

ELEVENTH GATE

Man Gong's Net

Zen Master Seung Sahn

One day, Zen Master Man Gong sat on the high rostrum and gave the speech to mark the end of the three month winter retreat. "All winter long you monks practiced very hard. That's wonderful! As for me, I had nothing to do, so I made a net. This net is made out of a special cord. It is very strong and can catch all Buddhas, Patriarchs and human beings. It catches everything. How do you get out of this net? Some students shouted, "KATZ!" Others hit the floor or raised a fist. One said, "The sky is blue, the grass is green." Another said, "Already got out; how are you, great Zen Master?" From the back of the room a monk shouted, "Don't make net!" Many answers were given, but to each Man Gong only replied, "Aha! I've caught a BIG fish!" So, how do you get out of Man Gong's net?

This is a very famous kong-an. Zen Master Man Gong always taught his students not to make anything. If you practice strongly, don't make anything and don't want anything, then you can attain no hindrance. Then this kong-an is not a problem. But if you are thinking, if you still have I, my, me and checking mind, then you cannot get out of the net. This net is life and death and includes everything. Even if you are a Buddha, if you have thinking, you cannot escape the net.

Man Gong's net is an attack kong-an. "I caught a big fish" is a strong teaching style. It drops down a large (000 size) hook for you. If you touch this fishing hook, you will have a big problem! It's just like a boxing match: hit, hit, hit... then you must defend yourself. So, how do you hit Man Gong's net? How do you take away Man Gong's idea? Man Gong's idea made the net. So, you must hit that.

Kong-an practicing is very important—it means, put it all down. In Zen, we say if the Buddha appears, kill the Buddha; if an eminent teacher appears, kill the teacher; if demons appear, kill them. Kill everything that appears in front of you. That means don't make anything. If you make something, then you have a hindrance. If you can completely put it all down, then you have no hindrance and your direction becomes clear. So, our practicing direction is to make our situation, function, and relationship in this world clear. Why do you eat every day? If that is clear, then our life is clear and we can help this world. Moment to moment our job is to do bodhisattva action and help all beings. Man Gong's net makes our direction and its function clear. Only help all beings. But that is just an explanation. Explanations can't help you! An answer is necessary.