



solving our life problems with the dharma

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When we encounter problems we should know how to work with them so we can solve them. I myself have had lots of problems and obstacles and thus I became a sincere, genuine student of all possible methods to cut through all these hindrances. Since these methods have worked very well for me as well as for many other people, I'd like to share some hints about them with you.

First of all, in Zen we say that we cannot change past karma. This has already been created and has determined the conditions of our present life a long time ago. But we can define our future conditions by what we do now.

So if we keep clear mind and act accordingly moment to moment we are actually building our future happiness and we are contributing to our future joy. (It does not have to be only a distant future. As time is relative and depends on the mind it can be just the

next moment, and that's what people mean by "changing karma.")

To be able to keep clear mind we should keep before thinking mind and use it with correct compassionate direction.

Now, maybe we are already Zen students and we are making our efforts to keep clear while at the same time we encounter troubles with our mind which gets forgetful, confused or fearful. Or we have problems with our body getting sick, money problems or family-relations problems.

The first advice is: do not give up your practice efforts! If you try, try, try, then you will be able to change the way you experience your karma. This means that although the seed of your karma stays the same, the way the result manifests in your life will change. If we don't practice, our karma controls our lives. When we cut off our thinking, our true self controls our karma and our whole life as well.

It's like when we drive. Usually, we follow the traffic lights. But sometimes there is a policeman standing at the intersection directing the traffic—then his signals override the traffic lights. Maybe the light is green, but if the policeman says stop, we must stop. So this policeman is like our true self. Our true self is the ultimate force which overrides any other layer of karmic forces.

So we must continue practicing until we can live moment-to-moment as our true self. That doesn't mean that road signs and traffic lights aren't useful—we have to use them, especially if we are not totally clear.

Here is a story about that, maybe you have heard this. Once in a small town there was a big flood. The rescue workers were asking everyone to leave, but one man said that he only depended on God, that he knew God would save him, so he refused to leave with the others. After a while the waters got higher, so the man went up on his roof. A boat came by, and the people said to the man, "Get in! Get in!"

"No," he said, "God will provide for me," and he let the boat go on. The waters got higher, the man got further up on the roof. He was beginning to worry. Then a helicopter came, the pilot shouted at the man, "Get in! Get in!"

"No thank you," he said, "God will provide." The helicopter left. Finally the waters covered the house, and the man drowned. When he reached heaven, he asked God, "I believed in you all my life. Why didn't you help me?"

"What are you talking about," said God. "I sent you a group of rescue workers, a boat, and a helicopter!"

God doesn't mean just the Christian or Jewish God—it is the Absolute, the Mind, the World, our True Self, if you wish to call it that. So this story means, when you call on your true self to help you, by practicing strongly, keeping don't-know mind, and using techniques like sitting, bowing, chanting, mantra practice, you may expect that some helpful conditions will appear. Don't discard them only because they don't have a big label like "Zen" or Kwan Seum Bosal" on them.

Kwan Seum Bosal may manifest itself as a friend, a book, a TV program, a rabbi, even as a good idea in your mind. Pay attention, remain unprejudiced and open-minded. Then you will understand Kwan Seum Bosal's message and you will be able to shake one of its ten thousand hands that are extended to you. Be alert.

So our basic, original practice of tapping into the energy of primary point, of our true self, is the spine of our practice. We should never abandon it. This is our absolute practice. Then all techniques, synchronicities, opportunities, and relative practices, such as dharma play, tai chi, self-help courses, therapy, university studies, can become the flesh, dress and makeup. They will organize themselves around our spine, creating the strong, straight and healthy body of our life, containing everything you need to the smallest detail.

This way we do not have to reject anything useful. We can gather up all the abundance of this world, as

long as we use it to help us in our correct direction. If we don't keep our correct direction, and rather get ensnared by desire, life will usually give us some instant, rather unpleasant feedback on the matter.

Here are some basic techniques for practice. We can call bowing, chanting and sitting absolute practices, which cut off all thinking and help us keep don't know mind. We can call these the practices which lead to the final goal, or the spine of our practice. Then we have relative practices, which smooth our way. For example, dharma play, soen yu, tai chi, acupuncture, good actions, Buddhist medicine in general, correct exercise and diet. This the the flesh and makeup of our practice. For basic teaching about all of these practices I would refer you to our Zen Masters and Ji Do Poep Sa Nims, or to any qualified Buddhist teachers.

If you cut off all thinking, any technique can lead you towards enlightenment. Besides that, each technique has specific helpful effects on our karma.

We can say briefly that the most important practice in all cases is bowing, which removes karmic results very quickly, and which should be used in most cases of life-confusion. Sitting cultivates your wisdom, but is not so helpful for people with psychosis or strong mental confusion. Chanting is very effective for soothing wounded emotions and sending energy to someone in need.

Mantra is a great tool to keep clear mind in any demanding situation, so it's the best technique for keeping don't know mind in daily life. It's also a powerful means for sending people energy. Soen yu refuels people with life energy, improves health and mood, and can prolong life. Dharma play is a self-suggestion technique which can bring the mind and body together, calming the mind and allowing one to make positive suggestions to oneself to reinforce one's practice.

If you need to make a big change in your life, it's good to make a schedule to practice these techniques intensively. If you have a big problem, then for many people it's helpful to do a hundred days of midnight practice, practicing for one or two hours in the time between midnight and 3:00 a.m. This practice has a special effect if you can do it without a break for a hundred days in a row. It can make a major, positive change in your karma, almost as powerful as doing a hundred-day solo retreat.

Over the years I have seen these practices make fundamental changes in the lives of myself and my friends. I can testify that they really work! Stay open to all possible forms of help that will appear along your practice. Most important is not to give up—only try, try, try and you will get it.

I wish you the best of luck on your dharma path.