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Zen Master Wu Bong

Good morning everyone. Ni how?

I want to express my gratitude, just as did the previous speakers, to the organizers of this conference. I know it took a lot of effort to bring all of us together yesterday and today, and I want to join in special thanks to Gye Mun Sunim JDPS for his “just do it mind.”

As you have noticed, many speakers have been using a script, and reading from it, except for Ajahn Brahmavamso, who lost his in somebody’s handbag. Well, I also lost mine. It is somewhere in the black hole of computer space where I cannot reach it. As a result, if my talk veers from the printed materials, please forgive me. We’ve heard already, yesterday and this morning, many recipes. And actually, yesterday’s session especially brought to mind a little story, which has nothing to do with my topic, but I hope you will overlook this digression. There was a community which was quite happy until some kind of disease arrived among the members. As people became sick, they called in many doctors, but the doctors were baffled by the disease and were not able to help. Finally, they heard of a very good doctor some distance away, so they sent their leader to get some advice, hoping that finally there was somebody who understood this sickness. This leader went away, and returned after a period of time with very good news. Yes, they found somebody who really understood this sickness. Not only understood the sickness, but also was able

to cure it, and in fact, gave the leader the appropriate recipe telling him how to cure their sickness. So the people were very happy. They called a big meeting that evening, and then the leader of this community read out the doctor’s recipe. Wow! That recipe sounded correct. Everyone agreed it was great. So everybody was very happy, and they decided that OK, next day we will meet again and we will go about making this medicine, implementing this recipe. Everybody went to sleep very happy, but also thinking about this recipe, repeating it in their minds. The next day when they met, somebody had an idea: “You know, actually, maybe we can make this recipe a little better. Why not take the time, discuss this a little more, and make some improvement.” They thought about it, and yeah, that’s maybe a good idea, OK; why not make the best recipe possible? Of course, there were many people there, so it was difficult for everybody to work on the improvement, therefore they decided to make a committee. They called it the “recipe improvement committee.” Then they decided that in three days they would meet again. After three days passed, they had a meeting, and indeed this committee came out with some very, very good ideas. But, it just so happened that in this group, there were a couple of people who, although they were not on this committee, thought a lot about this issue and they came up with even better ideas. OK, they decided to make another committee to study the difference between the two sets of ideas. Well, a few days later, they met again but somehow, the original committee did not agree with the new committee in their choice of which recipe was the best, the one true and perfect recipe. I don’t have so much time, but you can imagine that this went on and on, and soon there were twelve committees, each fighting each other about the recipe. Finally, everybody died. *[Laughter.]* End of the story. This weekend you also heard, and will continue to hear, a lot of recipes. I encourage you just to take one and apply it, and perhaps it is not so important which one is the best.

Now back to my topic. The title is “Ecology of Mind,” and the topic was inspired by a trip made by Zen Master Seung Sahn to Moscow many years ago, at the invitation of the then first secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev, a trip on which I had the privilege of accompanying my teacher. This was for what was called at that time, “Global Forum of Parliamentary and Spiritual Leaders for Human Survival.” The forum brought together people from various fields—politicians, scientists, artists, spiritual leaders—to talk about human beings’ relationship to nature, the destruction of the environment, the causes for such destruction, and what we can do about it. Well, it’s kind of interesting, this question of relationship to nature. Actually, what we are talking about is ecology. According to Webster’s dictionary, ecology is the study of the relationship between living things and the environment. That means all kinds of relationships, our relationship to the earth, to water, air, plants, and animals. Now, in Buddha’s time, that was not the topic of the day. I think there were not so many people, there were many animals around, many forests, so actually in

one way, Buddha didn't talk about ecology as we think of it today. But in another way, that's all Buddha ever talked about. If we look at Buddha's teaching, it was really all about ecology, what someone might call ethical or spiritual ecology. And in our Zen tradition, via the many Zen patriarchs, we can also talk about ecology, or moment-to-moment, correct situation, correct relationship, correct function.

At this Global Forum, the most common theme that people talked about was love. Love was seen as the one force that could save all of humanity. Now, this is interesting, because actually for me, the very title of that event somehow lacked love. It was "Global Forum for Human Survival." Not for the survival of animals, or trees, or plants, or mosquitoes, no, it was about human survival. So, only when we are threatened by some disaster do we become concerned about our surroundings. Nonetheless, everybody agreed that love was the one thing that is necessary. It was never, however, stated clearly what is love.

So let's examine that point right now. Long ago in China, one day a cat wandered into Zen Master Nam Cheon's monastery. Now at that time in this monastery, there were two residences for monks, the eastern residence and the western residence. And when the cat appeared, the eastern monks decided that this cat was their cat. Unfortunately, the western monks came to the same conclusion. So, over a period of some time, this became a source of great contention between the eastern monks and the western monks. One day, when the Zen Master was resting in his room, he heard a great commotion coming from the main hall. Already understanding what the problem was, he went over there with great energy, opened the door, and walked in. Immediately, all argument ceased, and silence appeared. Noticing the cat present in the room, the Zen Master walked up to the cat, picked it up, took out his knife, and said, "You! Give me one word. If not, I will kill this cat." Nobody responded. He waited, waited, waited, finally "Pooghh!" killed the cat. That evening, his number one student returned from some business in town. The Zen Master called him to his room, then told him what had happened that day, and asked him, "If you had been there at that time, what would you have done?" Now this student, called Joju, replied in a very strange way. He didn't open his mouth. He just took off his slipper, put it on his head, turned around and walked out of the room. Then Zen Master Nam Cheon said, "Ahh, if only you had been there, I would not have had to kill this cat." It's a very interesting story, because this is a story about love. Yeah, actually, ever since this happened, this kong-an helped many students attain enlightenment, attain great love, and attain great compassion. Why? At that time, the Zen Master was only trying to test his students. Do they only have desire for this cat, or is there somebody who truly loves this cat? So when we work with students, we have two questions associated with this story. The first question is, if you had been there, what would you have done to

save this cat? The second question is, what is the meaning of Joju's answer, of putting the slipper on his head and walking out of the room? If you don't understand, don't worry. You have already heard it many times: only keep don't know. Then from this don't know, someday great love and great compassion will appear. Then, not only can you save the cat, but you can save all beings, also.

Now, at this Global Forum, Zen Master Seung Sahn also talked. His teaching was always very simple, very concise. He talked about cause and effect, and then he gave his recipe to everybody. Basically, what he said was very much in line with Buddha's teaching, also. Because what Buddha taught us was to take away the three greatest pollutants, which he called anger, desire, and ignorance. In fact, it can be said that until we get rid of these pollutants, there is no way that we will be able to save our environment. When I was a young person, before I even heard about Buddhism, in order to help this society, I was very much involved in political action. That was the time of the war in Vietnam, and I was involved in the antiwar movement. One day, however, I had a very painful realization. I saw in myself a lot of anger, a lot of desire, and I realized that I would not want to be in a country where I was the leader. In other words, I was no better than the people I was protesting against. Actually, that moment, that very painful moment, was the end of my political activity. And then, I was also looking for a recipe, a recipe to change myself. So before changing the world, let's do something about ourselves. The recipe I liked at that time was called Buddhism. And, finally, in Buddhism also, there are many kinds of recipes. It happened that somehow I ended up with the Zen recipe. In particular, it was the school of Zen Master Seung Sahn. Let's call it the Seung Sahn cuisine.

Earlier, there was some talk about sutras. So, oh, I'm being given the signal that my time is up, OK. So let me forget the sutras. *[Laughter, applause.]* But I just wanted to tell you that my favorite sutra is called the BBC. Sometimes I stray from the true path and I watch CNN. *[Laughter.]* So I want to also encourage you to maybe try this don't know recipe in your own life. If it doesn't work, then it is not a problem.

Throw it into the garbage. OK? But if it works, then please use it and share it with everybody in this world. Thank you for your attention. ☸

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