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*Zen Master Seung Sahn:
Losing It is Getting It*

*Oh Jin Sunim
receives inka*

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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.

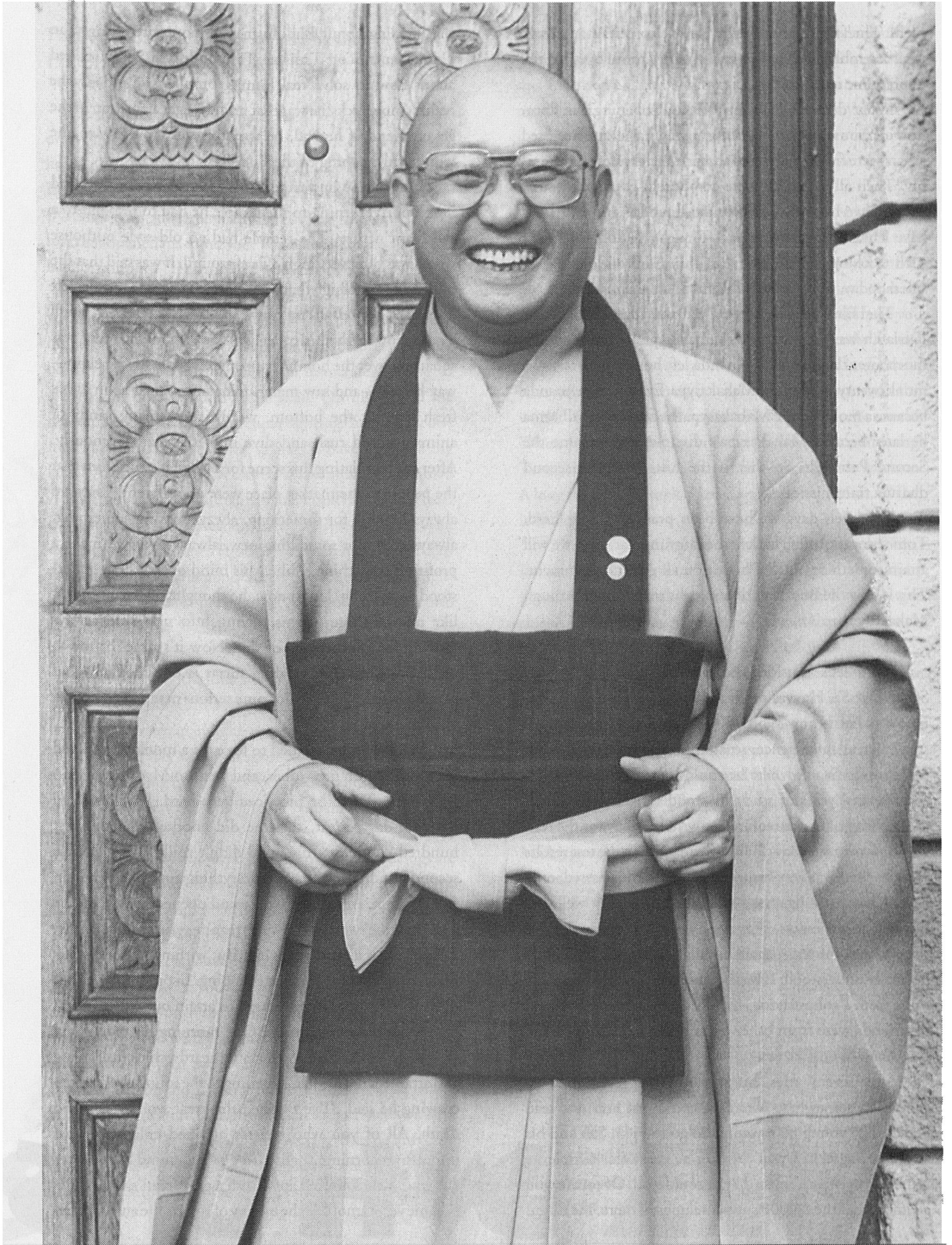
Among the Buddha’s disciples, Ananda was one of the foremost. Known for his phenomenal memory, he remembered everything that the Buddha taught—just like a tape recorder. If you said to him, “At this time, at this place, what was the dharma speech?” he could tell you precisely. In the Buddha’s time there 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

WHO IS

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,

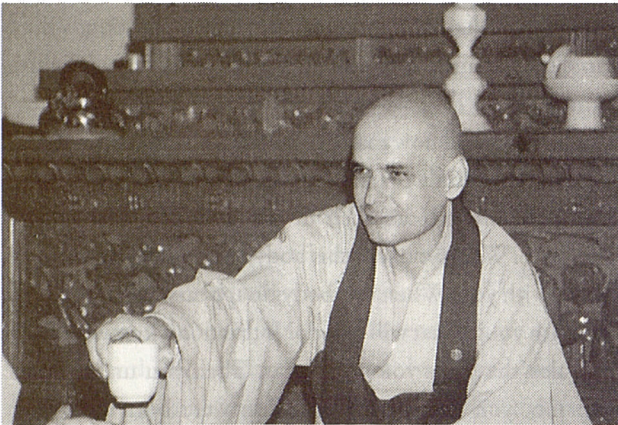
Together we enter Amita’s Ocean of Great Vows.
Na Mu Ah Mi Ta Bul

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?

On August 6, 1998, Oh Jin Sunim received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn at the Seoul International Zen Center.



DHARMA COMBAT

Question: Good morning, Oh Jin Sunim.

OJSN: Good morning.

Q: So it's been nine years that we haven't seen each other. I just wanted to ask you, what did you do during that time?

OJSN: You already understand.

Q: I ask you.

OJSN: Welcome back.

Q: Good morning.

OJSN: Good morning.

Q: Your name means true enlightenment, but Zen Master Seung Sahn always tells us no enlightenment is true enlightenment. So can you demonstrate this no enlightenment for me?

OJSN: You already understand.

Q: So I ask you.

OJSN: The ceiling is white, the floor is yellow.

Q: Ah, thank you for your teaching.

OJSN: You're welcome.

Q: In the north there is a northern pole. In the south there is a southern pole. In Poland, there is a western pole. In Seoul there is the eastern pole. Where is the true pole?

OJSN: You already understand.

Q: Tell me a Polish joke.

OJSN: This has nothing to do with Polish joke. You are sitting on the third floor of Hwa Gye Sah.

Q: Thank you.

OJSN: Is that funny?

FORMAL DHARMA SPEECH

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dead words are live words, live words are dead words.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

No live words, no dead words.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Live words are live words, dead words are dead words.

Of these three statements, which one is correct? If you find it, this stick will hit you thirty times. If you don't find it, this stick will also hit you thirty times. What can you do?

KATZ!

Drinking Joju's tea and receiving Dok Sahn's blows for fifteen years. The stick is brown, the tea is hot.

Oh Jin Sunim gets a Zen

Today during the circle talk marking the end of our three month winter retreat, Zen Master Seung Sahn told us about using words in Zen. As you all know, Zen started on Vulture Peak. Buddha pick up a flower and Mahakasyapa smiled—no speech, no words. Two minds connected. Later, during the T'ang dynasty in China, speech and words appeared in Zen. Sincere questions met simple, directly pointing answers.

Today we also heard about Zen Master Dok Sahn. Whenever someone asked him a question, he would only hit the student with his staff. Before becoming a Zen Master, Dok Sahn was a "dead words" man. He had studied the Diamond Sutra for ten years and because of his knowledge he was called "Diamond Chou."

One day he heard about monks in the south of China who only sat in meditation facing a wall. They didn't study any scriptures, yet they claimed to have perceived their true selves and become Buddhas. When Dok Sahn heard this he got angry; he packed his commentaries on the Diamond Sutra, picked up his staff, and headed south. On the way he got hungry. The old lady who owned the tea house took away not only his hunger, but also his pride, when he could not answer her "live word" question with his "dead word" understanding. Following her suggestion, he went to visit the Zen Master of Dragon Pond Monastery. They talked late into the night. All that time Dok Sahn was still using the "dead words" of his understanding. Finally the Master said: "It's getting late, why don't you go rest?" and handed him a candle. When Dok Sahn reached out to take the candle, the Master blew it out. In complete darkness Dok Sahn perceived his true self for the first time. The next morning he took his commentaries to the front of the Buddha Hall and burned them all.

Imagine a monk who had studied sutras for ten years and

was so attached to them that he carried them on his back throughout the whole of China. Something had changed. There he was, standing in front of the fire, watching the ashes of the Diamond Sutra flying up in the air. His past was gone; all that remained of his former life was a monk's staff. For the rest of his life he used that staff to teach Zen. Those were his "live words."

There is another famous story about live and dead words. This time it took place at the Wi Sahn School's monastery. One day Zen Master Wi Sahn received a monk who had studied under his late master. "Oh, I recognize you," Wi Sahn said. "When somebody asked you a question you gave ten answers, when somebody asked you ten questions you gave one hundred answers. This was possible because of your smart and discriminating mind. Now! Give me some 'live words' about your real face before you were born." Hyang Eom, who was that monk, was completely stuck. He ran back to his room and checked all his scriptures. All that he found were "dead words" written on paper. He came back to Wi Sahn and said, "Please teach me."

"No, no, no, I cannot teach you that," the master replied. "If I tell you about it, later on you will scold me. After all, this is your business, not mine!"

Hyang Eom became very upset; weeping, he returned to his room, took his books and burned them all. Then he resolved: "In this lifetime I will only care about

finding my true self. I won't care about sutras, I won't care about anything! I'll become a 'rice bag' (a wandering monk who only eats rice and gruel.)"

Later he found an old temple which he decided to restore. One day as he was working in the garden he picked up a broken tile and tossed it away. When the tile hit a bamboo tree—TOK!—his mind opened. He bowed in the direction of Wi Sahn's monastery and said: "Your compassion is bigger than my parents' compassion. If you had told me about it when I asked you, this wouldn't have happened." Those were his first "live words." Later he created the famous kong-an, Hyang Eom's "Up a tree." Maybe some of you are still hanging there...

During the T'ang Dynasty many interesting and lively dialogues appeared in Zen: Dong Sahn's "Three pounds of flax", Jo Ju's "Cypress tree in the garden." They were just reflecting truth words. But for students who were attached to words, it wasn't enough: Why did Jo Ju answer "the cypress tree in the garden"? What does "three pounds of flax" mean? So, many second-rate questions appeared. Not only that, during the Sung dynasty things got even more complicated. More words, more speech. There were dragons and wooden chickens flying in the sky and stone girls dancing at night.

One of the most famous Zen Masters of that period was Won Oh Sunim. One day he received an interesting book, a collection of one hundred Zen stories, with commentaries which were like the legs of a snake. To inspire Zen students he decided to add his own comments to each case. That's how the *Blue Cliff Record* was born. His number one disciple was Dae Hae Sunim. He was famous for spreading the "Mu" disease throughout China. When he read the *Blue Cliff Record* he burned it, because by this time the snake legs even had socks on! Unfortunately, somebody already had made a

copy of it and the whole collection was passed down through the generations to us.

In our school we emphasize kong-an practice. Sometimes, when we are going to have an interview, we feel like we're taking an exam or even entering an execution site. But actually this is a resurrection time. A time when teacher and student have a job to do: to bring the "dead words" of an old saying back to life. When we read a kong-an in the interview room we might start to think of an answer: "What should I say?" This is only making the situation dead. Zen Master Lin Chi called that kind of person a "third-class student who cannot even save himself." Other times we might be like Hyang Eom Sunim when he left Wi Sahn. We completely put it down. We give up any hope or desire of giving an answer. Without checking anything, we hit the floor [*hits*] and become clear. Then, at that moment, inside the "dead words" we perceive the "live word," the heart of the kong-an. We can then experience how our clear mind can function without any effort or expectation. Outside the interview room we are surprised: "Wow, what was that?" But back on our cushion we start to think again. It's like being a "second-class student," a person who has experienced a taste of being clear. The "first-class student" is one who, facing the kong-an, not only has a clear answer right away, but this experience becomes part of his life. This is attaining the kong-an. Anytime, in any situation, he can "just do it."

When I look back at why I was told to drink "Jo Ju's tea" so many times, it's only because I wasn't always sincere during my interviews. Do stories like "Hyang Eom's up a tree" have something to do with my life? That kind of checking mind is the very "dead word" itself. "Good" or "bad" answers don't matter. What matters is an experience that can be used in our everyday life.

So, today this monk is getting a new job, but actually we are getting this job together. This "inka" is for all of us. Our job is to make these old sayings of our tradition live again. It is not just for our good feeling, that we have an answer. There is something inside each of them that is always alive and can be used to help others. All I wish is that you will never miss a chance to have an interview. Completely put it all down and only do it. Do it with a clear direction: this job is not for me, but for all sentient beings.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dok Sahn burned the Diamond Sutra and picked up a Zen staff.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Hyang Eom burned his sutras and heard the sound of tile hitting bamboo.

[Raises Zen stick over head, then hits table with stick.]

Dae Hae read the *Blue Cliff Record* and with disgust burned it.

Are the flames which burned the Diamond Sutra, Hyang Eom's books and the *Blue Cliff Record* same or different?

KATZ!

The candle is white, the flame is yellow.

Stick

A Zen Center Comes Into Being

Berlin Zen Center

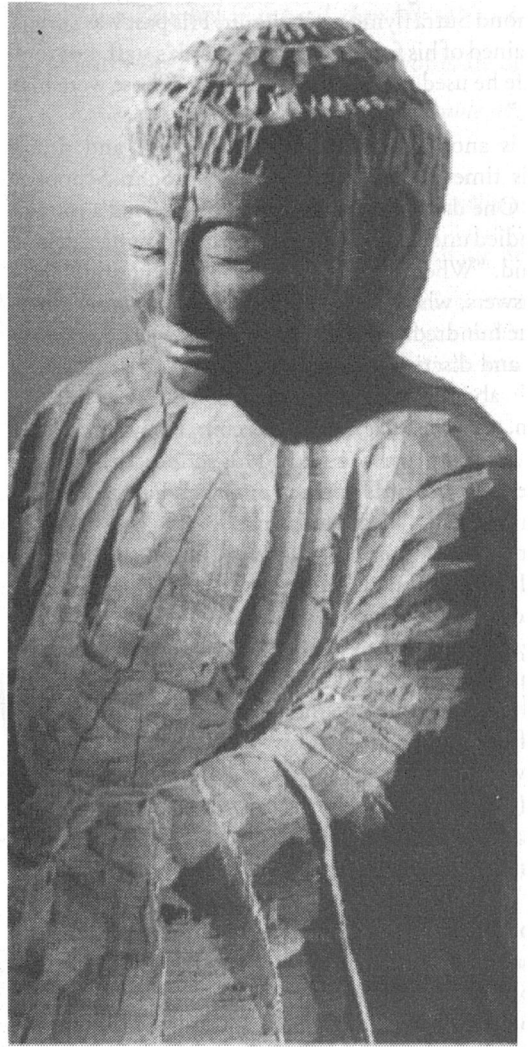
The city of Berlin has been undergoing tremendous changes ever since the wall crumbled. Everywhere there are construction sites. Building is a fever in Berlin. Reconstruction, renovation, new construction, explosions, implosions—all these words can't begin to describe the fate of our city. In fact, the largest construction site in all of Europe, Potsdamer Platz, is in the heart of Berlin! Right in the middle of all this new energy and construction we have been doing some construction ourselves—dharma construction.

Berlin Zen Center is the result of a vision which appeared soon after Zen Master Seung Sahn established the Berlin sangha in 1990, right after the wall fell. In the beginning Roland and Namhee offered the sangha their flat. It was a rather small flat, which meant that we had to rent another place to do retreats. Since practically nothing in Berlin is located on the ground floor, we regularly tracked up and down flights of stairs, continuously packing and unpacking altars, mats, cushions and kitchen stuff. All this naturally got us to thinking what it would be like to have a center with showers or a kitchen large enough to cook for lots of people. In short, we had the same dream that all sanghas have.

We never stopped talking—or thinking!—about our Zen enter vision. Everyday the details would change but the vision never went away. Then one day, a wonderful friend of the sangha, who had become tired of all the talk, gave us a generous donation and said to us: “Just do it...please!” Constant talk can have a good karmic result, eh?

The whole mood of the sangha transformed into feverish action. The hunt for our new home began. It was an arduous search: Too big. Too small. Too dark. Too expensive. Too loud. No U-bahn in sight. So it went until we found a huge empty hall located on the top floor of an industrial building which had been built in 1880. The building was situated in a suburb of Berlin called Wedding—a colorful, bustling area populated by working people and filled with little Turkish restaurants. Directly beneath us on the floor below was a belly dancing school which had its ceilings painted blue with stars. Perfect. The new Berlin Zen Center would sit on top of the stars!

Everything we had visualized would fit in this empty hall—no problem! We would do all the work ourselves and save loads of money. Lots of showers there, a big kitchen here, a big space for the dharma room, some rooms for residents, an office and—best of all—a room just in case a teacher might want to come and live with us. We signed the contract and the place was ours. That evening we toasted our great find with a glass of vintage green tea and we felt GREAT!



Below: Berlin Zen Center, building from 1880, the small windows on the third floor belong to the Zen Center; lifting the beam in the dharma room.

At that time, our sangha was made up mostly of students who studied psychology, physics or literature. It also included a few other kinds of non-student people who worked in the health professions or in business. Not many construction skills here! Except for one student of architecture, there were no other “worker types.” We had no clue about how to build anything. We were in a pure state of not knowing. If we had known then what we know now, we might never have started at all.

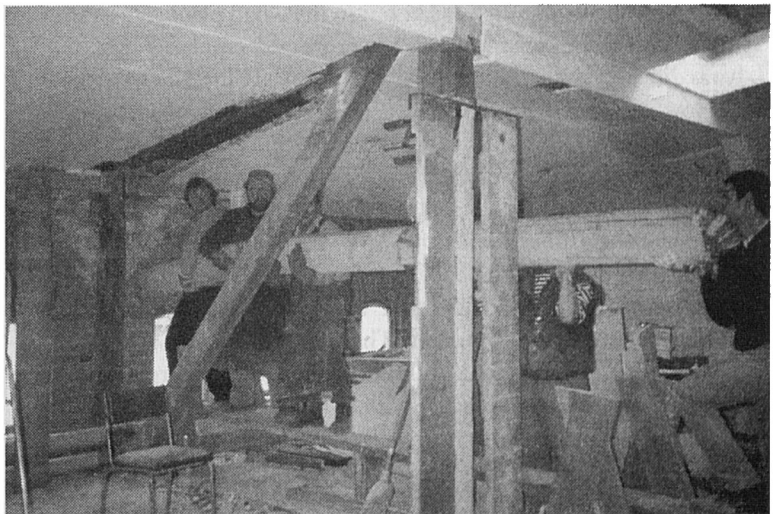
Out of this state of not knowing appeared various kinds of helpers, good weather, and materials. For example, Hannes appeared and showed us how to fill out the official building permit papers required by the city government, which is our landlord. He also showed us how to put in electrical wiring, how to tile walls, how to put up drywall and how to put in the wooden floor. Actually, he would rush in, instruct Arne on how to do all these things, and then Arne would train us. Arne became our “half hour expert.”

We started with the showers. After not having a shower for years we were completely committed to lots of showers. We tiled for weeks. Udo would sing his lopsided songs while pasting tiles to the walls in less than symmetrical patterns until 4:00 in the morning. Hyon Mun Sunim tiled the floor after we bought him a super pair of rubber boots. One day the three showers were finished. Some of us walked in after work that day and immediately proceeded to take showers. It was the best shower ever!

Around this time we began to realize how immense the project was. As we focused on the walls we became aware that they were crumbling and that we had to rebuild them. The immensity of the task made our good intentions start to crumble also. Just at those moments, someone would always appear and bring in a new rush of energy. Like Darek from the Paris Zen Center. He was doing a thousand bows at that time and his energy level was phenomenal. He taught us how to do walls in German and in French, and inspired us all with his strong practice.

Our “antique” wooden doors (eleven of them) were found by Arne in a dump heap. The federal police department had thrown them away. Nickolaus spend hours meticulously removing years of paint. The wood planks for the new floor were often so warped that they looked like propellers but they were cheap! Udo and Silke would carefully sort each plank out and assign it to this or that room, with the best planks going for the dharma room. Eventually, the wood planks became a floor and after Piotrek and Jacek sanded it for an eternity, Sabine brushed on many hard wax coats. The whole center was suddenly imbued with a soft golden glow.

As the construction rushed to completion, the work would sometimes become frenzied, sometimes exasperatingly slow. Arne’s eyes would shine with madness as he wired the whole center with cables for electricity and phones. Somehow he never lost track



Below: Like a puzzle, the dharma room floor had to be leveled before the wooden one could be layed; the new dharma room in use during the visit of Zen Master Seung Sahn, Zen Master Dae Kwang, Mu Shim Sunim JDPS, Mu Sang Sunim, Myo Ji Sunim and Ji Soen Sunim; kitchen/living room.

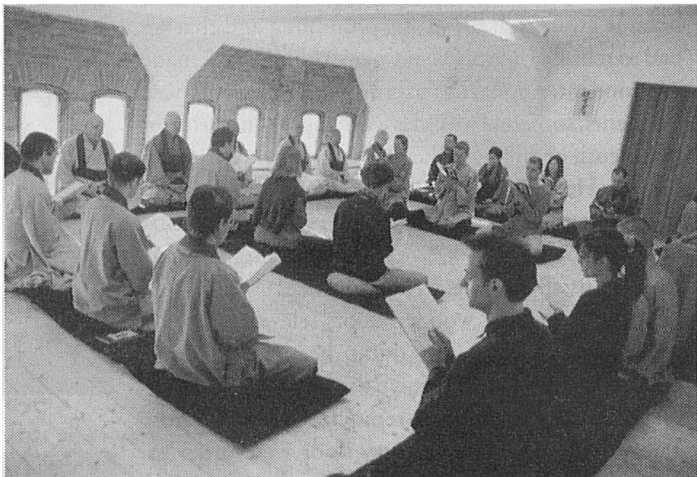
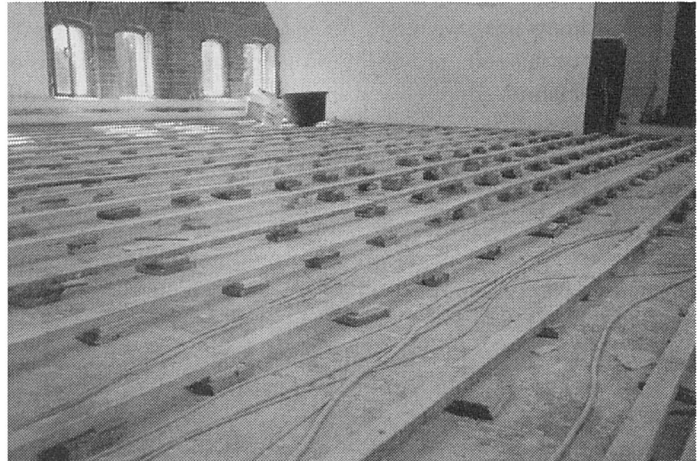
of the skinny and the fat wires. Jo and Katya discussed a thousand possibilities regarding the kitchen and finally bought a sink big enough to wash a thousand plates. Mariusz from Szczecin arranged for three jovial and loving Polish workers who slowly and with great pride covered the center with a warm new roof. In the evenings before practice they would fervently greet all the women who had come to sit with a kiss on their hand.

The official opening ceremony of Berlin Zen Center took place on the 7th of April, 1997 with Zen Master Seung Sahn present. The center was far from being finished. The Yong Maeng Jong Jin retreat that weekend took place in the belly dancing school. This year when Zen Master Seung Sahn came, the center was finished—he had a great smile on his face as he looked around.

At the beginning we struggled with many dissappointments. We thought this project would take at the most four to five months. It took over two years of continual construction. We thought many people would come and help, but sometimes there were only one or two people. As it turned out, those times of disappointment and discouragement were really helping us. We had no choice but to look at the very moment and evaluate the next tiny step. Step by step, each one of us had to learn that it didn't matter why others were doing it. Each one of us had to come to a clear understanding of why we were giving our time to this unique project. One of us once complained to Zen Master Wu Bong, the guiding teacher for Berlin Zen Center, "This sangha is terrible, it does not even exist, there is no together action!" Wu Bong Soen Sa Nim just answered, "Ja, that is how it is. Welcome to the club!"

All through the time of building, in winter and in summer, people from the other European sanghas, and especially from Poland, would come to help us. They would spend their vacations with us in the freezing cold of winter when we had no heat. In the summer heat they were helping us put up walls or put in the wood planks. Because no one came for personal profit, the emphasis was directly on the work itself. We often asked ourselves, "How is it that these people so generously give us their help?" We couldn't pay them and the work was hard. They would silently come and go. We are very grateful to them.

In the evenings, sometimes Su Joung will welcome us with her delicious kim bop, Korean sushi. Newcomers sit around the big kitchen table and drink tea. Arne pounds away at the computer. The phone rings and a voice asks; "What is Zen?" Silke answers; "You are very welcome to come and practice with us and have a cup of tea." And you also are warmly welcome to come visit!



ACROSS

Cambodia

FOR

Peace

Ji Hyang Sunim, Cambridge Zen Center

The Dhammayietra is an annual pilgrimage across Cambodia, led by Maha Ghosanada to bring peace and reconciliation. This year an election, considered part of a transitional process to democracy, was being held in July. A second Dhammayietra was initiated, to carry the message of nonviolence during the campaign season.

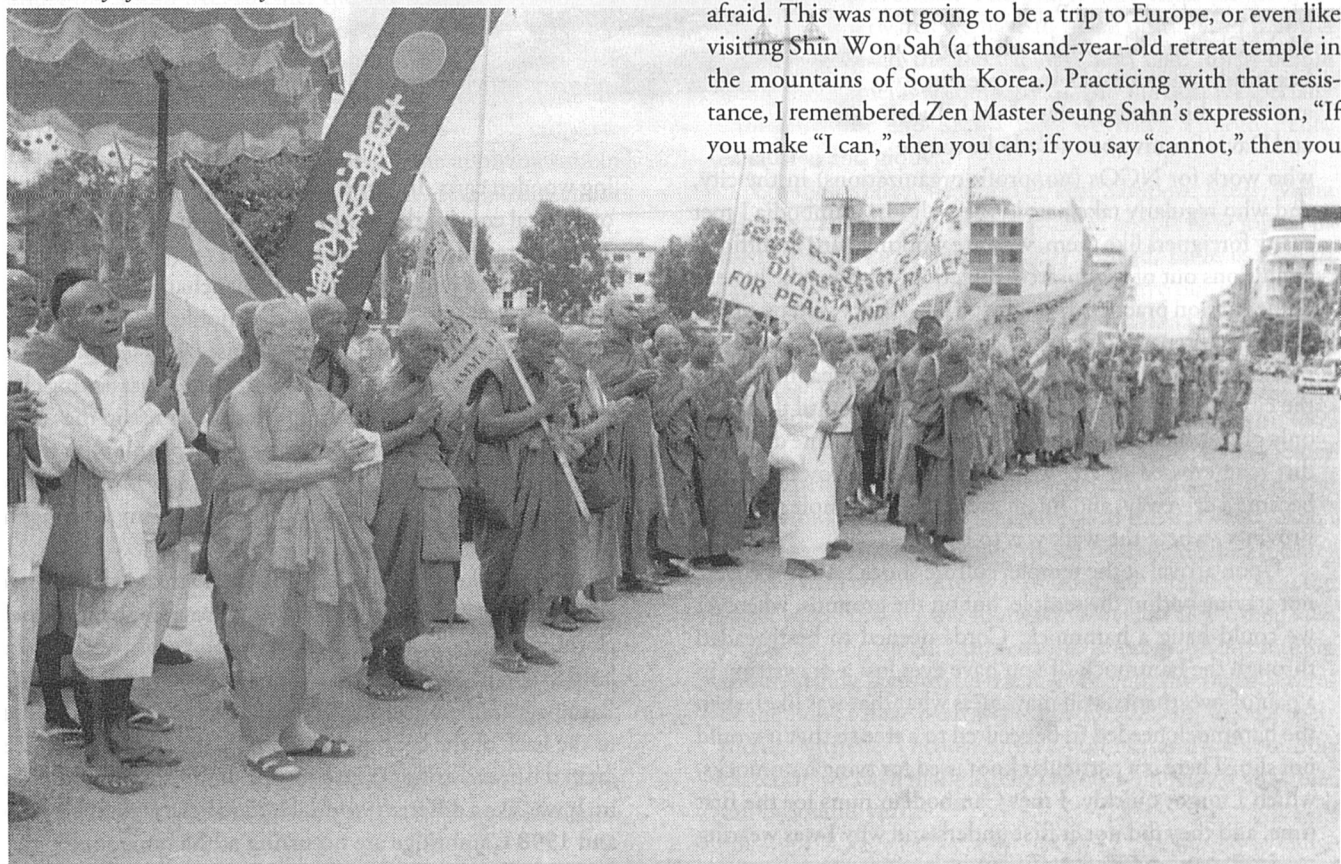
This summer I had no plans. Not making anything, everything soon appeared!

I was doing a one day retreat at the Houghtons' cabin in Lexington, Massachusetts. The cabin is surrounded by conservation land, outside the city. That night, Dyan Houghton came out to the cabin with a message: "Maha Ghosananda is in town, and he is asking for you." So, my practice was in the city, after all.

Maha Ghosananda was visiting only overnight; before he left in the morning, we had breakfast. Maha Ghosananda spoke about his upcoming Dhammayietra for peace during Cambodia's first elections. He said, "Please come." Then, he put money on the counter, meaning, he really does want me to come; buy the ticket. Before I had much chance to check in, he had left. Should I go or not? The Zen Center is not so busy during the summer; maybe this is possible. So, I resolved, if I am able to get a good ticket, if I can get all the necessary immunizations, if the Zen Center business is well taken care of, then I will go. If not, then not. All of this business was concluded much more quickly than expected. The tickets, the immunizations, even the Zen Center business wrapped itself up more smoothly than anticipated.

The only obstacle was my own fear. Reading the news reports of violence in Cambodia, the State Department Advisory, and the Center for Disease Control report, I became afraid. This was not going to be a trip to Europe, or even like visiting Shin Won Sah (a thousand-year-old retreat temple in the mountains of South Korea.) Practicing with that resistance, I remembered Zen Master Seung Sahn's expression, "If you make "I can," then you can; if you say "cannot," then you

The last day of the Dhammayietra, in Phnom Penh.





Above: A bodhi tree at a Cambodian temple

Right: Ji Hyang Sunim with Cambodian nuns at Wat Phnom, the temple built at the point where Phnom Penh was founded

cannot. Which one do you like?" Without taking a risk, breaking open their shell, seeds would never grow. There is so much possible in the situation; also, there is the Great Vow. So I went.

The travel was long and not comfortable; thirty-six hours of flying and airport time, just to get to Bangkok; an overnight there, then another flight to Phnom Penh. We traveled together. Maha Ghosana taught me then, by being completely relaxed and at peace throughout it all. Upon arrival in Phnom Penh, we went to Maha Ghosana's temple, which is very beautiful; many monks were present to attend to his needs. I stayed with Judy and David Saumweber, a Catholic couple

who work for NGOs (nonprofit organizations) in the city, and who regularly take part in the walk. In Cambodia I met many foreigners like them, who are working hard in difficult conditions out of bodhisattva direction, without the benefit of meditation practice. It was inspiring. After two days of rest and basic preparations in the city, we took a pick-up truck into the country to begin the walk. The road leading out of the city was paved; the road became rougher, until there was only gravel. The gravel road continued and became dirt. The dirt road crossed several wooden bridges, narrowed until it became a driveway, and finally we reached a temple in Takeo Province, where the walk was to begin.

Upon arrival at the temple, culture shock set in. We were not staying within the temple, but on the grounds, wherever we could hang a hammock. Cords needed to be threaded through the hammock (if you have ever lost a drawstring in a pair of sweatpants, you may guess what that was like); then the hammock needed to be secured to a tree so that it would not slip. There is a particular knot used for tying hammocks, which I forgot quickly. I met Cambodian nuns for the first time, and they did not at first understand why I was wearing



gray instead of white. Yet, with persistence, and the compassion of my fellow travelers, all these things were no problem.

That night we had a presentation on landmine awareness. There were slides: this is what a mine looks like, this is unexploded ordnance. This is called a "corn cob mine" because it looks like a corn cob; this is called a "TV mine" because it looks like a TV. Some of these mines are from the Soviet Union, some from Vietnam, some from China, some from the United States. If you find yourself in a mine field, stay put unless you can clearly retrace your footsteps, and call for help; better one day spent in a minefield than a life paraplegic. Although there were no landmines on our route, it was sobering.

The next morning, we were awake at 4:00 am. Time to untie and pack away the hammock, fill water bottles, return our backpacks to the bus. I had the option either of walking with the foreigners, or the Cambodian nuns. I was very happy to walk with the nuns. Even though we couldn't speak with one another much, our practice and just-doing-it walking five hours a day made for deep friendship. Interspersed throughout the lines were banners—"A peaceful heart makes a peaceful person," "A peaceful community makes a peaceful nation," "May all beings be at peace." It was 6:00 am when we set off. We shared the road with oxen, pull-

ing wooden carts. In some cases, the carts were pulled by the ox's metal cousin, the motorbike. Pigs cut through our line. There were chicks running around. As we passed along the road, villagers had their hands in hapchang (hands raised, palms together) and knelt for the monks' blessing. There would be three sticks of burning incense (representing desire, anger, and ignorance) above a pail of water, representing clear mind. The monk would extinguish the incense in the water, then use a spray of palm leaves to bless the people with water. Since it was ninety degrees, children especially loved this, and sometimes ran along the street to catch as many blessings as possible!

As we walked, the road stopped at a stream that crossed rice paddies. Some walkers waded through, soaking their clothing. There was also a ferry, composed of two sampans lashed together with cord, boards nailed on top to form a raft. Passengers pulled it across by means of a rope, as a ferryman in the back of the boat, poled it across. His young daughter sat in the prow, using a cup to scoop out the water that washed in. It was like a different world. Hard to believe that this scene and 1998 Cambridge are occurring at the same time.

The warmth of the people is something I will always remember. The older nuns taking my hand, and smiling. Another friend sharing her umbrella, under the hot sun. Long before we reached the temple where we were to have lunch, the traditional music could be heard. Temple women gathered to meet us, and then there would be a wonderful lunch. All this in a country where, materially, people do not have very much.

Before any meal, upon arriving at the temple, we would circumambulate the wat (temple). Since the wat area was paved with concrete, and clean, it was often used for drying vegetables. At one temple, we walked through drying red peppers; at another, green onions. Then there would be chanting in Pali, including a meal offering. I regretted not knowing the prayer, thus being able to thank the Khmer people for their abundant hospitality. Some foreigners spoke on behalf of all of us, and I at least managed “aucun”—thank you.

These temples were the centers of their community, and there were always many children. They were fascinated by foreigners; some had never seen one before. Asleep or awake, we were surrounded by children. As I drew pictures of flowers, dogs, cats, stars, birds, clouds, and monks, they taught me Khmer.

By the second day, walking began to fall into a rhythm. The road itself, dust, rocks, boards, and ridges. It kept my practice honest. A lapse of mindfulness, and I would trip. Walking step by step, the picture of the Buddha’s footsteps that Maha Ghosananda keeps in his office came back to me. When the Buddha was deciding whether to leave his seat under the Bodhi tree, to enter the city and teach people, he did walking meditation. That point is “just do it.”

By the third day, a few blisters have appeared. We are all feeling the impact of the heat. To compound it, much of our time is spent on the wat grounds, where it is temple etiquette not to wear a hat. These nuns observe me applying suntan lotion; one asks to use it for her headache. The lotion cannot help her. Another has rheumatism; I share a muscle relaxant. I wish to do more for these tiny, courageous old nuns, who are walking fifteen kilometers each day in the heat, wearing only flip-flops. At least the moleskin, gauze bandages and tape are of use against their blisters.

After walking the fourth day, we rest near the Mekong River, where a path crosses the grassy field. There are small colored butterflies, bicycle bells sounding. The bushes are white with nuns’ cloths; many saffron cloths dry nearby in the sun. Having gotten through the larger part of the walk, we are relaxed. At dinner, Yeshua Moser (one of the organizers) walks over. “Murukami Sensei is sick tonight. Will you give the dharma talk with the Samdech?” “When?” “When chanting is over, in a few minutes.” My heart leapt into my throat. Summoning up every bit of “do it” mind, I agreed. As it turned out, Murukami remained sick the next night, and I was again asked to step in.

The talks were formal, given in Khmer every night to the walkers, the temple and the village (the talks were broadcast

over a public address system.) How could a young female foreigner begin to speak in this setting? Even the monk who showed me in was confused at this point; he initially found a place on the floor for me. Maha Ghosananda then motioned to the empty chair next to him—as always, he was completely at ease. Every word I spoke was translated by Venerable Ghosananda with great joy and confidence—and often some value added. When I spoke the first line of the Metta Sutra, Maha Ghosananda translated the whole thing. As I went on with the next few lines, the Samdech offered a commentary on the sutra. With the next few lines, there was a commentary on the commentary. At the end of the talk, Maha Ghosananda taught the crowd, “Only go straight,” “Don’t know,” and “No problem,” and spoke about Zen Master Seung Sahn with great appreciation.

On the fifth day, we had agreed to walk an extra ten kilometers, in order to attend a prayer vigil at which representatives from every party would be present. When we began walking, the sky was completely dark. The Southern Cross and a billion stars hung overhead. Surely, I thought, no one will be by the side of the road this time. As we walked out through the temple gate, onto the road, there were points of light scattered along our path, the candles of people who had gotten up early to kneel by the side of the road, with water and incense, in hapchang. Oxen lowing in the cool night air, the rhythms of the drum and our feet, and silence. A very present morning. It was as I have imagined the Nativity; the climate of something being born.

After breakfast, we walk on to the prayer vigil, where we are greeted by a dozen cameramen, which changes the atmosphere somewhat. The prayer vigil takes longer than expected. Afterwards we have to make up time, so that the monks can reach the next temple and take lunch before noon. The cameras accompany us, and the heat is especially strong. At the end of the day, we reach Phnom Penh, exhausted and giddy.

On the last day, we begin at Wat Sampeau Meas, Maha Ghosanada’s temple. Three thousand people have joined us for this walk throughout the city. Ahead, there is a sea of saffron; behind, a sea of white. Police have put down their assault rifles to accompany the Dhammayietra across traffic. This is the last day of campaigning before the election. The presence of the Dhammayietra makes it possible for the opposition parties to hold rallies in the capital; on this day, no one will throw a grenade. We walk to the Victory Monument, which originally celebrated victory over the Vietnamese, and is now a memorial to the war dead. Maha Ghosananda leads chanting, which rises strong into the city air. We then continue to Wat Phnom, the temple built at the point where the city was founded. We chant there, then take lunch. During lunch, a professional photographer is milling about, selling pictures he has just taken of the walk. Several of the nuns I have been walking with ask him to take their picture with me. Through smiles, walking, and our common direction we have made a deep connection. May it continue ten thousand years.

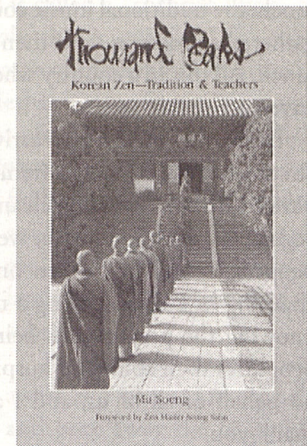
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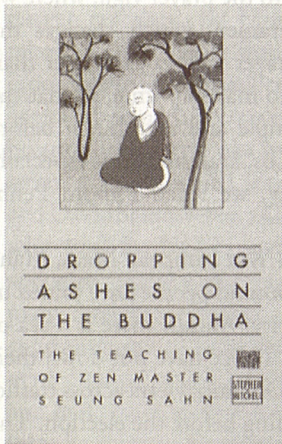


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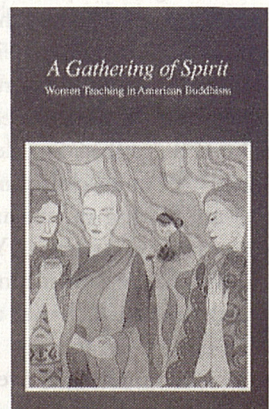


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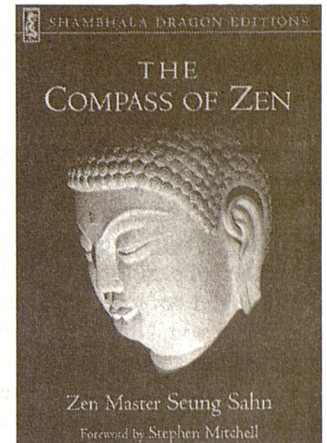
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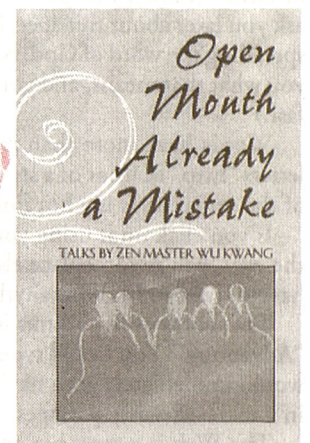
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Commencement address to the graduating seniors in the departments of cognitive science, mass communications and interdisciplinary field studies at University of California Berkeley, on May 21, 1998.

Distinguished staff, honored professors, beloved bureaucrats, fortunate matriculators, fellow content-providers, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me here today. I want to say a few words about words. In the beginning was the word, and yet “in the beginning” is three words. This is not an actual paradox, this is a happy trick of English. When I was a young person, I did not understand that words were fungible. Indeed, when I was a young person, I did not understand that “fungible” was a word. Words are both analog and digital, their meanings changeable and multiple, their penumbras and resonances intertwined. Nike is a shoe company, a goddess and a missile. Coke is a kind of coal, an addictive drug and the most popular soft drink in the world. Bugs are insects, computer errors and covert listening devices, while bugging is both annoying and gratifying.

It is fashionable to say we live in a post-literate society, that somehow the advent of the graphical user interface has meant the death of reading. This is of course not entirely true.

The future is chunky with words. The next 50 years will be the most word-intensive time since Gutenberg developed a method to get Bibles in the hands of every citizen. He thought he was spreading the word of God; he was actually spreading the god of words. (I made that phrase up just last night and am quite proud of it. If your friends ask you later about this speech, be sure to remember that phrase—“He thought he was spreading the word of God, but he was actually spreading the god of words.” They’ll ask you what that means, and you’ll say, I dunno, the first part of the speech went by pretty fast.)

Words have more than multiple meanings; they have multiple functions. Put the letters “http” in front of a string of words, and it becomes a wormhole into another part of the universe. It is a hot link, which is also, of course, a kind of sausage.

If you click on it using your mouse (which is also both a rodent and a bruise under the eye), you’re someplace else entirely. You know little about your new location; you have to read to find out anything. Reading is a survival skill.

The world of hyperlinks is rather like the ancient text-based computer game called “Adventure.” You would type a single letter (n for north, s for south, and so on) and you would immediately get a navigational message, the most famous of which was “You are in a maze of twisty passages, all alike.”

The Web is a great big adventure game; its unique power comes from the sense of choice it gives you. Go north, go south, type anythingatall.com, and you are transported somewhere else with a magic that quickly becomes commonplace. (It seems to be the nature of technology that its wonders rapidly become ordinary, whereas the wonders of nature—a sunset, a tulip, an orgasm—stay wonderful pretty much forever.) But it is new magic nevertheless, no matter how routine it seems, and it’s always a good idea to respect the new magic, particularly the kind that seems ordinary. A penny arcade game called the Zoetrope became the most powerful propaganda tool the world yet knows.

All of which means that it’s a great time to be a content provider. I envy you, and so I am going to do what envious people frequently do. I am going to give you advice.

But first I am going to tell you a story. In 1914, Sir Ernest Shackleton, one of England’s most successful explorers, decided to cross the Antarctic continent on foot. You might think that this was a zany and pointless enterprise, and so it was. Then as now, men were much given to symbolic journeys, partly for personal glory, partly to rekindle some spirit of heroism and sacrifice that every age perceives is about to be extinguished. We went to the moon for much the same reason that Shackleton wanted to walk across Antarctica. He had men, supplies, dogs, sleds, food caches, maps and a sturdy boat. He set sail on the very day that England declared war on Germany, so his trek was to become a matter of great national pride. He was walking for Anglo-Saxon values against the cruel and godless Huns. Alas, he never made it so far as the coastline of Antarctica. His boat, the *Endurance*, was trapped in the ice in the Weddell Sea (“frozen like an almond in the

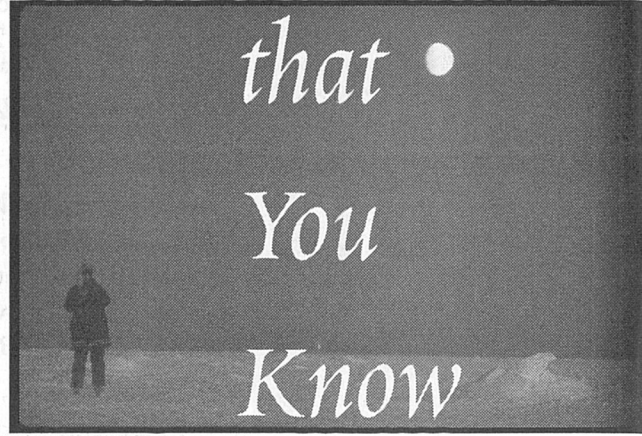
Knowing

that •

You

Know

Nothing



middle of a chocolate bar,” wrote one crew member)—about 100 miles from the continent itself.

For a long while, it drifted helplessly, then the ice began to squeeze the ship. Shackleton and his men offloaded everything and listened for three agonizing weeks as the ship was crumpled and finally crushed. It sounded, they said, like animals dying.

There followed one of the great struggles for survival in modern history. First they had to make for open water, dragging their lifeboats behind them, over the shifting ice floes. They had to sleep on the ice as well, kill seals and eventually their own dogs for food, combat frostbite, boils, depression, hunger and eventually, the dark, terrible Arctic winter.

When they reached water, things did not improve much. They were a thousand miles from the nearest human habitation. They had no hope of rescue. They had no radio, no navigational aids beyond maps and sextants, no engines for the tiny lifeboats.

Eventually, they reached an uninhabited island—the first solid ground their feet had touched for more than a year—and made a sort of camp. After a time, Shackleton and five other men got into an open boat, 22 feet long and six feet wide at its broadest point, and set off for a thousand-mile sail in the stormiest waters on the globe. Remarkably, through unimaginable pain and privation, they made landfall at South Georgia Island, site of a small sealing station they had left some two years before. But the coast was rocky and the tides were against them; they were shipwrecked on the wrong side of the island, with a 4,000-foot icy ridge between them and the station.

Shackleton and two other men began climbing at dawn. By night, they were nowhere near the summit. There was a sliver of moon; they searched for handholds by its thin light. At about midnight, they reached the summit. They had no idea where along the ridge line they were. They could not see down the steep slopes below them. They were less than five line-of-sight miles from the station, at the end of a two-year journey of incredible endurance.

Shackleton felt himself getting sleepy. He realized that he was experiencing the first symptoms of hypothermia.

This is an entirely true story, by the way. Many journals survive; many books were written. Shackleton had his men sit down on the ridge and link themselves together as though they were riding a toboggan. He himself sat in front. Each man put his arms around the chest of the man in front of him. Without a word, Shackleton launched his small crew over the ridge line and into the blackness below.

A thousand feet later, the snow field began leveling off. Another thousand feet, and the party came to rest naturally against a small rock. Twelve hours later, they walked up to the main building at the encampment. A man opened the door. “Who the hell are you?” he asked. “My name is Shackleton,” said Shackleton. It was all over. The men back on the island were rescued a month later. Not a man was lost.

And now we come to the advice. There will come a time in your life when you are standing in the dark on a snowy ridge line. I speak metaphorically—at least, I hope I do. You will, at that moment, realize the worthlessness of opinions. All your life, and probably for most of your college career, you have been drowning in a sea of opinions. You have been instructed to mediate your experiences with opinions. You have sometimes found yourself in the uncomfortable position of holding the wrong opinion, of liking a work of art which it is not useful to like, say, or of seeing a pattern which, it is commonly believed, does not actually exist.

Opinions are great barnacles of the intellect; they are substitutes, not just for thought, but for life itself. They come between you and beauty; they blind you to unexpected ineffability; they convince you that the thing you love is not worthy of you.

And what good are your opinions on the icy ridge? What good are they when you are in a maze of twisty passages, all alike? Information would be useful; you can always use information. But opinions are of no use. Jettison as many as you can right now, in anticipation of that moment when you have to travel light.

The other thing that you will have been told is that failure is the worst thing of all. Because failure is bad, experimentation is discouraged. I submit to you that failure is the best friend you have. Failure is the only way to get ready for that moment on the mountain. Failure is the only thing that makes you strong and smart. Cherish your failures; remember them; tell them to other people. Failure is just wisdom in ragged garments.

So we return to the situation. You are on the ridge line and the moon is down and you have no options left and you can feel yourself slowly dying. What is the very best thing you can do? Link arms with your friends and launch yourself into the darkness, knowing that you know nothing and having the courage of your ignorance.

Because that’s when the fun really begins. Thank you.

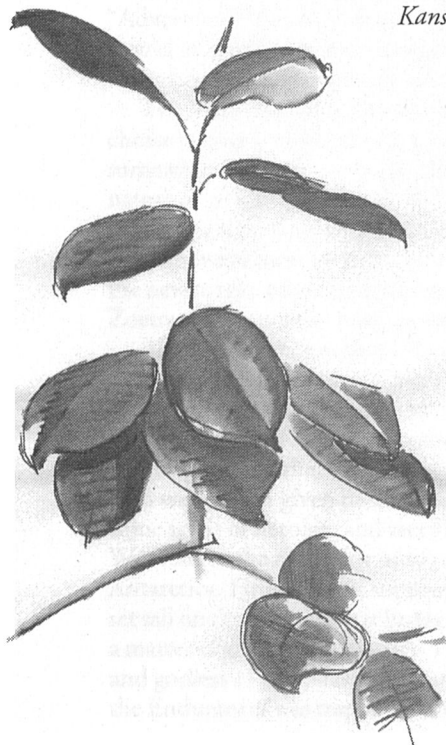
Three poems for Ji Hyang Sunim
from her dharma sister Hyeon Hyang

Into the word-head.
Over flower.
Invisible straw.
Lightning.

Bell light.
Shells measure.
Her forehead.
Street.

Sky.
Calf.
Fence.
Distinct.

*Judy Roitman, JDPSN,
Kansas Zen Center*



Deep stillness of very small hearts stopped.
The cemetery slopes heave; tombstones soar.
Squish, squish, squish
Muddy footprints by today's grave

*Susan Warden,
Kansas Zen Center*

He was hidden kept
from rain swept city streets

nothing impure palace bound
marble porphyry lapis
lazuli unchangeable beauty
a garden with gold and silver wrought flowers
the grass carved of jade
and those who surrounded him
who said they loved him

were perfect
their faces and hands replaced by
ivory masks silk gloves
sewn to their skin
every action rehearsed

until no mistakes could be made
He would have been content but
saw a child hurt

and asked What is this?
. a child in pain .
He found a blind woman crazed by her fear
and asked What can this be?

. horror loneliness .
And last came the dead men
filling the streets outside
their faces and wax eyes a sea under
the streetlights

and there was no need to ask further
I suppose in that instant the palace dissolved
more likely it merely stood
forgotten until rain and wind
left a stone hillock with tangled weeds

Christopher Cornish

Hokusai Says

Hokusai says look carefully.

He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing.

He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it, repeat
yourself as long as it's interesting.

He says keep doing what you love.

He says keep praying.

He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient,
every one of us has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find
a way to live with fear.

He says everything is alive—
shells, buildings, people, fish,
mountains, trees. Wood is alive.
Water is alive.

Everything has its own life.

Everything lives inside us.

He says live with the world inside you.

He says it doesn't matter if you draw,
or write books. It doesn't matter
if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on the veranda
or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in the garden.
It matters that you care.

It matters that you feel.

It matters that you notice.

It matters that life lives
through you.

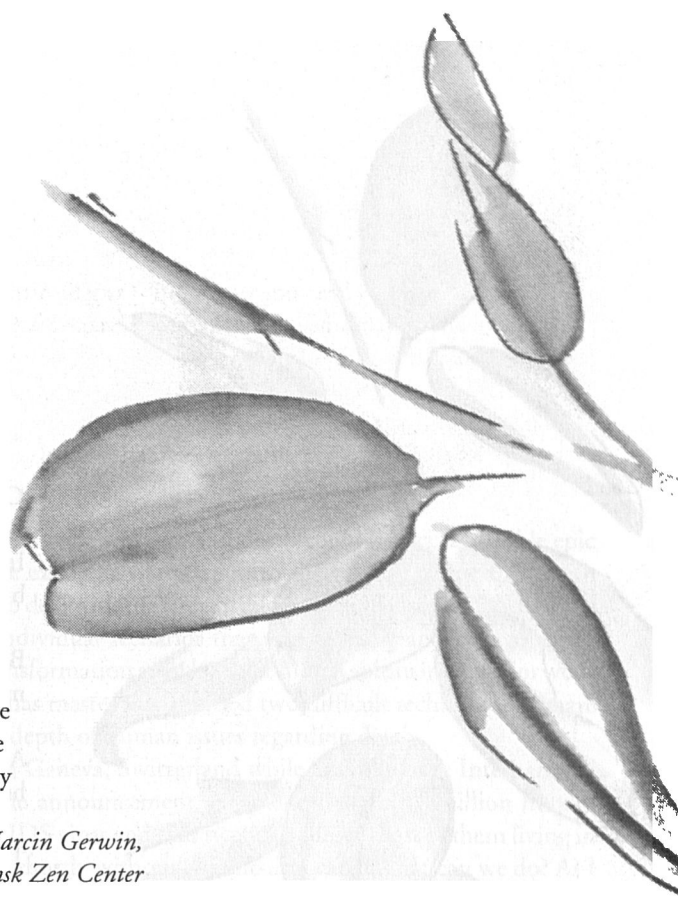
Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength
is life living through you.
Peace is life living through you.

He says don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.

Look, feel, let life take you
by the hand.

Let life live through you.

Roger Keyes, Providence Zen Center



It's you in blue
as if by chance
passing near by

*Marcin Gerwin,
Gdansk Zen Center*

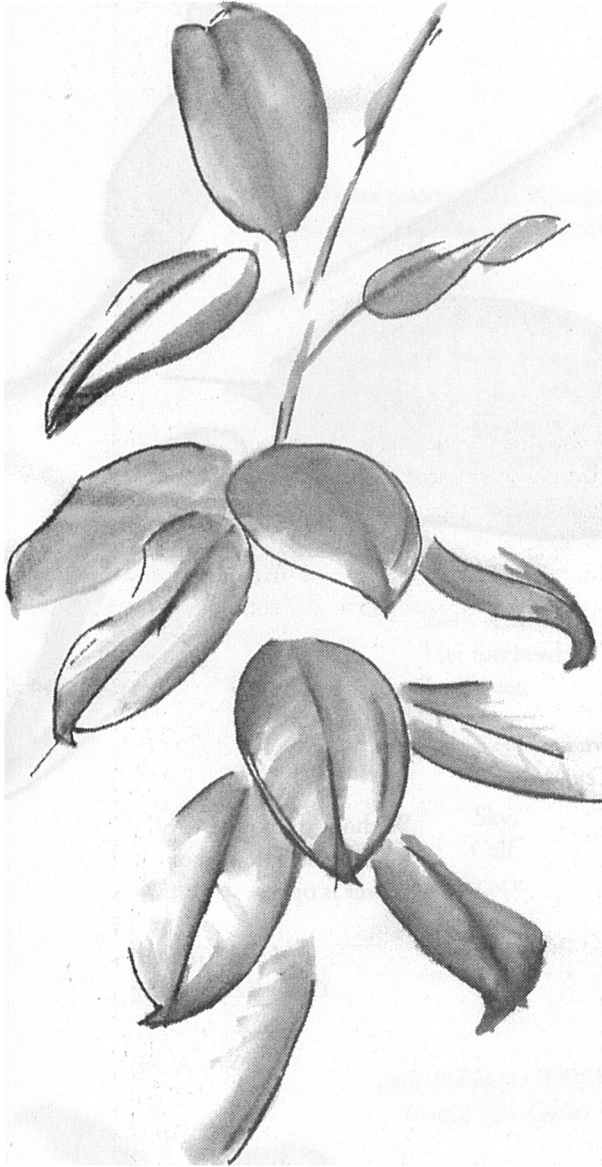
Without thinking –
for the one who comes
flower is open

*Marcin Gerwin,
Gdansk Zen Center*

new year work poem

in this computer quick traffic jam
salsa explodes on the tongue
in ears
in the eyes
each day
dead work lights' colors
find moment
or elbow to glisten,
crushed pine needles scent wet streets,
faint chirp of children's voices
all perspective.

*Paul Bloom,
New Haven Zen Center*



Crusade

In a not so distant past, some kind of fever shook the land
breaking up the people's homes, raise the dust of caravans

Brothers went to be made men, and wives, widows, war would leave
martyred in Jerusalem, they buried them in effigy

And children only knew the myths, of fathers in the righteous flood
headed for a holy death, on a wave of heathen blood

Today it's all an old romance, more the stuff of make-believe
And in my life I've seen events, would bring these dead men to their knees

But this is not a hymn of war, not a tale of ancient sins
This is just my mind at work, wondering how it all begins

We're creatures of a tribal love, and everyone a Zion has
Some ideal as we grow up, we struggle to redeem at last

But grudges in the modern age, have outlived old dieties
memory now keeps the rage, and every mind's a casualty

And if you think this world malaise, is the fruit of foreign feuds
Better you observe your days, see the seed in all you do

Something moves me to suggest, in our lives we perpetrate
Other kinds of righteousness, but in the end the same crusade:

When at first we sense a charge, we turn our tongues to cross-bows
The breath is taut and strikes hard, heats the air as it goes

And every truth we might have heard, falls on embattled ears
sharpening our next words, shoring up our next fears

And suddenly we're captives all, shackled in our own campaigns
Loathe to let our standards fall, slow to recognize our pain

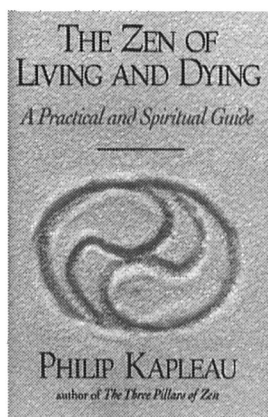
Listener, you're given one chance, tomorrow we are white, white bones
Will you live your days in judgement, or leave the gods to claim their own

*Jody Blackwell,
Cambridge Zen Center
copyright 1998*

BOOK REVIEW

~~~~~ Tony Somlai, Original Root Zen Center

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**The Zen of Living and Dying:  
A Practical and Spiritual Guide**

by Philip Kapleau

Shambhala Publications,

Boston, 1998

Writing about the human struggle with life and death could be a considerable epic or a brief composition. In the extended narrative form the saga would be filled with heroic deeds of grand efforts to deal with the irreversible fate we all face. As a short story the theme would focus on individual scenarios that appear less grand and yet more intimate with the reality of transformation and change. Philip Kapleau in his major work *The Zen of Living and Dying* has masterfully married two difficult techniques to share a narrative that describes the depth of human issues regarding death.

I am writing this review in Geneva, Switzerland while attending the International AIDS Conference. Today, the announcement was made that thirty million human beings are infected with the AIDS virus and that twenty million, most of them living in developing countries, will die shortly without any medical care. What can we do? As I read Kapleau's book there were many times I would stare off into space, digesting another insightful passage. This book is a "thick" work that at times is very scholarly and on other occasions very intimate. Take your time when reading *The Zen of Living and Dying*; it is a wonderful resource deserving of your full attention.

The four sections of this work (Death, Dying, Karma, and Rebirth) are packed with information, insight, resources, and suggestion on how to deal with a great human fear. However, don't stop there. The appendices are a "how to" for constructing living wills, using hospice care, following a checklist upon someone's death, consoling the bereaved, and how to use meditation during the dying time. There is an extensive glossary and bibliography that points to other important works.

The purpose of Kapleau's book is quite simple, "To help the reader learn to live fully with life at every moment and die serenely with death." This uncomplicated purpose is fraught with the traps of existential psychologizing regarding the meaning of life and death. Kapleau is able to avoid this problem by "pointing" to the constantly changing landscape in front of us rather than "explaining" the clinical and biological terms of death. Kapleau is not afraid of dying. He points to others who also are not afraid, and asks us to investigate the journey. His invitation is clear, "Death, then, does not extinguish the flame of life; it merely changes its form and direction. Put another way, death is not a period but a comma in the story of life, as the writer Vern McLellan noted."

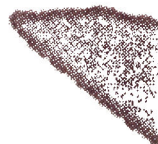
Western culture seems particularly perplexed and confused by our ideas of what we call "death." Perhaps this is why we are so interested in the subject. Ultimately, this is the silent scream behind most mental health issues in the West. Kapleau views it as a deep human need to find the answers to the perennial questions of "Where did I come from when I was born and where will I go when I die? What meaning has my life, my death?" He believes that there is no greater goal than to "be free from the dualistic restrictions of life and death." He uses Dogo's response to a student's question regarding death, "I won't say alive and I won't say dead," as a means of teaching that what is called life and death are mutually dependent, "you can't desire one without inviting the other." In this way, birth and death are temporary points between what precedes and what follows. As Kapleau says, "at every second there is life, and at every second, death." He then asks, "Which condition is life, which death?"

While these teachings on life and death may be perplexing for human beings, the critical point is that intellectual understanding explains only part of the truth. Kapleau places greater importance on the teaching that “what is beyond understanding—unrecognizable—is the whole truth.” This issue needs no solution or explanation, only to be transcended and lived fully. The question then is how to do this? Kapleau points to attaining our true self through a spiritual practice. “The reading of certain books can provide a compass and a map, but there is no substitute for personal experience. The good book, to paraphrase Emerson, is the one that gets you onto the meditation mat (or chair).” Much like “The Human Route,” Kapleau has us coming empty handed and leaving empty handed, “clinging to nothing—just fading away like clouds in the sky.”

A word of caution regarding Kapleau’s advice on suffering intense pain, keeping a clear mind, and making every effort to avoid “heavy” sedatives. Kapleau is not a physician, nor am I. However, I have seen intense physical pain from the outside. There is a “Calvinistic” anti-drug belief system in America that borders on hysteria. I believe, that when

possible, the issue of pain management should be based on providing comfort and relief. Those of us who are not suffering the pain do not intimately “know” the experience. It is quite easy for me to say how others should handle their pain, until I have a toothache. At that point my “opinions” and “ideas” take a very radical shift! There are times when the body needs to rest, where the mind needs to relax, from the struggle with pain. When my mother was dying from the final stages of breast cancer she needed significant relief from the pain and I chanted Kwan Seum Bosal. Who was keeping clear mind then?

As stated at the beginning of the review, there are numerous moments where *The Zen of Living and Dying* will force a reflective digestion of what we believe to be the truth. Philip Kapleau is a master in teaching each of us to live fully. As I sit here at the International AIDS Conference it is clear that all beings, living with or without AIDS, are faced with the issues of life and death. Philip Kapleau provides a guide that points to the transitions before all of us. If your direction is clear, this book will help you and all beings deal with their feelings, condition, and situation—alive or dead.



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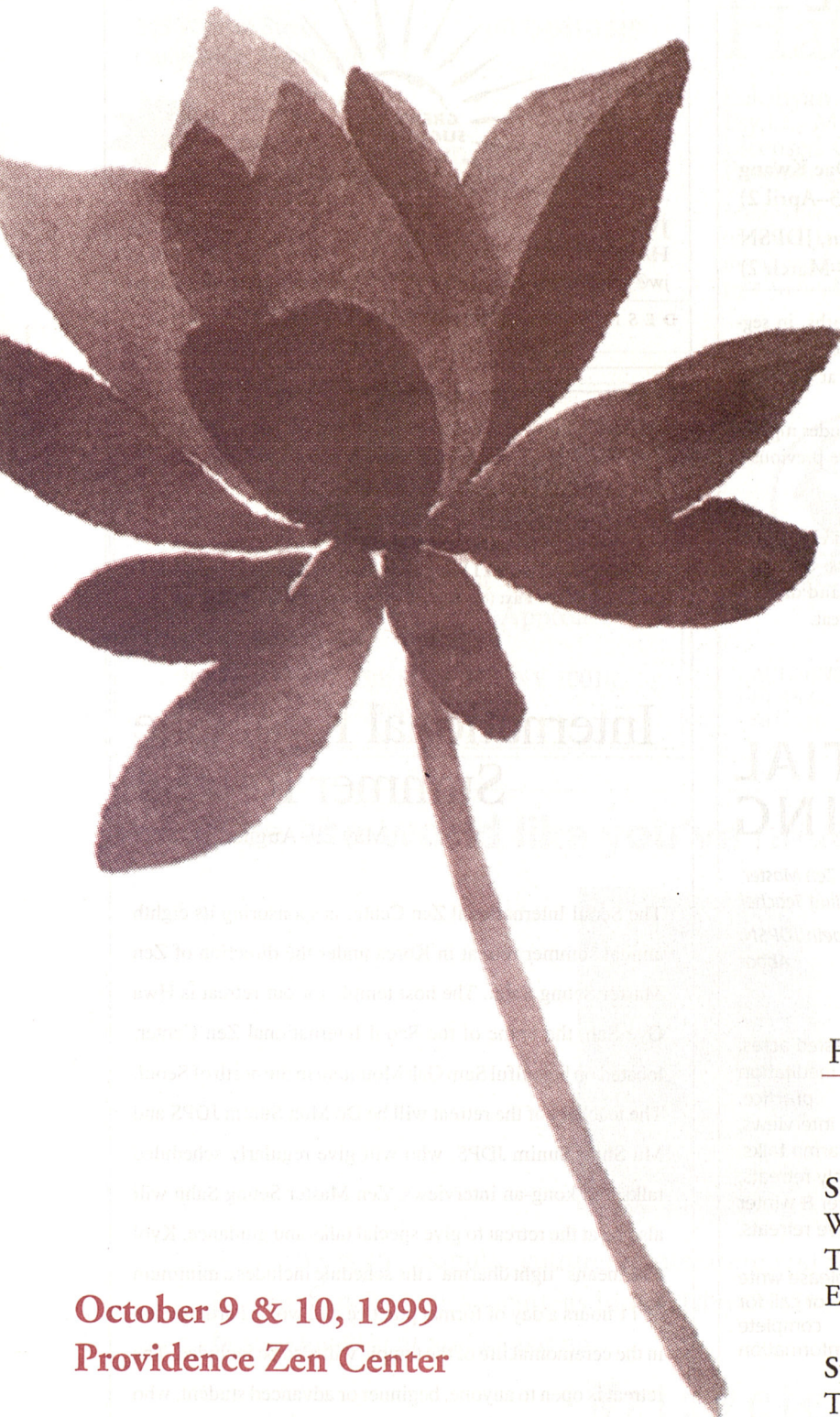
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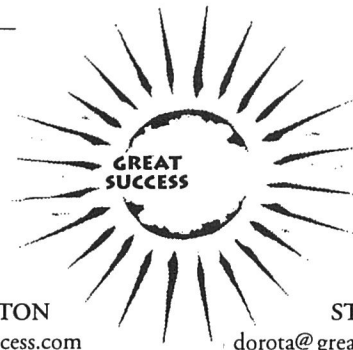
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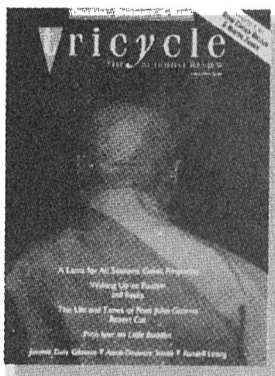
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That myriads things come forth and experience themselves is awakening."  
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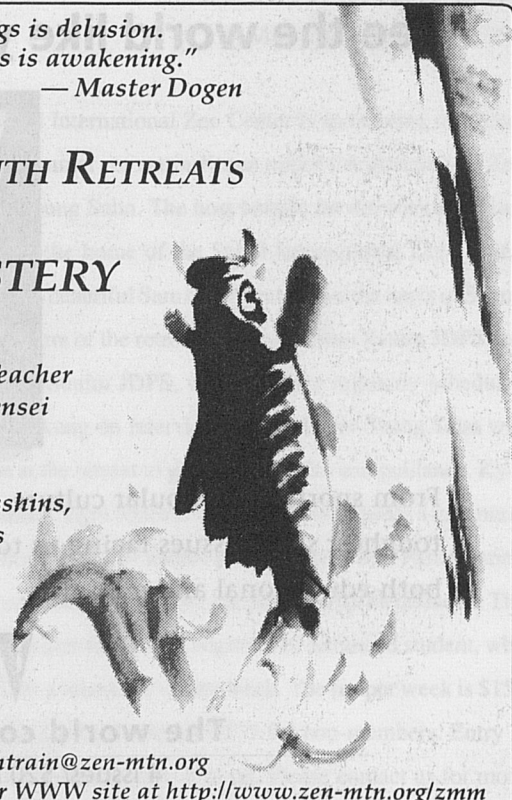
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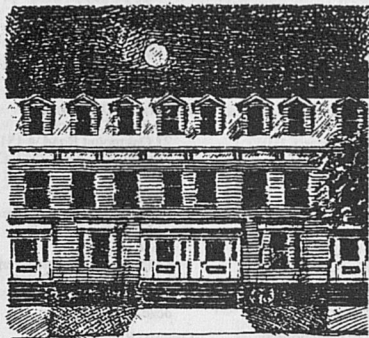
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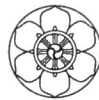


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