—and saw many small animals. As soon as his fresh shit hit the bottom, worms, rats, many kinds of animals would rush and dive into it, eating ravenously. After contemplating this scene for a while it struck him that the people in the market place were no different. They are always looking for something, always seeking something, always going for something new, always trying to make a profit off something. Ahh... his mind opened. He understood something. Up to now, he thought, I have been just like one of those worms, diving into new shit; always looking for another pile of shit. Now it's time for me to really practice. Only reading sutras is not enough—that can't help me. I have to do some serious practice. What am I? Who am I?

With that, he decided to become a monk. He shaved his head, put on grey robes, and went to Myo Hyang San Mountain. There he practiced very hard. First he did a hundred-day retreat, then he did another. On the first hundred-day retreat his mind didn't really open. On the second hundred-day retreat, everything appeared clearly in front of him. At that time his mind opened widely and he saw that the world is always turning, turning, turning. Everything is always changing. But within all that change there is one thing that is not changing. In order to find that one unchanging thing, we have to attain our true nature.

What did Sosan attain? One morning he awoke very early to do a kido. From far away he heard a chicken crowing and attained his true self. Listening to the sound of a chicken crowing he said, "I've finished the great work of life and death. All of you who haven't attained enlightenment, tomorrow morning, try listening to the sound of a rooster crowing. Listen to that and finish a great man's work." He became very famous in the history of Korea. He and Samyan

Taesa helped save the country from the Japanese invasion of 1592. That is the story of Sosan.

Zen Master Pao-Chi practiced very hard but still everything was unclear in front of him. One day at a funeral he heard the bell of the funeral crier. As the monk rang the bell he chanted. As soon as Pao-Chi heard this chant—BOOM!—his mind opened, he got enlightenment. The line that opened his mind was: “In front of the door lies the land of stillness.” Hearing that line, he got enlightenment.

Many stories of masters attaining enlightenment involve hearing one thing. Zen Master Bao Zho was asked by his teacher, “What is your original face before you were born?” He stayed up many nights, desperately trying to answer this question, but to no avail. On his way to the market one day he saw two people fighting. Eventually one man apologized to the other, saying, “I have truly lost my face.” At this Bao Zho achieved awakening. He attained “losing his face.” Then he truly understood his original face. If you keep this great question, then any time, any place, you can get enlightenment. The Sixth Patriarch got enlightenment hearing the Diamond Sutra. Bao Zho got enlightenment hearing two people fighting. Also, you can hear a bird or the bellow of a cow—any kind of sound—and get enlightenment.

Tomorrow is Buddha’s Enlightenment Day. That is the day the Buddha saw a star and got enlightenment. If you really want to attain enlightenment, then the big question must become very strong. It must be earnest and sincere. If you have this big question: “Who is chanting Kwan Seum Bosal? Who is sitting Zen?” then it’s possible to get enlightenment.

These days I am always teaching that human beings are not human beings. Human beings have to act correctly, then they become human beings. Moment to moment, what do you do? What is your correct direction? Moment to moment, what is your correct life? How do you find your correct way? How do you save all beings from suffering? We come into this world empty-handed. What do we do in this world? Why did we come into this world? Our body is an empty thing. What is the one thing that carries this body around? Where did it come from? You must understand that... you must find that. If you want to find that, you have to ask yourself, “What am I?” Always keep this big question. Thinking has to disappear. You have to take away all your thinking; cut off all your thinking. Then your true self

appears; then your true mind appears. Everybody assembled here tonight, ask yourself sincerely, “What am I?”, and keep this great don’t know. Maybe you try Kwan Seum Bosal, or maybe you try Om Mani Padme Hum, but only if you do it with complete sincerity will this great question—this don’t know mind—explode. Then you will attain enlightenment!

In this world how many people really want to practice? Many people don’t practice at all. All day and night they fight and only exercise their desire, their anger and their ignorance. When you lose this body, you will have nothing to take with you. When this body disappears, what will you take with you? What will you do? If this don’t know is clear, then also the place you go is clear. Then you understand your job, you understand why you were born into this world. Then you understand what to do in this world. When you do that, then you can become a human being. Tonight I will give you homework—a kong-an to work on. A long time ago a monk asked Zen Master Un Mun, “What is Buddha?”

Un Mun said, “Dry shit on stick.” What is that? What in the world does that mean? Dry shit on stick. If you keep practicing... ahh! Buddha is dry shit on stick! Everything in this world is Buddha. All things—not just dry shit on stick, but everything in the world. All are Buddha.

So I ask you, how long is this dry shit stick? You must attain that, then we can say that you are really a Zen disciple. How long is dry shit on stick?—you must find that. It is very important to find that. Then you can understand your original face. You can understand what brought you to Hwa Gye Sah. You can find Buddha’s original face. You can have the energy to save all beings and you can keep the great bodhisattva vow. Lifetime after lifetime the great bodhisattva way opens for you. All our Hwa Gye Sah members, ask yourself, “What am I?” Keep a great “don’t know” mind. Tonight we will stay up all night, attain our true selves, attain universal truth, and save all beings from suffering.

*[Zen Master Seung Sahn chants while hitting with the Zen stick three times.]*

Vowing to join with all sentient beings throughout the universe,

Together we enter Amita’s Ocean of Great Vows.  
Na Mu Ah Mi Ta Bul

In order to save all beings in numberless worlds,  
Together, you and I, at the same time, attain Buddhahood.

Na Mu Ah Mi Ta Bul

# SITTING ZEN?