

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?

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#### 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?

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#### 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?"*

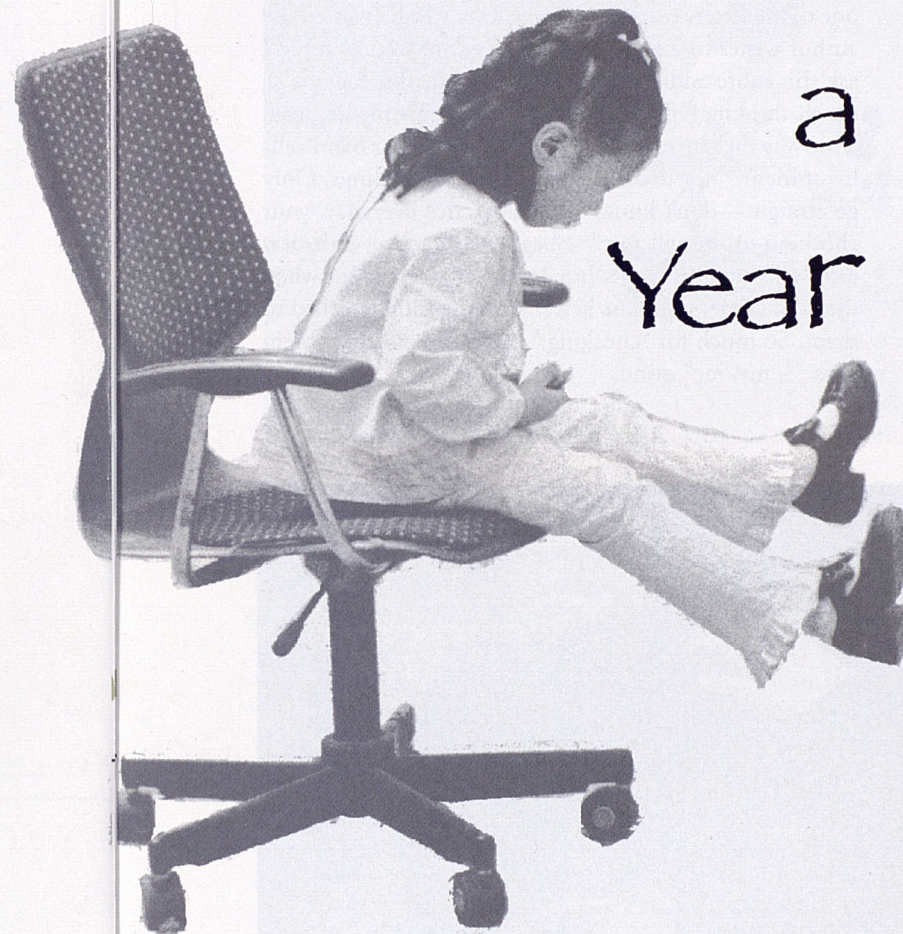
This is a very, very, very important question because it points to compassionate action. So I ask all of you, "Why do you eat everyday?"

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!!!!*

I knew I was in for a long day when I was out of breath at bow number 27. Things became worse when pain appeared in my legs during the third sitting. Then I embarrassed myself by playing musical bowls at every meal. I went to bed that night tired, hungry, and full of thoughts about sneaking out in the middle of the night to go home and lie in my own bed. But I stayed. And just like my first visit to the Zen Center, no one gave me a hard time. In fact, I received encouragement and support and was told that even the senior members of the sangha have difficulty from time-to-time. Again, I was made to feel welcome, and have since participated in other retreats.

As time has passed, I have become more proficient in these “forms.” I can now chant in unison with others and I can comfortably sit for 25 minutes. My legs have become accustomed to this sitting and it now takes longer for the pain to appear in my legs during retreats. I almost have the bowls memorized and I have even learned how to serve during the meals at retreat. Even the bows are coming along nicely and at the next retreat I intend to do all 108 at the hellish pace of 7.2 per minute. Although I became comfortable with the “form” of our practice, I began to have some reservations.

If you remember from the first paragraph, I came to this practice wanting something. I wanted to know the answer to, “What am I.” and “What is this ‘I’?” After months of practice, I did not feel I was any closer to the answer. Not even a hint of any real progress to inspire me onward. I began to second-guess the way I was practicing. Eventually, frustration set in and I began to think that perhaps Zen practice, or at least our form of Zen practice, wasn’t right for me. I was deep into “I, my, me mind” and “checking.” As a result, I considered quitting.

Then, one evening at the Zen Center, someone read one of the letters from *Only Don't Know*. In this letter, the author writes to Zen Master Seung Sahn, “What am I? I ask this more and more through my day. But there is so much thinking!” I felt as if I had been hit in the head! This was me! In response, Zen Master Seung Sahn tells his student, “not to check your mind and feelings. Only go straight—don’t know. If you practice everyday, your checking mind will rest.” I began to practice with new resolve. Thoughts came, but I did not worry. And when they did come, I became better at not getting attached to them. So much for “checking,” but I still had a problem with “I, my, me” mind.

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Inspired by the letters in *Only Don't Know*, I went and purchased a copy of the book, and at the same time purchased a copy of another book by Zen Master Seung Sahn, *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*. In the latter, I was further inspired by the message in chapter 42, "Wanting Enlightenment." In this chapter, Zen Master Seung Sahn states that, "The idea that you want to achieve something in Zen meditation is basically selfish." He explains that if we have thoughts of attaining something, we will never attain anything. There it was, after nine months, the slap in the face that I needed! I had to "put down" this "I, my, me" mind and begin practicing without the desire to attain anything.

This past July, the company I work for merged with another company, and during this process there were many concerns about lost jobs and changing roles. Our practice enabled me to remain relatively calm throughout this ordeal. A few weeks after the merger was completed, I was in California on business and several of my co-workers expressed their thanks to me for helping them cope throughout the merger process. They told me of numerous conversations in which I had told them not to get caught up in the mindset of speculation and "what if" scenarios. I had told them not to worry about what was going to happen or what might take place after the merger is

completed. I told them that they should just worry about their current jobs and that things always seem to work out in the end. I had no idea that my words and actions had made such a difference.

When I returned home, I shared this experience with my wife. She then told me that since I began this practice, I have become more patient and more understanding towards her and my children. She also went on to tell me that even our friends and relatives have commented to her about how they have noticed a change. I had no idea!

A full year has now passed and I am preparing to commit further to our practice by taking the Five Precepts. In the past year, I have learned and experienced many things. I have had the privilege of knowing and practicing with my immediate sangha family at the Great Lakes Zen Center and my extended sangha family throughout the Kwan Um School. What wonderful teachers they all are! However, there is one teaching that stands above all the others I have learned this past year. And, that teaching is: the reason we practice at all is not for ourselves, but for others.

My family, friends, and co-workers have taught me this lesson. And even though I try every day to practice with no desire of attainment, I really have attained something after all. ☸