



**The first time** I saw Dae Soen Sa Nim was at a dharma talk at Cambridge Zen Center. I understood very little of what he said. Maybe a third—maybe. But I remember very clearly his delight. He laughed freely.

The next time I saw him, I had been practicing and waiting. I was nearly sick with anxiety when he arrived again. And he looked at me and said, “Are you sick?”

I wanted to tell a story that Stan told once because it hit me very hard when he told it here at Providence Zen Center. Dae Soen Sa Nim was in Kansas doing a public talk at the university. There was a young man sitting right in the front row, staring intently at Dae Soen Sa Nim with great desire. He finally got a chance to ask a question and asked, “What can you teach me?” And Dae Soen Sa Nim looked at him and said, “I’m not special.” He shared that with us his whole life. We put robes on and made this altar and built Zen Centers, and we have all kinds of hooplah. Behind it and in amongst all of it, nothing is special. Just how is it now?

I drove Dae Soen Sa Nim to a Korean couple’s home for dinner once, near Cambridge. They spoke Korean all evening and I understood pretty much nothing. I got to sit back and watch the dynamics as they chatted. I picked up some words. It was a lot of Korea talk and the politics of religion and stuff. After dinner, he turned to the wife and the energy completely changed. It was dharma. It was so clear that there was a love for sharing the dharma with whomever—a delight and a love and an obvious passion, his passion. That was what we all got to share. And it will continue.

The last story I remember was when he gave a talk about life and death here at Providence Zen Center once. He had just been in the hospital and he had been quite ill, but also he had a roommate who was older and quite ill. He talked about what is our job just now. As we get older, we lose our working jobs, our family jobs, our physical ability to move as the different functions of the body are beginning to fall apart. Still, what’s my job just now? Then, there is just breathing: breath in, breath out; breath in, breath out.

So our job is always right in front of us and no teacher is great teacher because then our job is very clear. Standing here, sitting here, talking, listening. On this occasion, so sad, so glad.

*Nancy Hedgpeth, JDPSN*

