

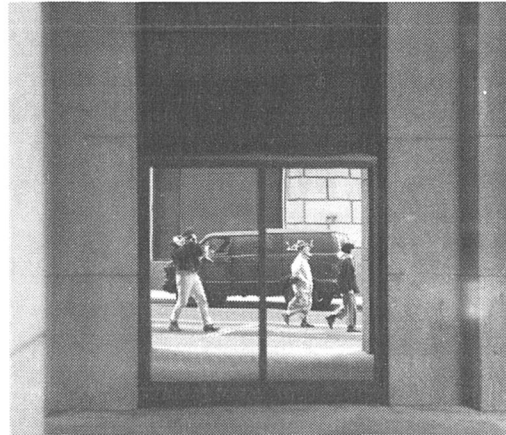
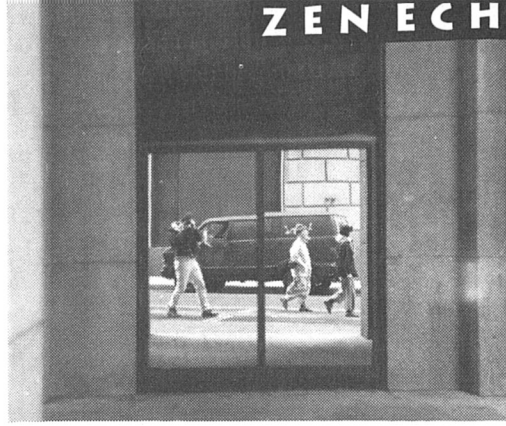
around and around

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On September 11th our country and this whole world experienced a trauma of inconceivable magnitude. In this time of loss and confusion, with all of the emotions that arise, it is important to consider the Buddha's teaching. The following story is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching of turning the other cheek. It comes from the Brahma Net Sutra, a Mahayana sutra which examines the lay precepts. This particular story is in reference to the tenth bodhisattva precept concerning the possession of weapons. This precept says in part, "Disciples of the Buddha must not even avenge the death of their parents—let alone kill sentient beings." It points clearly to the importance of cutting the cycle of revenge and retribution, thereby relieving human suffering.

During the Ching Dynasty in China, in Yang Chou province there lived a man named Cheng Pai Lin. One night he had a dream in which Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva told him, "Tomorrow the Ching army will arrive. Out of the seventeen people in your household sixteen will survive, but you cannot escape your fate. Tomorrow Commander Wang Ma Tze will kill you because in a past life you stabbed him twenty-six times and killed him." The bodhisattva added, "There is still an expedient method that may work. Prepare a fine feast tomorrow and when he comes, invite him to eat with you. Afterwards, allow him to kill you. Perhaps after that things will change."

The dream was vivid and when Cheng Pai Lin awoke the following morning he began preparing the feast as suggested. When noontime came someone knocked at the door. Cheng opened the door and said, "Are you Wang Ma Tze?" "How strange," said the man at the door,



"I'm from the north, how do you know my name?" The host invited him in and said, "You are welcome in my house. I have prepared a feast for you. Please join me." Then he related the dream he'd had the night before. "Last life I killed you with twenty-six stabs of a knife and so in this life you are bound to kill me. After we've finished this meal you may do it." Wang Ma Tze pondered this and said, "But if you killed me in the last life and I kill you in this life, won't you kill me in our next life? It will just go on and on. No, I won't kill you." Then he took his knife and scratched twenty-six marks on his host's back—symbolically repaying the debt. Having settled their karmic debts, they were able to enjoy the feast. Not only did Wang Ma Tze not kill his host, but they became fast friends. Wang said to his host, "The Ching army is following *en masse*. They are not reasonable, so it would be best for you and your family to flee to Su Chou. It's safe there."

This is a case of our innate wisdom perceiving cause and effect clearly, turning grievance into friendship. However, merely understanding this as a concept can't help us. That is why Zen Master Seung Sahn always encourages us to practice so it can become ours.