



CA

## A GREAT PAGODA

*Zen Master Seung Sahn*

*From a talk at the end of Winter Kyol Che 2004*

Hae Jae means put it all down. So, a Hae Jae dharma talk means putting down everything you have attained for the last three months and letting go. If originally there is nothing, what else is there to put down? The Sixth Patriarch said originally there is nothing, yet he made a great sutra. So, our job is neither to make anything nor to put down anything, but to leave it alone. Then just seeing, the sky is blue, the ground is brown and water flows down. Just seeing means not making even one single thought appear, then our mind is clear like a mirror.

The mountain is blue, water flows down, a dog is barking. Seeing, hearing—any experience—everything is dharma.

When we are in that state of practice, then Hae Jae, or no Hae Jae, Kyol Che, or no Kyol Che, it doesn't matter, there is no hindrance.

Those who practice can say there is no hindrance. But for those who don't, they say there are many hindrances. That's why today at Hae Jae, we are having a dharma talk. Dharma talk means we must place at the center of our mind a great pagoda of what we are going to do. As we raise each pagoda step, the higher the pagoda, the further we can perceive. The lower the pagoda, the less we can perceive.

If we practice with great persistence, we can help many beings. If we don't practice, we cannot even help ourselves. If we cannot even save ourselves, how can we possibly help other beings? One way to get closer is by "putting it all down." Moment to moment, if we put it all down, everything we see, hear and feel, all of it is the truth. There is nothing that is not truth. The sky is blue, water flows down, the dog is barking, woof, woof; sugar is sweet. Which one is not truth?

So, our job is to keep this direction, attain universal truth and save all beings from suffering.



Today is Hae Jae Day, which means put it all down. All of you, what will you put down? Rather than putting it down for Buddha or eminent teachers, we must put it down for all sentient beings. Hae Jae means practicing to put it all down for all beings so that all beings can ride together on the same boat to Buddhahood. That is Hae Jae Day.

Now my Hae Jae dharma talk is finished, so please ask any questions.

Q: My prajna boat is too small—how can I make it bigger?

ZMSS: When you throw away “small,” it becomes bigger. Original prajna boat is not big, not small. Don’t make anything!

Q: Every now and then, I experience great sadness. What shall I do?

ZMSS: Who is it that is experiencing sadness?

Q: [no answer]

ZMSS: Don’t know? Keep that don’t know. Then there is no problem.

Q: What does *practice* mean?

ZMSS: Who is asking the question?

Q: I am.

ZMSS: Who is asking? You have to find this “I,” OK?

Q: All of us being here together and practicing is not an accident. Please explain how nothing happens by accident.

ZMSS: Who is the one who is talking, asking the question right now? Who?

Q: One who is sitting here...

ZMSS: What is the “one who is sitting here”?

Q: Don’t know.

ZMSS: Don’t know?

Q: Yes.

ZMSS: Hit the floor. [student hits the floor] OK. Open mouth to explain not necessary, OK?

Q: These days your body is not in good condition. So, your mind from when you were young and your mind now, are they the same or different? How different?

ZMSS: If you say “same,” you get thirty blows. If you say “different,” you also get thirty blows.

Q: I am experiencing great suffering. My suffering is far bigger than yours. What shall I do?

ZMSS: When you say “bigger,” what do you mean? You mean to say your suffering is far bigger than your teacher’s? How do you know that?

Q: [no answer]

ZMSS: You don’t know. So don’t pretend you know something.

Q: Zen Master Seung Sahn, are you the reincarnation of Mahakashapa from Buddha’s time?

ZMSS: Stop this nonsense. That is useless speech. It’s an old tale. Zen means right now, moment to moment, studying what is appearing and disappearing in our mind. Whatever happened to Mahakashapa, or what became of Buddha, all of it is useless, none of your business. You have to find out right now what is this thing that is sitting here, breathing in and breathing out. That is why, a long time ago, a great Zen Master burned all the sutras and threw the teaching records of eminent teachers into the garbage. All are unnecessary. Zen does not need that. You have to find out and attain clearly your true self. What is it that is moving around?

Q: If Zen is the practice of being moment to moment, then before physical death comes, how can we go beyond death?

ZMSS: From moment to moment, what is this moment that is speaking? In moment to moment, already there is no life, no death. That’s why, moment to moment, when our mind is clear and we perceive that everything is truth itself, then no problem. But if you get stuck in the moment, that’s no good. Moment means one second divided by ten million. That means one moment is very short. The continuation of this moment is what we call meditation. So throw away thinking. Good. You are bowing with hands in hapjang, that’s good.

Q: When you first started practicing, Koreans were fighting with each other, north and south—it was very sad. What do you think now about Korea and Korean Buddhism?

ZMSS: After you eat breakfast in the morning and you open your door and go outside, you see many animals fighting and trying to eat each other. What do you think of that? People are the same. So in Zen we say put down your “situation.” Just put it down. Good or bad, coming or going, high or low, put it down, put it down. Put it all down. Put it down, OK?



Q: How can I cultivate compassion inside me and save all beings?

ZMSS: “Cultivate inside me,” itself is already a mistake. In Zen, we say “put it all down.” Put it down. If you put it all down, you become one with the sky is blue; the ground is yellow, the dog is barking woof, woof, and sugar is sweet. That is universal truth. When the universal truth and we become one, then our action is Buddha’s action. Put it all down.

Q: I want to practice more, but the more I practice, the further I get from my parents.

ZMSS: If you practice correctly, you will become more devoted to your parents. When I first went to America, nobody helped me. I had to teach Buddhism, do the chanting, and teach meditation. At that time, Americans did not understand the meaning of the word meditation.

When I went to the kitchen, they also came to the kitchen to work with me. Then when there was time, I would sit facing the wall—just sit still. Then they also followed and we sat together. Later, we did not just sit still together, I taught them how to keep a Great Question. This Great Question slowly, slowly, grew bigger and bigger, so now Korean Buddhism is all over the world. Do it like that. All of you also do it like that.

Q: Thank you very much Dae Soen Sa Nim. Hearing your dharma talk after a long time, my heart is elated. Now you are advanced in years, and soon will enter nirvana while we remain practicing. If someone asks “what is your teacher’s teaching?” how could we answer?

ZMSS: The one who is talking right now, who is it?

Q: Right now, we can practice with your guidance, but later, when we are left without you, what is the best way to follow your teaching?

ZMSS: Put it all down.

Q: Those who understand your teaching well can do it, but what if others cannot, what will they do?

ZMSS: What does “what if” mean? Throw away “what if,” and when I say put it down, put it down. You are making too many delusions!

Q: These days our sangha can practice in three different places. First the main temple Hwa Gye Sah, and now Mu Sang Sah, and since last year, Hyon Jong Sah. Some people may choose to practice at Mu Sang Sah, others may choose Hwa Gye Sah. I would like to ask you what is the best practice, place, and method. Is it all right to go to different places according to one’s personal preference and practice?

ZMSS: Your speech is very low class. “Personal preference?” There is no such thing! When you don’t even know who you are, what kind of personal preference exists? When the Great Question is clear, then you can attain who you are.

Q: My Great Question is clear. When what is asking this question is clear, then what do we do?

ZMSS: What are you asking about?

Q: When the Great Question gets bigger and when it is clear who it is that asks, what does one do?

ZMSS: This question is clear?

Q: Yes.

ZMSS: How is this question clear?

Q: I keep “who am I,” so I am clear, and I have a question.

ZMSS: What is clear about the question “what am I?”

Q: I am clear; I have this question.

ZMSS: Don’t explain, give an answer. What is this that is saying, “I have a clear question?”

Q: It is don’t know mind.

ZMSS: Don’t open mouth, but answer! Answer!

Q: *[hits the floor]* The floor is yellow.

ZMSS: You see—just keep that and continue. Too much making!

ZMSS: If there are no more questions, then we will end. Only keep this Great Question, Don’t Know Mind! When your mind is completely filled with don’t know mind, the whole universe is don’t know mind. When the whole universe is don’t know mind, you will attain that this don’t know mind is you. So keeping don’t know mind, this question persistently, is our kong-an, our correct path of practicing. So, all doubts are resolved, no more doubts?

Q: You said “keep this Great Question,” what does it mean?

ZMSS: What is this now? Who is talking?

Q: *[hits the floor]*

ZMSS: Then just keep that! But still making too much! ❁

*In June 2004, Zen Master Seung Sahn was officially conferred the lifetime honorific of “Dae Jong Sa,” or Great Master of the Chogye Order. This is the highest title which the Chogye Order confers.*