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SPREAD
THE
DHARMA
TOGETHER

*Seong Dam Sunim
Dharma Talk at the 49th Day Ceremony
for Zen Master Seung Sahn
at Hwa Gye Sah in Korea*

Seong Dam Sunim is well known for his complete adherence to the Zen saying, "Not dependent on words and speech." Among Korean monks and nuns who practice Zen, he is highly respected and referred to as "Northern Seong Dam," as contrasted with "Southern Jin Jae," which refers to Jin Jae Sunim, who lives in the south. Seong Dam Sunim is famous for being very difficult to meet in person. His public appearances were limited to monthly dharma talks at Yong Hwa Zen Center in Incheon. Throughout his life, he has refused to meet any outside people, especially journalists, give interviews, or give dharma talks at other temples. Even his attendants don't respond to requests for interviews from the news media. He has dedicated his life to Zen cultivation and has encouraged his students to practice likewise. For this reason, he even disappeared from his temple on occasion, in order to keep away from fame and position. A few years ago, he declined to be the official resident Zen Master of Yong Hwa Zen Center and of Bong Am Sah Zen temple. Seong Dam Sunim has refused to allow any books to be published about his dharma teachings, and his students are not permitted to transcribe his dharma talk tapes. All of this shows Seong Dam Sunim's ferocity in seeking after the truth, and his determination not to be dependent on words and speech, or any external form.

Seong Dam Sunim was born in 1929, and in 1945 he became a novice monk under the guidance of his teacher, Zen Master Jeon Gang. After a ten year silent meditation retreat, he attained enlightenment and received transmission from his teacher, Zen Master Jeon Gang.

*Ending a hundred years of illusion
Dream of a friend appears in black ink.
Na Mu Amita Bul*

*Going around all day long, not knowing for what are you so busy?
Na Mu Amita Bul*

*If in the midst of a busy world
The clear truth is attained,
That is a single lotus flower
Rising in the midst of a fiery boiling stream.
Na Mu Amita Bul*

That was an old wisdom.

To commemorate the 49th-day ceremony of Seung Sahn Dae Soen Sa (Great Zen Master), there are many eminent teachers and great monks here today. Then why is this mountain monk at this seat? Actually, a while ago, one of Zen Master Seung Sahn's students came in person and said to me that it was the wish of his teacher. So why would Zen Master Seung Sahn want me to be here today?

There is a story which gives a good reason. In 1979, with an invitation from New York State University at Stony Brook, I visited the United States. Zen Master Seung Sahn greeted me at the airport. He also took me to some places to give dharma talks. At that time he explained to me that Western people are very high class; that they are very innocent and pure and follow the teaching sincerely. He said to me, holding both my hands, "Let's spread the dharma together." After that, Zen Master Seung Sahn went to Canada to give a dharma talk and while he was away, I was invited to give a talk at a gathering of some of his Korean students, who were a group of doctors living in New York. I said to them, "Zen Master Seung Sahn is hanging up lamb meat but selling dog meat in America." An old Chinese saying. Why would Zen Master Seung Sahn, who received transmission of the dharma that comes all the way down from Kyong Ho Sunim to Man Gong Sunim, and to Ko Bong Sunim, why would he sell dog meat pretending it to be high-class lamb meat?

No matter how sophisticated the Western material culture might be, when it comes to the practice of finding one's true self, and especially when it comes to our particular Zen practice using kong-ans, many skillful means are necessary and used in order to help people digest it. So I said to his Korean students, "Maybe Western people need this kind of teaching, but for all of you Koreans who have over 1600 years of Buddhist history through Paekche, Shilla, Koguryo, and in whom Buddhist blood flows through—why do all of you also buy dog meat? Go and tell your teacher you don't want dog meat and beg him to please sell you lamb meat immediately!" At this, the students were shocked. They recorded the talk and passed it around. Soon Zen Master Seung Sahn returned from Canada and I told him how I talked to his students. He exclaimed, "Well done, well done!" and with the Pyong An Do accent of a true man of no hindrance, he laughed heartily.

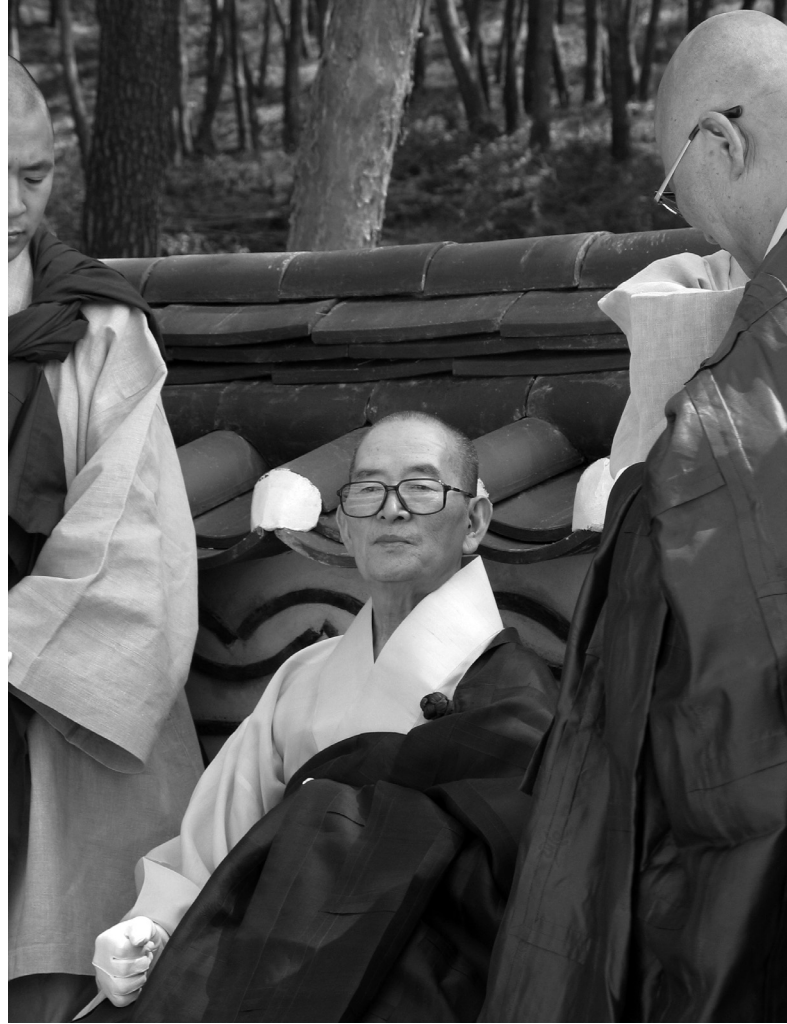
We just heard earlier about the great life work of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Through Japan, Hong Kong, the United States, Canada, and the world over, he not only spread Korean Buddhism, but made eminent our Zen practice worldwide. He was also recognized as a "Living Buddha." Calling someone a "Living Buddha" is an expression of the highest esteem. However, the next "Buddha" will only appear in 56,700,000,000 years when Maitreya Buddha will appear. Until then, Shakyamuni Buddha is the only true "Buddha" of our time. Until then, for any eminent teacher or patriarch who

appears however great, it would be correct to call them great bodhisattvas. I say this not because there is any lack of enlightenment, sincerity, faith or compassion in Zen Master Seung Sahn, but because this is our correct responsibility to the teaching. If we are calling Zen Master Seung Sahn a “Living Buddha,” then all of us here at this assembly, except for this mountain monk, are also “Living Buddhas.” That’s because the Vairocana Buddha light is residing inside each one of your bodies. Whether man or woman, clever or stupid, educated or illiterate, all of you are unmistakably “Buddhas.” It is only with that kind of great faith and vow in following the buddhadharma and commitment to practice correctly that we can truly attain enlightenment.

Bodhidharma came to China and transmitted the dharma to Hui Ko, then down to the Sixth Patriarch, and finally the five schools appeared: Imje (Rinzai), Jo Dong (Soto), Poep An, Un Mun, and Wi Ahn schools. The Zen masters of these schools had their different styles and methods of teaching. Those of you following Zen Master Seung Sahn’s teaching and hearing his dharma understand that he taught the practice of attaining the great way, and many students appeared. He also offered the teachings in the form of *Compass of Zen* in Korean, English, Chinese characters, and other languages. In this way, he made the teachings available and easily understood even for the less educated—so that all beings without distinction, no matter what the circumstances of their birth or education, if they apply themselves, can attain the correct path.

One of Zen Master Seung Sahn’s students said to me that Zen Master Seung Sahn is very well known and respected in the world, but less so in Korea. There are two reasons. Firstly, it is because the practice of Hwal Gu (the Zen practice of kong-ans and keeping don’t know), which is handed down from Kyong Ho Sunim and Man Gong Sunim, is still not deeply embedded in our (Korean) practitioners’ hearts. Cham Gu (hwadu practice) is more commonly known. Secondly, there is a Western proverb that even the most famous of heroes merely appears as an ordinary man to his everyday attendant. We also have a Korean proverb: “the light is dark directly under the lamp,” and the Chinese saying is that even Confucius, who is one of the most well-known and respected philosophers of China, was simply known as the “old man living on the east side” in his home village. This means that however great one is, often those closest are ignorant of one’s true greatness. Zen Master Seung Sahn is called a “Living Buddha” in the rest of the world, but not necessarily in Korea. Here, some do know and respect him, of course, but not as deeply.

Forty-nine days ago, Zen Master Seung Sahn left and today is the 49th-day ceremony. Although his body has left our world and we cannot perceive him with our six senses, his sincere faith, great vow and many skillful means are all deeply transmitted into his students, more so into blue-eyed Western students than Koreans. If his blue-eyed



students can truly uphold his great vow and sincerity and attain great enlightenment, they will become the great Byok An Jong Sah, lineage holders of the dharma for the whole world. All of the bodhi seeds that Zen Master Seung Sahn has sown in the world, these enlightenment seeds, will one day bloom, and Zen Master Seung Sahn will live on, just as perished life on this earth transforms to new seeds and flourishes as blooming flowers. Zen Master Seung Sahn will then live on through his students vibrantly, and this world will be filled with millions of Zen Master Seung Sahn.

I could not refuse to come here today as a way to sincerely beg all of his students to continue as Zen Master Seung Sahn has done. Many great teachers, practitioners, brothers and sisters have appeared here today. All of you, please take on wholeheartedly Zen Master Seung Sahn’s honored example of great vow and sincerity and attain his direction, following the great and deep intention which comes down from Man Gong Sunim, Kyong Ho Sunim, the Sixth Patriarch, Bodhidharma, and from Shakyamuni Buddha himself. In Korea and the whole world, material and scientific civilizations are always fighting non-stop, and any moment, with one nuclear explosion somewhere, the whole world can be pulverized. For ourselves, our families, and our countries, a moment will surely come when Zen Master Seung Sahn’s deep faith and great vow of intention will surely be needed. If we attain this vow and realize this direction, Zen Master Seung Sahn’s life will be an eternal one, which spreads throughout the universe. ☸