

On April 9, 2000, Dennis Duermeier received inka from Zen Master Seung Sahn at Providence Zen Center.

dennis duermeier jdpsn dharma combat

Student: In the transmission ceremony yesterday there was five minutes of meditation. Just now, we only had three minutes of meditation. Which is correct, the three minutes or the five minutes?

Duermeier Poep Sa Nim: You already understand.

Student: So, I ask you.

DPSN: *[sits in meditation]*

Student: Good.

Student: There was a radio skit where one actor playing a robber goes to another one and says, "Your money or your life!" There's silence, and the robber waits, waits, waits, and then the other one says, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!" So, if you were that robber, how would you clear this guy's mind?

DPSN: You already understand.

Student: So, I ask you.

DPSN: Yeah—boom! *[points hand like gun and shoots]*

Student: This picture above the altar here, somebody said that these guys are the protectors of the dharma. I don't find that very interesting. What I am interested in is, how are you going to protect the dharma?

DPSN: You already understand.

Student: I don't, I don't.

DPSN: What are you doing right now?

Student: Just sitting here, talking to you.

DPSN: The dharma is already protected.

Student: Oh!!

Student: I have here the great sword of Ahimska, ready to cut off your fingers and your toes. Without violence, how can you disarm me?

DPSN: I'm sorry, what did you say?

Student: *[has nothing to say]*

[loud laughter and applause from audience]

Student: You're this great man from Kansas, which is known as the Great Plains State, right?

DPSN: Right.

Student: A long time ago, there were great numbers of buffaloes that used to roam in the great plains. Where have all the great buffaloes gone?

DPSN: *[Imitating a buffalo]* RRRRRRGGGHHH!

Student: This buffalo not roaming too much!

DPSN: Not enough?

Student: Good enough.



dennis duermeier jdpsn dharma talk

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

Zen Master Seung Sahn always teaches "Just do it!"

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

Lao-Tse in the Tao Te Ching teaches the wisdom of non-doing.

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

So, just doing, non-doing, are they the same or different?

KATZ!

What are you doing right now?

I'm so grateful and relieved. Now I'll always know where to sit when I come here. A while back I was reading about a practice which is based upon the idea that everyone who comes into this world has twelve teachers. The practice requires you to figure out who your twelve teachers are as you go through your life. Who are my teachers, my twelve teachers? It doesn't take much of this sort of practice to open up your mind very wide, very fast. Who's my teacher, is this person my teacher, is that person my teacher? You begin to relate to everyone in a much different way. Is this dog my teacher? Is that cat my teacher? Is the guy cutting me off in traffic my teacher? It really changes your mind.

Of course, all of us start out with our families as our first teachers. In my family I had a brother ten years older than me, whom I idolized. He had a wastebasket in his room which had all sorts of college pennants printed on it, many little colorful pennants with college names printed on them. I used to sneak into his room when I was young and just look at that wastebasket and think "Oh man, there's someplace where you can go, universities where you can go and figure out things. You can get an answer." I had such a strong aspiration that someday I would be able to follow in his footsteps and go to college and figure out things, figure out life, understand everything. Over time, this aspiration evolved into something else. As I grew older, I began to have an idea about something I thought of as the "True University." It seemed, in my heart of hearts, that there must be some thing, some place, the real university where real knowledge must be available. I really wanted to go there.

Finally I went to the university, but that wasn't it. So for years afterward I continued to secretly wonder, "Where is the true university? Where is true learning?" I didn't tell many people about my question. I was a little shy, it seemed very personal and maybe a little odd, my idea, but a while back I told my wife Carol about the wastebasket and the Real University. Two days later she went out to a garage sale and came home with a wastebasket, exactly the same wastebasket from my childhood. It's sitting by my desk at home now, and still I look at it and think, "Ahhh."

When I was growing up, my mother was a very avid reader and she imparted to me her love of reading and of books. One thing we always had around the house was *Reader's Digest*, usually in the bathroom. When I was maybe eleven or twelve years old, I read a particular article and the title stuck in my mind for years—I have no idea why. The title was "Make Way for the No Problem Guy!" You have to hand it to those *Reader's Digest* title writers—"Blank, the Sleeping Giant on our Doorstep." "The No Problem Guy."

But finally, years later, I met him. And in meeting Zen Master Seung Sahn, I learned that the true university is on the tips of a hundred blades of grass, and I could quit looking, quit wondering. Encountering Zen Master Seung Sahn was a wonderful gift, a gift of clarity and direction, the perfect antidote to the aimlessness of most of my early life. Of course, in becoming part of our school, I encountered many other teachers and many other teachings. I'd like to thank all of our teachers, everyone who has kept this tradition alive and passed it on for the benefit of all beings. It's a wonderful, remarkable and rare thing.

Twice since joining our school, I've gotten teaching or inspiration outside of formal situations which has changed the course of my life. Both instances occurred in restaurants. About ten years ago, I was having a cup of coffee with Zen Master Su Bong, and he talked to me about someday becoming a teacher in our School. I'll always be grateful to him for that encouragement and carry his memory in my heart.

Zen Master Hae Kwang is the other person who encouraged me to consider becoming a teacher. Several years ago, I got very angry with the Zen Center and decided "I've had it with this, it's too much trouble dealing with all these people and their karma." I left and quit practicing. I had a very tenuous relationship with the Zen Center and the School for maybe two and a half years. After a time, maybe because I was getting so unhappy, I decided I'd better try going back to practice. So, one Sunday morning, I went to the Zen Center, got to the door, and was too late. Practice had already begun, so I thought "Aww, I'll go have a cup of coffee instead." I went to a local bakery, got some coffee and the paper, and sat down to read. Almost immediately Zen Master Hae Kwang came in and sat down with me. He had also been late to practice, and in the course of a wonderful conversation about practice and the Zen Center, he also encouraged me to think seriously about becoming a teacher. I'm very grateful to him for his kindness and will always remember his encouragement.

So, this teaching is very wide and teaching doesn't always occur in the dharma room. I hope we can all keep our minds wide open and receptive so we can receive the moment to moment teaching as it appears before us.

One of the things that has always attracted me to Zen practice has been that so much of our teaching comes to us in the form of stories. I've tried to read sutras, but they just don't penetrate somehow. My mind doesn't work that way. But if I hear a story, it stays with me, so I would like to

close this talk with two of my favorite stories. They really hit me.

The first story is about a famous and eccentric Zen Master in old China who was known as Bird's Nest Zen Master because he lived in a tree and practiced high up on a limb. He was known far and wide for his wisdom. It happened one day that an imperial courtier, tiring of the intrigue and superficiality of court life, and having heard of the famous old teacher, determined to seek him out and get some good teaching. Accordingly, he dressed in his best robes, mounted his finest horse, and rode out to find the old teacher. Eventually, he found the tree, and sure enough, its famous occupant is sitting up on his limb, meditating. The courtier dismounts and waits far longer for recognition than anyone of his august station should have to. Finally, irritated, he shouts up "Old man, you're in a very precarious position up there!" Immediately comes the reply, "Not half so precarious as your position down there." Somewhat taken aback, the courtier remembers hearing that to get anything out of a Zen Master, you have to ask a question, so he shouts up "So old man, what is it that all Buddhas have taught?" Again, the immediate reply, "Do all good, avoid all evil. Thus have all Buddhas taught." Now the courtier is really mad. He shouts up "Do all good? Avoid all evil? I've known that since I was four years old!" "Yes," says the old man, "A four year old may know it, but even an eighty year old cannot do it."

So that's our practice, that's our teaching. Do it! We all understand, everyone understands how to live, what to do, but, do it, can you do it—just do it—that's our practice.

The other story is about a famous warrior who had been feared throughout the land all of his life because he was such a skillful and ruthless swordsman. He had killed many, many people. But he is becoming old, and he realizes it is only a question of time before someone a little younger, a little more skillful, a little quicker comes along and takes care of him. He thinks "Oh, I've killed so many people, I've been bad all through my life, what's going to happen to me after I die?" He's heard of a famous and wise teacher living nearby and determines to visit him to gain some insight into heaven and hell. He dresses up, arms himself, and heads to the temple. Upon arriving, he stomps right into the dharma room, very proud and ignoring all the formalities. He sees the old master sitting practicing, walks over to him and waits for acknowledgment. Ignored, he waits, becoming angrier and angrier, until finally he shouts "Old man, I want something from you. I want you to tell me about heaven and hell!" The Master looks up at the warrior and exclaims, "What? Me, teach an ignorant, smelly lout like you about anything? Impossible. Quit wasting my time. Get out of here!" Stunned and enraged, the swordsman whips out his blade to lop off the old man's head. Just as the sword reaches the top of its swing, just as the blade is about to descend, the old teacher says calmly, "Here open the gates of hell." Pow! The warrior is stuck, he can't move, he doesn't know what to do. Slowly, very slowly, he lowers and resheathes his blade. In the same calm tone, the old man says "Here open the gates of heaven."

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

So, hell.

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

Heaven.

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

Which one are you making? Be careful.