

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Zen Master Seung Sahn

Student: The aim of Zen practice is awakening. As a doctor who treats cancer patients and gives them advice about Zen meditation, I wonder what can we do for patients who are just beginning to practice in our hospital? They start using Zen as a “meditation technique,” which is OK, but what happens on the “spiritual level”? What does this beginning mean?

Zen Master Seung Sahn: Most important is that these cancer patients who are beginning to practice meditation have a vow that even if they cannot get enlightenment and practice the bodhisattva way in this life, they will continue to practice in their next life. If this vow is strong, then they will be reborn as a human being in a country where the dharma is taught and practiced. They will encounter great teachers and have the chance to get enlightenment and save all beings from suffering.

Also, if they attain their original nature, then there is no life and no death. Their original nature is clear like space, clear like a mirror. At that point they can die peacefully and their great vow will naturally lead them to a bodhisattva rebirth. Even if they are born in a non-human body, or under difficult circumstances amidst people who are not sympathetic to the dharma, their strong vow can change that birth and situation into a bodhisattva birth and situation. So, most important is a strong decision to get enlightenment and a great vow to save all beings from suffering. This vow comes from looking deeply into the great question “What am I?” and keeping a don’t know mind always and everywhere. That is correct Zen practice and correct spiritual growth.

