



world. I want to share with you some of these teachings, four apocryphal sutras: 1/ the Animal Crackers Sutra, 2/ the Row Your Boat Sutra, 3/ the Noble Duke of York Sutra, and 4/ the Cheerios Sutra.

1/  
Animal Crackers Sutra

Fifty years ago, Watson and Crick unlocked one of the secrets of nature, the structure of DNA, the magic code of four letters: A, T, G, and C. This event changed the way that scientists understand and think about life, from cloning to the genome project, and what geneticists now call genetic fossils. In Zen, we say that all the questions return to one question: "what am I?" Scientists also ask the question "where do we come from?" These genetic fossils that geneticists are discovering point to the idea that we all probably come from the same original DNA.

If you look at a box of Barnum's animal crackers, you will see that on the outside they have drawings of lions, gorillas, polar bears, elephants, tigers, giraffes, zebras and hippopotamuses. The cookies inside, as Zen Master Seung

# Children's Sutras

From a talk by senior dharma teacher José Ramírez Abbot, Delaware Valley Zen Center

The first time I heard Zen Master Seung Sahn talk about "anything can be your teacher: a tree, a river, the phone book, the newspaper; no problem," I thought, "what kind of teaching is this; is this Zen?" I was expecting deep teachings, profound words, the wisdom of the ages coming down from the East. There are 84,000 sutras... but the newspaper, the phonebook? Was Zen Master Seung Sahn out to lunch?

It is hard to believe that the immediacy of life, the immediacy of this moment, is full of teachings, but once you begin to pay attention, to be mindful, you realize that the teachings are everywhere. Now that my daughter Oriana is taking me by the hand and sharing her life with me, I've been discovering some Buddhist teachings in her

Sahn sometimes tells his students, are baked in those different shapes. Grabbing one of those animal cookies, you can see that the form, and the name we give it, are different from other cookies in the box, but they are all made from the same dough and, after biting and chewing one of them, we realize that they all taste the same. Yes, this Caucasian Zen Master from Nebraska sitting next to me, and this Latino dharma teacher from Venezuela who is talking to you, come from the same original dough.

The Animal Crackers Sutra points to original substance, to primary point. Keeping the mind that bites into tiger and realizes that it tastes like the elephant, I ask you: What is the original dough?

2/

Row Your Boat Sutra

While growing up in an English-speaking country, or if you were taught English when you were growing up, you probably sang:

*Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily  
Life is but a dream.*

These days, every time I sing this with Oriana, I can hear the Buddha singing it with us. I can see him composing this poem, because in it you find the most important elements of his teaching. Let's take it from the top and look at it line by line.

*Row, row, row your boat...*

The last verse in the Heart Sutra, which, like "row, row, row," is repeated three times, reads "gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha." In this verse, there is an image of reaching the other shore, and for this you need a boat. The Buddha's last words were, "All component things in the world are changeable; they are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation." This means that

you not only need a boat to get to the other shore, but also that no one can do the rowing for you. In other words, do not waste any time, get on your boat and just do it!

*Gently down the stream...*

We need to row, row, row our boat, but we should not be attached to the boat, the rowing, or reaching the other shore. To reach the other shore, we have to let the process unfold. When you receive five precepts in the Kwan Um School of Zen, you get a nice poem in Chinese, of which the last verse reads: "Spring comes and the grass grows by itself." We have to be gentle with ourselves and not be attached to enlightenment.

*Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily...*

Not being attached to good and bad and the world of opposites, we are at ease with life. We can row our boat merrily down the stream. We let the flow help us with our rowing.

*Life is but a dream.*





The last chapter of the Diamond Sutra reads:

*Thus shall you think of this fleeting world:  
A star at dawn, a bubble in a stream;  
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud,  
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.*

Once, someone asked the Buddha, "Are you God?" and the Buddha replied, "No." "Are you an angel?", the person continued, and the Buddha answered, "No." "Are you a saint?" Once again the Buddha answered, "No." Finally, the person asked, "Then what are you?" The Buddha said, "I am awake." In Sanskrit, the word Buddha means "awake," and this last verse remind us of one of the goals of our journey down the stream: to awake to our life.

Once we reach the other shore, we discard the boat and realize that in life, all is changing, changing, changing. As one Zen Master once said, "Renunciation is not giving up the things of the world, but recognizing that they go away."

"Life is but a dream," but how do we function in this dream? How do we wake up to our life?

3/

#### Noble Duke of York Sutra

In the Kwan Um School, we talk about clear mind a lot. We even recite it to ourselves when we sit in meditation. What is this clear mind that we talk about? Zen Master Dae Kwang will tell us that clear mind is the mind that reflects things as they are. There is another children's song that reflects clear mind and goes like this:

*The noble Duke of York  
He had ten thousand men  
He marched them up to the top of the hill  
And he marched them down again.*

*And when you're up, you're up.  
And when you're down, you're down.  
And when you're only half way up  
You're neither up nor down.*

The last stanza talks about the mind that does not add anything to the situation. In particular, the last two lines show the way out of suffering:

*And when you're only half way up  
You're neither up nor down.*

There is no point in arguing if we are up or down, or which way is better or worse. The last line points to things as they are: *You're neither up nor down.*

Children have the gift of clarity. Recently I was watching the movie *Rabbit-Proof Fence*, a true story about three little girls who were taken away from their mothers and placed in a foster home, denied of their identity, 1500 miles from home. Their courage and one-mind took them on a journey back to their mothers. There is a wonderful scene half-way through the movie when two of the girls, Molly and Gracie, find a nest with three eggs. Molly grabs the eggs one by one saying, "One for me, one for you, and one for the both of us." In just that action we can see wisdom and compassion hand in hand. As Zen Master Seung Sahn always says "First attain enlightenment, then help all beings." How do we help all beings?

4/

#### Cheerios Sutra

Every morning, most of us, as part of our morning ritual, sit down to have breakfast. It could be toast, coffee, tea, eggs, cereal, etc. We have many choices for cereal, but most kids like Cheerios. I don't know if you've seen a box of Cheerios lately, but on the side of the box they have this wonderful question, which is a Zen thing because sometimes everything in Zen seems like a question:

*"Who are you eating them for?"*

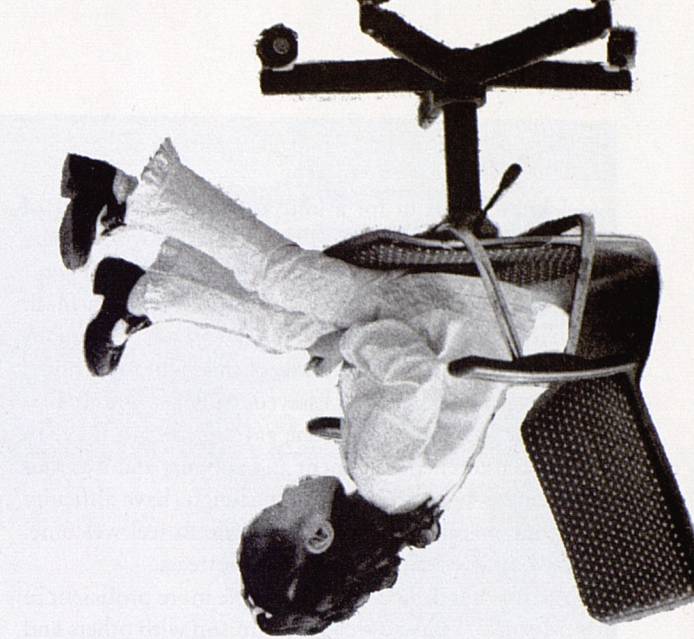
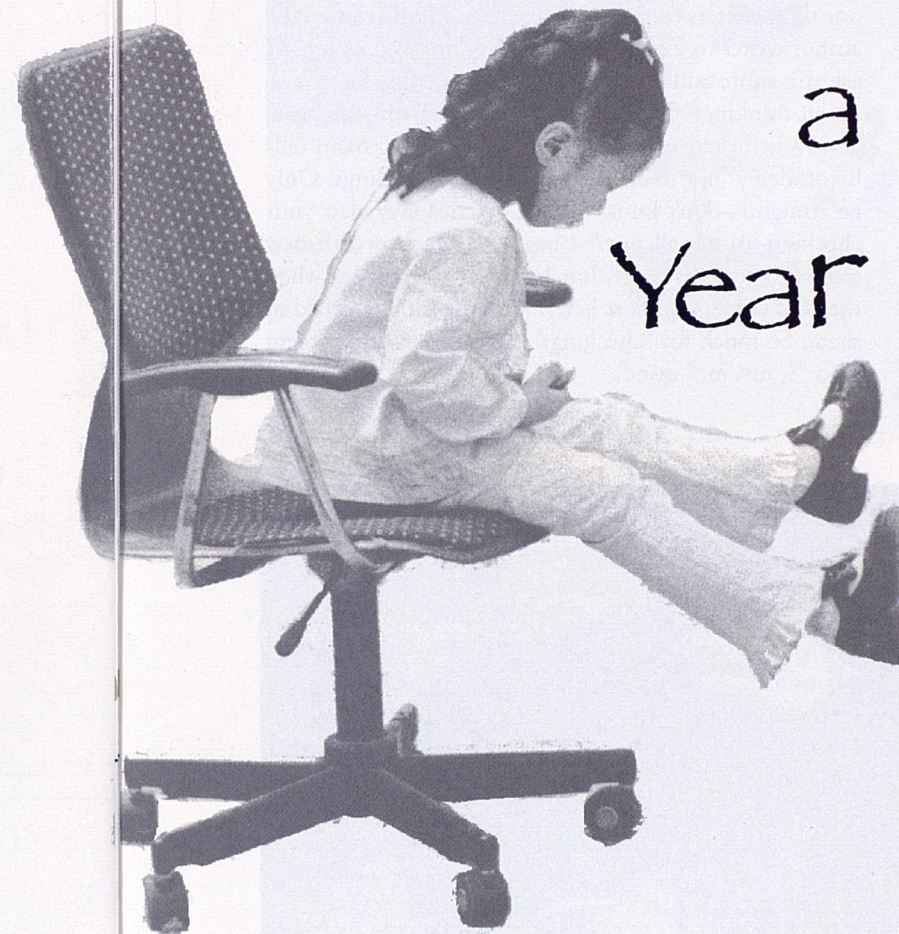
This is a very, very, very important question because it points to compassionate action. So I ask all of you, "Why do you eat everyday?"

I hope you all have a big bowl of Cheerios, get on your boat, and row merrily down the stream, helping all beings along the way. ☸

# Reflections

Gary Dixon

## on a Year



My Korean friend and business associate, Mr. Youngjong Yu, handed me a copy of *The Compass of Zen*, and told me to read it on my way back to the U.S. He had finally run out of answers to my questions regarding Buddhism, and thought that this book, written by Zen Master Seung Sahn, would help me. On the flight home, I opened the book and began to read.

I was immediately drawn to one particular passage in the first chapter. Zen Master Seung Sahn writes, "There are many paths that one can follow in order to attain this point [true self]. We have many religions and spiritual ways. But actually there are just two kinds of religion in this world: subject religions and object religions. Following an object religion means believing in some kind of god or some power or opposite outside yourself." He continues by stating that, "Buddhism is a subject religion. It seeks direct insight into the very nature of existence itself, beginning with insight into the nature of our being, 'What am I?', 'What is this 'I,' and where did it come from?'" This passage is why I came to the Kwan Um School and the Great Lake Zen Center. I wanted to know the answer to, "What am I" and "What is this 'I'?" I wanted to get something.

On my first visit to the Zen Center, I received some basic instruction on how to sit and what to expect during the practice to follow. I was told that we would be chanting in Korean, but not to worry about the correct pronunciation and the meaning of the words. I was also told that we would sit for 25 minutes in the manner I had just been instructed. Panic began to set in. This was not another book read on Buddhism or Zen. This was the real thing!

I chanted, but it wasn't Korean. I have no idea what was coming out of my mouth on that first visit. My nine-month old son is more intelligible. I sat and was uncomfortable sitting still for 25 minutes, but no one seemed to notice, and if they did, they didn't seem to mind my blundering through it. I was made to feel welcome and so I returned to practice fairly regularly.

Before my first retreat, I received a basic explanation of what would take place during the retreat. I was told that the majority of the time would be spent sitting. *How hard can that be?* I was also told that we would eat meals differently, with bowls in a formal manner. *How hard can eating out of bowls be?* Then the bows, we do 108 of them. *No problem! I have done a few of those, too. Sign me up!!!!*