

**SHIT
STICK
GOES
PUBLIC**



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Every day at 8:00 am, Zen Master Seung Sahn would come and teach a class at the Seoul International Zen Center. On one occasion, along with the Zen students, there were many Korean television news people who came to film the class. The Zen students practiced hard, helping each other, and helping to save the world from suffering. The Buddha said, "Meditation is the best way to help save the world from suffering."

The topic of study on that day was the famous teaching of Zen Master Un Mun:

A student once asked Un Mun Zen Master, "What is the Buddha?"

Un Mun answered, "Buddha is dry shit on a stick."

Long ago in China, most Zen monks lived in temples high up in the mountains, far away from villages and cities, because peace and calmness foster the the principles that they practice: "Put it all down and attain your true self." Because the temple was so remote, and resources were limited, the monks had to grow their own food. The monks learned to save and reuse everything, even their excrement. They made a mixture good for growing vegetables, composed of ashes from the kitchen, dead leaves from the jungle, and shit from their toilets. They used a long stick for mixing this concoction. This filthy stick was called the "shit stick." No one wanted to touch this filthy stick, except during work time, and they kept it beside the heap of garden refuse.

One day, during the dharma talk, Zen Master Un Mun was asked by a student, "Master, please tell us what is Buddha?" Un Mun said, "Buddha is a dry shit stick!"

During the class, Zen Master Seung Sahn said, "If you attain the true meaning of this teaching, then you realize this is a very high-class teaching. Are there any questions?" After he answered many questions, finally a Zen student asked him, "Master, for more than ten years, I have been studying and practicing from your clear teachings, and was given food and shelter through your generosity. You have saved me from the infinite time and space of my suffering. Today, out of my deepest gratitude, to offer thanks for your great kindness and compassion, I want to make a sincere offering to you. A dry shit stick is all I have. Do you accept it or not?"

All the students present were shocked! "What kind of question is this?! What kind of a student is this monk?! Is he crazy?! This is incredible! Unforgivable! This is completely inappropriate!" Even the Korean television news people were upset. Korean tradition is influenced by Confucianism, where people hold their masters in great respect, the position of the master being even higher than the father's.

Everybody looked in the direction of Zen Master Seung Sahn, in anticipation of what was to happen next. Smiling, he answered firmly, with a smile, "I accept it! And I use it to hit you!"

The student asked, "Will you keep it or not?"

"I will keep it for the garden."

"In the future, can I use this dry shit stick to help people?"

"You have already helped!" Zen Master Seung Sahn answered, closing his eyes without smiling.

After the class, the Korean television news people continued to interview many Seoul International Zen Center students, but not the student whom they believed had offended Zen Master Seung Sahn. They just stared at him and were very upset.

The next day, the student who had made the strange offering said to a young nun, "Zen Master Seung Sahn hit me with the dry shit stick. Do you understand that?"

The young nun immediately exclaimed, "Why did you offer the Zen Master the wrong thing...?" ❀