

Harmony and Zen

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Thank you everybody for coming here, and especially I would like to thank the organizers of this event, Gye Mun Sunim JDPS in Singapore, also Zen Master Dae Kwang, and many other people who have worked hard to realize this Whole World Is a Single Flower opening today. It's not even been one year since our great teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn passed away, so in some sense, his words are still ringing in our ears, and I remember doing many of these Whole World Is a Single Flower conferences with him. And, especially what I remember was his teaching to become in harmony with all people. So, with this in mind, I would like to talk about harmony in Zen, harmony between people, and how to achieve that. Because many times, even among Zen teachers and students, there's a difference of opinion about things. So, how do we get to be in complete harmony? So, first, I would like to ask, what is harmony? What does that mean, what does it mean to be in harmony? What I understand as harmony is to reconcile all opposites, to be in agreement or to become one with something. Also, agreement in feeling or opinion, to be in accord, to live in harmony—how do we use the concept, or how do we use that in Zen? For example, we often tell beginning Zen students their body, breath and mind should be in harmony. This means, very simply, that they need not try to separate the body, the breathing and the mind—they are all part of one continuum. We use these words when we instruct students who begin meditation. We say, keep your body like this, sit up straight, keep your back straight, look down at the floor at a 45 degree angle, follow your breathing, keep your mind like this. But these are only teaching words. We have to bring our body, breathing, and mind into harmony, and this harmony is not something that we can

buy outside—it's not something that we can find in a store, or attain by reading about it. We have to get it ourselves. We have to attain that ourselves. So how do we find that? How do we attain that? Whether we practice with simple breathing, whether we practice with a mantra, or whether we read a sutra, or whatever kind of practice it is, whether we just do chanting practice, it's very important that we can get this harmony, this inner harmony. Already, we heard the Singapore head of state's representative talk about our inside job, and the importance of our inside job. And more and more, our belief in that is what we have to address. What is our inside job? A human being, as we understand human beings in the older way of understanding, was that a human being is kind of a marker in time and space. So when we look at the old physics, the physics of Newton and others, we see that the human being is at some point a marker in time and space. So we call that a human being. Some result from cause and effect. But nowadays, we understand from the newer physics, from Einstein's physics and also from the teachings we have gotten from the Buddha, that time and space really only exist relative to where a person is, or in our particular relation to somebody else; time and space are completely relative. So your time and space and my time and space are only relative to what we are doing with our minds moment to moment. And we find that our time and space are always changing as our mind is changing. As our mind changes, our time and space changes. If we are very busy taking an exam, for example, it seems like we never have enough time to get done. If we are waiting for somebody that we really long to see, somebody we haven't seen in a while, waiting for them in the airport seems like we have too much time. Time is too much on our hands.

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So time and space are completely relative. And our modern science also corroborates that and confirms that. So how do we become in harmony with all people? Everybody has a different kind of mind, a different frame of reference. And when we practice Zen, it's possible to become in harmony.

What is this Zen itself? The word Zen is actually Japanese for 'meditation.' In Korean we say "Soen," in Chinese it's know as "Chan," in Sanskrit also as "Dhyana." As it was practiced originally in India, "Dhyana" meant to go deeply into the nature of reality and realize three important insights: insight into impermanence, insight into impurity, and insight into non-self. The early disciples of Buddha were capable of practicing very intensively until they mastered these insights and were no longer hindered by notions of self, and others. They were free of the bonds to the material world and enjoyed the bliss of nirvana, or shall we say the spiritual world. Nirvana means the end of all attachments, the absence of any abode or the blowing out of anything at all. However, even though one person may succeed in throwing off the bonds to the material world and enter nirvana, there are numerous beings who are not yet free from their bonds, and are struggling day and night to free themselves from their suffering. How does a person who has left the material world, and who only stays in nirvana, harmonize with those who are still living within their desires and their attachments? Even though we may experience some peace and some harmony within ourselves, how do we save those who are still in the world of opposites, the world of us and them, the world of high and low, the world of rich and poor, man and woman, the world that is fighting, the opposites world. Even though we may reconcile that through our own practice, our own insights, there are still many who are suffering because of these opposites. These opposites, how are they taken away? We cannot just take them away so easily. In order to take them away, we have to come to the root of the problem which is our strong ego, our I, my, me. Zen

18] Master Seung Sahn always pointed that out to us, that until we take away this I, my, me, we cannot experience this infinite time, infinite space. We cannot experience this freedom. But if we take away this strong I, strong ego, then we can experience this infinite time, also this infinite space. This means we cover the whole universe. We and the whole universe become one. Then also the suffering of the universe becomes our job. So we get this very big job.

When Buddhism first went from India to China, it took a change from emphasizing just the salvation in the individual to the salvation of many beings over many lifetimes. The influence of Taoism and Confucianism on Buddhism resulted in changes that became what we now know as Zen Buddhism. The influence of Taoism cannot be overstated. Taoism sees all things in a state of flux, with harmony and stability arising from the balance of opposite forces called yin and yang. In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu says "all things in the universe achieve harmony by embodying yin and yang." Which means good and evil, right and wrong, holy and unholy are all opposite concepts that only come to harmony when seen as part of one whole. Most people seek to get happiness and avoid misfortune in their lives. What exactly is true happiness? What is misfortune? Or sadness? When I first actually met Zen Master Seung Sahn, I heard him tell a story that was very inspiring for me. Long ago in China, there was a famous student of Zen master Ma Jo named Han Ung. People always said to him "You are lucky, you are happy." And then he would always reply, "What is luck? What is happiness?" He always spoke like this. He had a very good horse which he liked to ride everyday. One day, the horse disappeared, so everyone said "Oh, are you unhappy, are you sad?" He said "What's happiness? What's sadness?" No feeling—this horse ran away but he only said, "What's sadness, what's happiness?" Everyone said this man has no feeling at all. Usually, if someone is attached to something that they lose, that means they are very sad. But Han Ung only said, "What is sadness, what is happiness?" And a week later Han Ung got a new horse, a very good horse. The best horse. This means it only has to see the shadow of a whip and it runs. This is a very clever horse. Then everyone said, "You are very happy, you are lucky." He said, "What is luck? What is happiness?" Only this, no feeling. NO feeling at all. Then everybody said this man is very lucky. His son liked the horse and rode it everyday. He only had to mount the horse, and it would go round and round, and he was very happy. Then, one day, he fell off the horse and broke his leg. Then everyone said, "Oh, I'm sorry your son broke his leg. Are you sad?" He said, "What is sadness? What is happiness?" No feeling at all. Soon after this, there were many wars, with North China and South China fighting each other. All the young people had to go to the army. But Han Ung's son had a broken leg, so he could not go. He stayed at home and only helped his parents. His leg was not so bad, so he could work in the garden and help them with their chores. Everybody said: "You're lucky, oh you are happy." So he said "What's luck? What is happiness?" This is Han Ung's style of speech, "What is sadness? What is happiness?" Any situation, his mind was not moving. His mind was just still, and his mind was clear. He didn't presume to understand everything, but he always kept his mind very clear. That was very wonderful. So, after Buddhism changed in China, it became very popular for people to practice and follow the Zen Masters of the time. However, even though Zen flourished greatly in China during this golden age, it eventually lost its power and influence to other kinds of Buddhism, such as the Pure Land school. Finally, Zen almost disappeared in China with the changed Communist control in the last century.

Before Buddhism was introduced to Korea, the Korean people had strong roots in nature and shamanism. There was a strong

influence from native animism and also shamanist influence. This influenced and compelled the Buddhism of Korea to become very close to the people and adapt to the needs of the people. Of course, there was the transmission of the Zen school from China to Korea. But within Korea, it took its own particular form, and Korean Zen Masters tended to be more syncretic, allowing themselves the freedom to adapt the teaching to the times. In particular, the great Zen Master Won Hyo was an example of a monk who announced that all opposite discriminations only obscure the experience of truth. It is said that, during his lifetime, he played many different roles; that of a monk, national teacher, of Zen Master, and also that of a father. This is an example of the eclectic role that Korean monks could and still do play. Recently, it has been the object of many scholars to separate fact from fiction, and determine who the true Won Hyo really was. However, it's not the topic of this talk to determine that here. It's enough to say that his contribution in history was to make the name of the Buddha and the bodhisattva Kwan Seum Bosal household names in Korea, and give the common people some great hope and inspiration that they, too, could become a bodhisattva or even become a Buddha. So, when I look at the Buddhism of Korea, I see that many times, it's adapted itself to the needs of the people. It's been very flexible. It's adapted itself in many different ways to meet the people just where they are. Our teacher, Zen Master Seung Sahn, was in many ways just like that. In America he adapted his teachings to the needs of the people there, and he met them where they were in the work place, where they were in the kitchen, in the dharma room, wherever they were, he met them and he taught them in those places, moment to moment, how to just do it. Later, when he became older, he came to Asia, and he was teaching people in Hong Kong and Singapore, and also in Korea. And when he was teaching people there, he tried not to break their tradition. He tried to become in harmony with their tradition, and follow their forms, and to do correct function with them. So, in any kind of culture, he tried to become in harmony with people. I remember going to Egypt with Zen Master Seung Sahn a few years ago, when he was still healthy. We arrived in Egypt at the Cairo airport, and were going to see the pyramids. When we arrived there, one of the immigration control people looked at the Zen Master and said, "Oh, you are from Korea? Then you must know Korean martial arts, Tae Kwon Do. You must be a Tae Kwon Do master." Without any hesitation, Zen Master Seung Sahn looked at him, and went "Haaa!" Like that, made a big fist right in the air. That was beautiful, because rather than trying to explain "I'm a Zen master, I'm not a Tae Kwon Do teacher," he only followed the situation and became one with the person who was asking him. That's what I really appreciate about our Zen Master and our teaching, the dharma that he gave us.

In any situation, you can become one, and can harmonize with, and teach, all people, and all beings.

So, I want to share one final story with you which I really like, and since there are three minutes remaining, maybe I can get it in. Especially because I'm here in Singapore, with many Chinese people from the government, I'd like to share this with you. There was once a government official in Sung dynasty China who had a constant interest in Zen teachings, and in particular, he wondered if Zen teaching had something to offer people in their last minutes, just before death. So he traveled to various Zen Masters, and he asked, "I heard that a true Master's mind attains great freedom at the time of death. Is there any special secret to it?" And one Master said, "Yes, there is a secret teaching, but I cannot give it to you now. First, you must become my disciple, and study with me for many years, and then I'll hand it down to you." And he didn't really believe in that Zen Master. And then he went to another one, and he asked, "Are there some final words for the last moment that you are alive?" When he asked that Master, the answer came back, "There cannot be any special secret to it. Only once you become awakened, will you come to understand such things." He also did not believe that was the complete teaching. Then he heard of a really great Master who lived in the south, and heard that he was very sincere. So he traveled to see this great Master, and asked him the same question again, whether there is a special secret to attain freedom at the time of dying. The Zen Master just said, "Of course there is." And the government official was taken aback. He didn't expect that. Then he said, "Please teach it to me!" And the Master looked at him, "All right—I will teach you. When you come here at the moment that you take your last breath, just then, I'll give it to you." The government official was deeply awakened by this, stood up, and bowed three times. He said: "Master, thank you very much. Only today have I learned the special secret!" That's a beautiful way that we give our Zen teaching. It's not just for free, you have to attain something. You have to try for it. I hope that all of you put this teaching into practice, and just do it moment to moment. Thank you. ☸

