

EVERYTHING NO PROBLEM

Zen Master Wu Kwang



Last December, I traveled to Korea to attend Zen Master Seung Sahn's funeral. While there, I had a conversation with Dae Soeng Sunim, one of the monks who had served as Zen Master Seung Sahn's attendant and caregiver during the last year and a half. He told me of Zen Master Seung Sahn's last words. As Zen Master Seung Sahn was lying in his bed shortly before he began to slip into unconsciousness, Dae Soeng Sunim asked him if he was uncomfortable, or in pain. Zen Master Seung Sahn replied, "Everything no problem." These were his last words and his last teaching to us. They also exemplify a basic attitude that we saw him demonstrate repeatedly throughout his teaching. In observing Zen Master Seung Sahn and learning from him, I would say that "Everything no problem" has two main aspects. The first is being able to actualize acceptance, or as Zen Master Seung Sahn would say, "follow situation." He certainly did this repeatedly with his chronic health

problems. Years ago, I remember reading his reply to a person's letter who was sympathizing with his plight of "having such a terrible disease as diabetes." Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "No, no, diabetes is very good." He meant that all things are our teachers, perhaps especially sickness and difficulty. Even now, I can hear his aphorism, "A good situation is a bad situation. A bad situation is a good situation." The other aspect of "Everything no problem" was his immense openness to the new, his spirit of adventure, and his great and tireless energy. This he also passed on to us through sayings like, "Try, try, try, for ten thousand years nonstop," and "We try that—O.K., why not!"

By way of illustration, let me cite just one example. In the mid-1970s, a Polish man who was in New York for a year, began coming to the Chogye International Zen Center of New York. During that year, he copied many of Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching letters that were read at the end of daily practice. When he returned to Poland, he shared these letters with friends, and the Kwan Um Polish Sangha was born. Shortly thereafter, Zen Master Seung Sahn was invited to teach in Poland. At that time, Poland was under Communist rule and had no diplomatic relations with South Korea. Zen Master Seung Sahn's first trips to Poland could never have occurred if not for his strong intention, "We try that, O.K.—why not!" I'm still not sure exactly how he was able to travel into Poland. From that adventurous endeavor arose many Zen centers in both Eastern and Western Europe. One might say that the Chogye International Zen Center of New York served as the soil from which the seed of the European sangha was gestated, but the sprouting, growing, and cultivating was due to Zen Master Seung Sahn's amazing "just try" mind.

I would like to address a few words to Zen Master Seung Sahn's spiritual presence. Even though, fundamentally, there is no coming or going in true nature, please Dae Soen Sa Nim, keep your great vow to save all beings and soon return to the world to continue teaching the dharma. ☸