

THE LIGHT OF THE

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In our historical era, Shakyamuni Buddha discovered spiritual ways humankind had barely known before. He opened a clear path to enlightenment, which serves the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering. This means reducing the suffering that we inflict on ourselves and others, and ultimately, it extends to freedom from birth and death, liberation from the cycle of becoming.

Progress on the path is most dynamic when great masters are present. In this talk, I will outline some changes in our tradition, as well briefly portray some paramount figures: human beings who gave direction to all of us by virtue of their attainment.

It is very fortunate that Gautama Siddhartha had over forty years to promulgate his teaching. This gave him ample time to see where to begin, how to continue, and how to end his effort. Upon attaining enlightenment, he started to teach what is now the essence of the dharma, the Avatamsaka Sutra: *If you wish to thoroughly understand all the Buddhas of past, present and future, then you should view the nature of the whole universe as being created by mind alone.*

No matter how profound this teaching is, the Buddha had to realize that his first students did not understand it, let alone attain it. Therefore, he started with something more conceivable, the Four Noble Truths. Although this approach was fraught with the danger of seeing the world as existing by itself, independent of human mind, the Buddha did start where students could see what he meant.

Who would not see impermanence? Who would not see the immediate root of suffering: attachment to impermanence? In this way, the First Noble Truth, the fact of suffering, could easily be comprehended.

How attachment develops and what forms it takes are presented in the Second Noble Truth, where the fundamental cause of all misery to sentient beings is outlined: wrong views, which can prompt us to believe in some inherent, unresolvable duality between humans and the world. Ignorance is the root of all desire and anger.

The Third Noble Truth presents the end of suffering, which is simply cutting attachments by not dwelling in ignorance, in other words, stopping to make opposites. In practice, this means attaining not moving body, not moving speech, and not moving mind. The resulting consciousness is before thinking or movement. It is clear like space, clear like a mirror.

The Fourth Noble Truth outlines how to use our clear mind so as to put an end to suffering. This is called the Noble Eightfold Path. It is truly remarkable that all the eight paths begin with the word *correct*. At the same time, since it gives no explicit and absolute definition of what is correct, the path should lead to *attaining* what that is.

It is very clear why the term *correct* cannot be defined by some explanation. If anyone tried to do this, dualistic views would be developed, and the very essence of the path, that is, liberation through non-duality, would be lost. The question is left for us to cope with: What is correct? What is helpful for all beings? What is it that helps us attain the supreme teaching, which is beyond all ignorant views, anger, or desire?

The Buddha and his students had to practice together for many years before the teaching on transcendental wisdom could appear. Nearly all pieces of the Prajnaparamita scriptures boil down to the same point, where the phenomenal world becomes void of any characteristics that we see as inherent.

The teaching on non-self and emptiness would not work without first carefully studying how this world appears to



us. Without describing the problem clearly, the solution cannot be found, and the creator of all our woes cannot be identified. This world is originally empty, functioning spontaneously without any self or permanent quality, to no end or special purpose.

This is why the Heart Sutra says that originally the five skandhas are empty and thus we are saved from suffering and distress. This means that if we do not create suffering, there is no suffering. Without the fact of suffering, the other three Noble Truths do not come about either.

Now the truth laid out in the Avatamsaka Sutra is brought home, and those who practice persistently can eventually discern how the mind creates the world. Finishing his great work, the Buddha reminded his students about impermanence and the importance of practice: "This world is on fire—strive endlessly!"

Although this recognition gave rise to numberless sutras and shastras, the underlying practice to attain where suffering comes from and how it can be overcome gave way within a few generations to thinking and rethinking what the Buddha had said.

Therefore, the 28th Patriarch, Bodhidharma, had an immense job. His teacher, Prajnatarā, told him to bring the light of the lamp, the true dharma, to China. Sutras had been flowing to China for centuries before that, and there were countless temples, and many, many monks and nuns.

Nonetheless, Bodhidharma had to employ what is now the Four Principles of Zen to teach those who would listen to become practitioners again. The task was not easy; this is evident from his encounters with scholarly monks in various temples, and his abruptly-ending conversation with Emperor Wu.

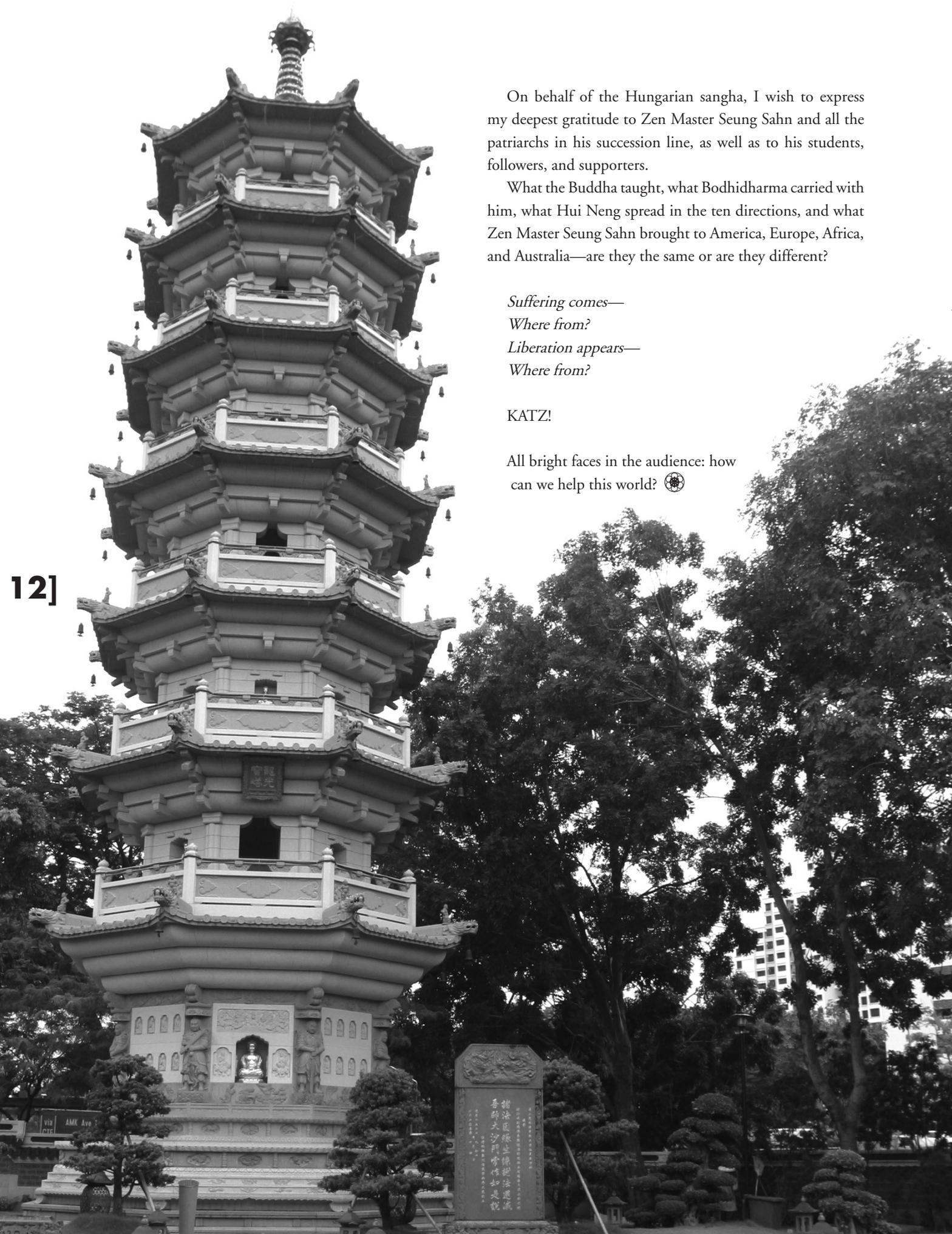
It is vital to cut attachment to words and speech. Thus the first principle says: Do not depend on the scriptures. The second says: Seek for a transmission which is beyond the written word. The third emphasizes the importance of directly pointing to the human mind. The fourth outlines the result: enlightenment by perceiving human nature.

In our nature, we find the origin and cessation of all phenomena and attributed qualities. If we look into ourselves deeply, we no longer ask for an external explanation of what suffering is, what a human being is, and why this world reacts to humans in the way it does.

After Bodhidharma's time, was there any need to renew the way the teaching functions? Yes, certainly. Six generations later, Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, almost lost his life because the relics attached to the patriarchal succession of the Buddha were coveted by a monk. In critical situations, as well as in everyday life, attainment is qualified by how one functions. Hui Neng destroyed the robe and the bowl, so that their presence could no longer hinder or endanger anybody who became ripe in the dharma. Moreover, he had the monolithic succession line fan out into five distinct schools, soon to go to everywhere in Asia. The fruits of these seeds are still fresh and alive today.

In the 20th century, several Asian monks and nuns received instructions from their teachers to carry the dharma to the west. One of them was Zen Master Seung Sahn. Through his tireless efforts, the light of the lamp is now shining on more and more of us. We have a much better chance than before to attain the correct way, where our situation, relationship, and function all become part of the bodhisattva way to offer the path of awakening to this world.





On behalf of the Hungarian sangha, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Zen Master Seung Sahn and all the patriarchs in his succession line, as well as to his students, followers, and supporters.

What the Buddha taught, what Bodhidharma carried with him, what Hui Neng spread in the ten directions, and what Zen Master Seung Sahn brought to America, Europe, Africa, and Australia—are they the same or are they different?

*Suffering comes—
Where from?
Liberation appears—
Where from?*

KATZ!

All bright faces in the audience: how
can we help this world? ☸

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